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Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2019 and provides an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel. It also outlines the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In addition, it provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin, pursuant to Security Council resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#).

II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

2. Since my previous report ([S/2018/1175](#)), the peace and security environment in most of West Africa and the Sahel has remained relatively stable, despite worsening insecurity in several parts of the Sahel. Raids and kidnappings by terrorist groups, banditry and spreading intercommunal violence accounted for much of the volatility. Terrorists and other unidentified armed groups continued to carry out raids on military targets and civilian infrastructure in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria.

3. A number of electoral processes unfolded in several countries during the reporting period. Presidential, legislative and gubernatorial elections were held in Nigeria. A presidential election was held in Senegal, while legislative elections were conducted in Benin and Guinea-Bissau.

A. Political and governance trends

4. On 28 April Benin held legislative elections, in which only two coalition parties participated, namely Bloc républicain and Union progressiste, allies of President Patrice Talon's Mouvement présidentielle. Opposition parties were disqualified from the poll because of new financial and other requirements imposed by amendments to the electoral code and the adoption of a new charter governing political parties in 2018. Their disqualification was strongly contested, including by key opposition leaders, notably the former Presidents, Boni Yayi and Nicéphore Soglo. At least two people were reported to have been killed in the ensuing post-electoral violence.



5. In Burkina Faso, on 18 January, the Prime Minister, Paul Kaba Thiéba, and his Cabinet resigned amid widespread criticism of the Government's response to worsening violence in the northern and eastern parts of the country. On 21 January, the President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, appointed Christophe Joseph Marie Dabiré as Prime Minister. A new 23-member Cabinet, which included 3 women, was formed three days later. The Government acceded to the opposition's demands to hold a national dialogue before the 2020 presidential elections, and a committee was formed to prepare the format and agenda of the discussion. Meanwhile, the President accused the former President, Blaise Compaoré, of maintaining links with some of the terrorist groups destabilizing the country in efforts to weaken the Government. Judicial processes against Mr. Compaoré and some figures of his regime remained pending.

6. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire launched a political dialogue on 21 January towards a reform of the Independent Electoral Commission, with the participation of representatives of the Government, political parties and civil society. On 1 March, 22 opposition parties, including the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire – Rassemblement démocratique africain of the former President, Henri Konan Bédié, called for a broad and consensual reform of the Commission. On 8 February, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Guillaume Soro, resigned. On 7 March, the Assembly elected Amadou Soumahoro of Rassemblement des républicains, the party of the President, Alassane Ouattara, to replace him. Opposition parties boycotted the vote.

7. In a Cabinet reshuffle on 15 March, the President of the Gambia, Adama Barrow, dismissed several people, including the Vice-President and leader of the United Democratic Party, Ousainou Darboe, amid mounting political tensions between them. Key allies of Mr. Darboe in the Cabinet and other arms of the State were also subsequently removed from office. Meanwhile, the country's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission commenced public hearings on 7 January and heard some 57 witnesses, including 8 women, on human rights violations and crimes related to the coup d'état in 1994. The Peacebuilding Fund provided financial support to the Commission.

8. In Ghana, the ruling New Patriotic Party and the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress, held consultations on 9 and 29 April, mediated by the National Peace Council, on political vigilantism in the country. They agreed, inter alia, on the need for continued dialogue on options for the total eradication of vigilantism in the political sector and all other sectors of society.

9. In Guinea, incremental progress was made in the implementation of the political agreement of 12 October 2016. The political environment, however, became increasingly polarized following the postponement of the legislative elections, which were due in January, to November 2019, amid fears that the presidential camp was pushing for the replacement of the Constitution of 2010 to pave the way for a possible third term of office for the President, Alpha Condé.

10. Following the release, in Liberia, of reports and presidential investigations into the alleged disappearance of 16 billion Liberian dollars (approximately \$102 million), three senior officials of the Central Bank of Liberia were detained on 1 March but later released on bail. On 29 March, the Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Kabineh Ja'neh was impeached for misconduct, amid growing criticisms of the Government.

11. In Mali, following concerns about the Government's response to persistent social tensions and worsening insecurity in the central part of the country, the Prime Minister, Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, and his Cabinet resigned. The President, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, subsequently appointed the outgoing Minister of Economy

and Finance, Boubou Cissé, as the new Prime Minister on 22 April. On 2 May, the Prime Minister signed a political agreement with representatives of several opposition parties which, inter alia, called for a national political dialogue to be held to discuss the state of the nation and a revision of the Constitution. This enabled the formation on 5 May of a new Government.

12. In Mauritania, on 28 January and 2 March, respectively, the President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and the ruling Union pour la République endorsed the Minister of Defence, Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ahmed, as the party's candidate for the presidential election to be held on 22 June. Despite concerns that the Government was stifling dissent, in particular after the arrest on 27 March of two bloggers for publishing information allegedly smearing the reputation of the President and his family, civil society activism persisted. On 31 December, the leader of the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania and opposition presidential candidate, Biram Dah Abeid, was released from detention.

13. Preparations continued for the presidential and legislative elections to be held in the Niger in December 2020. However, the stalemate in political dialogue persisted, with the opposition continuing to boycott the National Council for Political Dialogue and the Independent National Electoral Commission.

14. Presidential and legislative elections were held in Nigeria on 23 February, while gubernatorial and state assembly elections were held on 9 March. The incumbent President, Muhammadu Buhari, of the All Progressives Congress, was re-elected. The People's Democratic Party rejected the results and contested them in court. The ruling party also won a majority of the seats in the Senate and in the House of Representatives, as well as 15 of the 29 gubernatorial positions. The elections were generally peaceful despite isolated incidents that reportedly resulted in some loss of life in some states. The President was sworn in on 29 May.

15. In Senegal, the President, Macky Sall, won the presidential election held on 24 February. On 2 April, he was sworn into office for a second five-year term, in accordance with the Constitution, and, on 7 April, announced his new 35-member Cabinet, which included eight women. A constitutional amendment proposed by the Government, approved by the Parliament on 4 May and promulgated into law on 14 May abolished the post of Prime Minister. On 28 May, the President presided over the opening ceremony of a national dialogue he organized in the period following the presidential election.

16. In Sierra Leone, political tensions between the Government and the opposition All People's Congress persisted. On 29 January, the President, Julius Maada Bio, of the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party, launched the Commission of Enquiry to investigate allegations of corruption during the preceding 10-year administration of the All People's Congress. On 9 May, the President announced his first Cabinet reshuffle. Nabeela Tunis was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and her predecessor, Alie Kabba, was appointed the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations in New York. From 23 to 25 May, a national dialogue on democratic consolidation for peace and national cohesion was held in Freetown. It was attended by government officials, political parties, civil society organizations, women's groups and youth groups, religious leaders, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Mano River Union, diplomats and other members of the international community. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel attended the meeting, during which the creation of an Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion was approved, a decision that will be enacted by Parliament.

17. In Togo, preparations were launched for local elections announced for 30 June. On 20 March, the President, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, met the leaders of

opposition parties, including members of the coalition of 14 opposition parties that boycotted the legislative elections held on 20 December 2018, to discuss the situation in the country. The new National Assembly elected Yawa Djigbodi Tsegan as the first woman Speaker of Parliament. On 28 March, 17 members of the Independent National Electoral Commission were sworn in. On 8 May, the National Assembly adopted a constitutional reform which, inter alia, limited the presidential term of office to five years, renewable once.

B. Security trends

18. The security situation in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria remained volatile. Violent non-State actors, including terrorist groups, criminal networks and community-based and tribal militias, perpetrated repeated attacks against civilians and security and defence forces. Security forces were also accused of extrajudicial killings, brutality and forced disappearances of civilians. Meanwhile, the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel continued to conduct joint cross-border operations against violent extremists.

19. Despite government and community efforts, intercommunal violence increased, fuelled by activities of violent extremist groups in Burkina Faso and central Mali. Over 67 persons were killed in an attack in Yirgou, Burkina Faso, in early January, while 160 people lost their lives in similar attacks in Ogossagou and Welingara, Mali, on 23 March, increasing ethnic and community tensions in both countries. On a number of occasions, I condemned attacks against places of worship and stressed the fundamental right of religious freedom.

20. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, from January to March, 86 security incidents were registered in Burkina Faso, resulting in 376 deaths and injuries to 187 persons. Over 300 deaths caused by community-related conflict were also recorded from January to May, according to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Owing to the deteriorating security situation, on 11 January, the Government extended the state of emergency in 14 provinces in the country's six regions for six months. It also launched Operation Otapuanu against terrorists and other violent groups.

21. Despite counter-terrorism efforts, the "Islamic State West Africa Province" faction of Boko Haram expanded its area of operations over the reporting period. Boko Haram briefly took control of the city of Rann, in Nigeria, in January. The group continued to use women suicide bombers against civilians and security and defence forces in Borno State. According to the Nigeria Police Force, 189 terrorist attacks were conducted in the northern states of Nigeria from January to April, resulting in 453 deaths and 201 kidnappings. The so-called Islamic State West Africa Province increased the use of suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices against national security forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force in the countries of the Lake Chad basin.

22. In the Niger, national and regional armed forces continued to carry out operations against Boko Haram and the so-called Islamic State West Africa Province in the islands of Lake Chad, resulting in civilian and military casualties. A number of attacks leading to multiple deaths and kidnappings occurred in the country during the reporting period.

23. Violent incidents between farmers and herders resulting in heavy human and material losses and displacements were reported in many states in the Middle Belt and north-east of Nigeria. In Kajuru and Kachia, in Kaduna State, 117 people were killed and several houses, farms and livestock destroyed. In Zamfara State, armed bandits, cattle rustlers and militia attacks on civilians reportedly resulted in about 497

casualties and 385 kidnappings between January and April. As part of the measures against rising insecurity, the Government of Nigeria launched or scaled up military operations in the affected areas.

24. There was a rise in piracy, armed robbery against vessels and other maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea. According to the International Maritime Bureau, 22 incidents were reported in the first quarter of 2019. The region also accounted for all worldwide crew kidnappings, with reports of 21 crew members seized in separate incidents in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo in the first quarter of 2019.

25. Transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking increased in West Africa and the Sahel during the reporting period. Some 9.75 tons of cocaine were seized in Praia, Guinea-Bissau, on 31 January. On 7 March, the Narcotics Control Board of Ghana reported the largest confiscation of drugs in the country's history with the seizure at the Tema port of 5,851 compressed slabs of suspected cannabis with a street value of \$34.2 million. Trafficking in wildlife was also reported in the region. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Hong Kong customs services seized more than \$8 million worth of elephant tusks and pangolin scales in a shipping container from Nigeria.

C. Sustainable development trends

26. According to the African Development Bank, the region's economic growth is projected to reach 3.6 per cent in 2019 and 2020, thanks in large part to improvements in the production and service sectors, as well as higher commodity prices, although challenges and uneven performance are expected to remain. Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana continue to be among the highest-performing countries, with expected growth rates of 7 per cent and 7.3 per cent, respectively, in 2019.

27. Challenges to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa and the Sahel included a low level of financial support and domestic and external investments compared with other regions, in addition to security concerns, which have also hampered regional economic integration, including the free movement of persons, goods and services. Sustainable development remains a priority in order to address the root causes of the crisis in the Sahel.

D. Humanitarian trends

28. During the reporting period, the humanitarian situation, in particular in the Sahel, was of grave concern. An upsurge in armed attacks caused massive population displacements, compounding food insecurity and malnutrition, cyclical epidemics and vulnerability to climate change and shocks. About 4.4 million people were displaced across the Sahel, up from 3.2 million in 2018. The escalating violence had a negative impact on civilian lives, heightening risks of abuse and rights violations, severely affecting basic services and often depriving vulnerable people of critical assistance.

29. In Burkina Faso, a spike in armed attacks in the northern and eastern provinces since December 2018 triggered an unprecedented humanitarian emergency. More than 170,000 people were uprooted from their homes, most of them since the start of 2019. The attacks and insecurity badly affected education and health services. More than 1,000 schools in the regions affected by violence remained closed, leaving 145,000 children without education, while about 150,000 people were deprived of access to

medical care. In February, the Government and humanitarian organizations appealed for \$100 million to assist around 900,000 people hardest hit by the crisis.

30. In the central and northern regions of Mali, armed raids and intercommunity clashes forced thousands of people from their homes and severely affected education and health services. As at March 2019, 100,000 people were internally displaced, representing almost a threefold increase in one year. Owing to increasing insecurity in Burkina Faso, around 8,000 Malians returned to their country, raising the number of internally displaced persons in Mali to 100,000. In the northern Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, Taoudénit and Timbuktu regions, one in four health centres was closed. As at February 2019, 857 schools were closed in Gao, Kidal, Koulikoro, Ménaka, Mopti, Ségou and Timbuktu regions because of insecurity. In the western part of the Niger, attacks and insecurity displaced 70,000 people in the regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua, in addition to the 55,000 Malian refugees hosted in the region.

31. In the Lake Chad basin, as at 31 May 2019, 2.5 million people were uprooted from their homes. Some 1.7 million people continue to be internally displaced because of the conflict in north-eastern Nigeria. The influx of displaced people into camps in Borno State severely strained capacity and infrastructure, with newly displaced people surviving in deplorable conditions. A rise in armed attacks in the Diffa region, in the south-eastern part of the Niger, forced around 18,500 people to flee from several villages. More than 100,000 people were internally displaced in the region, which hosts almost 120,000 Nigerian refugees. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed stabilization plans for the Lake Chad basin to address socioeconomic, conflict prevention and recovery needs for communities newly liberated from insurgents, for which funding is needed.

32. Around 14 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria will require assistance in 2019. The humanitarian community requested \$1.6 billion to assist 11 million people, but only 23 per cent of the request had been received by June 2019, including 26 per cent for Nigeria.

E. Human rights trends

33. Various perpetrators of violence continued to operate with impunity in the region, in particular in the context of the deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel, especially in Burkina Faso, the Niger and Mali, undermining the respect of international human rights and humanitarian law. Prolonged strikes by teachers' unions over wages and conditions of service led to the closure of schools for significant periods of time, undermining the right to education in some countries and having an adverse impact on the human rights situation in the region. Security forces deployed excessive and disproportionate force in handling public demonstrations in some countries, undermining respect for the rule of law and the enjoyment of fundamental rights, such as the freedoms of association, assembly and expression.

34. Despite largely peaceful electoral processes, some violent incidents were noted during recent elections in Nigeria, which had an impact on the rights to life, to physical integrity and to vote. The National Human Rights Commission reported that about 176 persons had been killed in election-related violence across Nigeria; other sources reported higher figures. In Senegal, two people were reported to have been killed in violent incidents during the presidential election. About four people were reported to have been killed during the legislative elections held in Benin on 28 April.

35. Clashes between farmers and herders, banditry and cattle rustling continued to contribute to systematic human rights abuses in the region. Local and international human rights groups raised concerns over ongoing threats to the freedoms of the press, association and expression, as illustrated by the assassination on 16 January of

Ahmed Hussein-Suale, a renowned investigative journalist in Ghana, and the alleged infringements of the rights of certain media in Liberia and Benin. In Benin, Guinea and Togo, local and international human rights groups raised concerns over the alleged excessive and disproportionate response of security forces in the maintenance of law and order during demonstrations organized by the political opposition or civil society organizations. In Sierra Leone, human rights defenders raised concerns about the shrinking political space following the general elections held in 2018 and the harassment of and physical assault against their members, which they said were perpetrated by State actors.

36. Nonetheless, some positive steps were taken by countries in the region to improve the overall human rights situation. In the Gambia, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission began its hearings, with at least five public hearing sessions held during the reporting period. In addition, the National Human Rights Commission was finally established and made operational through the appointment and swearing-in of its Commissioners. Likewise, in Sierra Leone, after the controversial removal of Commissioners of the Human Rights Commission by the Government, new Commissioners were appointed. In Togo, stakeholders commended the creation of the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, which will ensure that Togo meets its obligations under the relevant treaty. In Mauritania, Biram Dah Abeid, the antislavery activist, was released from detention.

37. Challenges persisted in relation to efforts against impunity in the region. In Burkina Faso, the trial of the alleged plotters of the attempted coup on 16 September 2015 continued. On 29 March, the African Court of Justice and Human and Peoples' Rights ruled against the conviction by a court in Benin of the renowned businessman and prominent opposition figure Sebastien Ajavon, who remained in exile. In Côte d'Ivoire, on 4 April, a group of three non-governmental organizations (NGOs) petitioned the Supreme Court on the legality of the President's decision to grant amnesty to 800 individuals implicated in crimes committed during the post-electoral crisis of 2010 and 2011. On 18 April, the Code of Conduct Tribunal in Nigeria convicted the country's Chief Justice, Walter Onnoghen, of a false declaration of his assets. In Guinea, the trial of those indicted for the massacre on 28 September 2009 has yet to commence, despite the establishment of a steering committee for the process.

F. Gender issues

38. During the reporting period, UNOWAS and its partners continued to monitor and advocate the enhanced participation of women in decision-making and leadership across the region. Togolese parliamentarians elected the first woman Speaker of Parliament in the country, while the new Governments formed in Burkina Faso, Senegal and Togo saw a slight increase in the number of women compared with the previous Governments. In the Gambia, the former Minister of Health and Social Welfare Isatou Touray was appointed Vice-President on 15 March. In Côte d'Ivoire, 8 women were among the 33 senators appointed on 3 April. On 2 May, the National Assembly of Guinea adopted a gender parity law for elective posts.

39. In Sierra Leone, on 14 February, the National Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution on women and peace and security based on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#). On 10 April, legislation was published in Cabo Verde on the implementation of its criminal policy, which classifies gender-based violence as a priority prevention crime.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

A. Good offices and special assignments of my Special Representative

40. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel continued to support efforts to sustain peace in the region, in collaboration with regional and international partners, including through advocacy and support for inclusive processes in national dialogues and elections, access to human rights and constitutional and institutional reforms.

41. My Special Representative undertook a joint pre-electoral mission to Senegal with the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, from 12 to 15 January. In their meetings with the President of Senegal, opposition parties and the Chairperson of the Independent National Electoral Commission, they urged stakeholders to address any contentious issues arising from the electoral process through peaceful means and encouraged them to take stock of lessons learned after the polls, including with regard to women's participation. My Special Representative subsequently conducted courtesy visits to the campaign headquarters of the five presidential candidates between 7 and 10 February.

42. My Special Representative also visited Sierra Leone on 18 and 19 January, on a joint preventive diplomacy mission with Mr. Brou. In their meetings with the President, political parties, national institutions, civil society and the diplomatic corps on the political environment and the reform agenda, they highlighted the importance of political consensus and reconciliation to facilitate continued development.

43. In his capacity as my High-level Representative for Nigeria, my Special Representative held consultations with key national stakeholders to promote an environment conducive to peaceful elections in 2019. He visited Nigeria from 20 to 31 January, from 10 to 18 February and from 23 to 28 February and participated in high-level dialogue forums organized by the United Nations and the National Peace Committee to promote peaceful elections. On 13 February, he attended the second signing event organized by the Committee, in which candidates committed to accepting the results of the election. He also co-hosted, with the Committee, high-level dialogues on peaceful elections in areas of concern, including in Benue, Kaduna, Kano and Kwara States. A peace accord was signed during the event in Kano.

44. My Special Representative addressed the fifth ordinary summit of Heads of State of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), organized in Ouagadougou on 5 February. He urged the leaders to promote dialogue between State institutions and vulnerable border communities, especially young people, women and traditional leaders, and offered United Nations support towards that end.

45. My Special Representative travelled to Abidjan from 14 to 17 April for meetings with government officials, political parties and civil society organizations and urged all to continue efforts to consolidate peace by strengthening national cohesion, including through inclusive dialogue.

46. On 7 and 8 March, my Special Representative travelled to Guinea-Bissau on a solidarity visit ahead of the legislative elections on 10 March. He met the President, José Mário Vaz, and political parties, the National Electoral Commission and key stakeholders to discuss the political environment and technical conditions ahead of the elections. He highlighted the importance of peaceful and inclusive elections and called upon all parties to respect the outcome of the vote and to work together in pursuing the country's development goals.

47. My Special Representative visited Togo on 17 and 18 March as part of his good offices efforts. He met the President, other national authorities and political actors to discuss electoral, constitutional and institutional reforms. He encouraged stakeholders to continue the political dialogue and ensure an inclusive and consensual process for the envisaged local elections. He visited Benin on 19 and 20 March, ahead of the legislative elections held on 28 April. He met the President and political stakeholders and encouraged all parties to prioritize consensual and inclusive electoral arrangements. In both countries, he also highlighted the need for a regional approach and solidarity to stem threats posed by increased terrorist activities in the subregion.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

48. The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission continued to work towards fully implementing the judgment of the International Court of Justice of October 2002, which will culminate in a statement about the boundary. Planned field operations were pursued under reinforced security protocols.

49. The parties continued to work towards the pillar construction targets, despite insecurity and tensions along their common land boundary. During the reporting period, the construction and placement of a total of 353 pillars were completed (for the 335 initially projected). In addition, the parties met in Douala, Cameroon, from 23 to 26 April and in Calabar, Nigeria, from 24 to 30 May, to assess ongoing field operations and plan for the next phase, in which construction will be resumed in October 2019. The trust fund for pillar construction was replenished with a contribution of \$3 million by the Government of Cameroon. Nigeria is expected to finalize payment of a second instalment of \$1.5 million, which will make the next phases of construction possible.

50. My Special Representative, who also serves as Chair of the Mixed Commission, pursued his engagements with the heads of the Nigerian and Cameroonian delegations towards resolving outstanding areas of disagreement in the remaining 100km of the boundary. A mediation team travelled to Yaoundé in March to follow up on earlier discussions.

C. Enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security

51. During the period under review, UNOWAS continued to enhance its collaboration with regional partners and United Nations country teams in the region on issues of common interest, notably women and youth, climate change, human rights, security and conflict prevention. UNOWAS collaborated with the Peacebuilding Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund to support national and cross-border programmes on addressing tensions related to the impact of climate change, preventing violent extremism, addressing conflicts related to transhumance and empowering young people and women in peacebuilding processes and conflict prevention mechanisms. Around \$90 million from the Peacebuilding Fund was allocated to West Africa and the Sahel in 2018. Of that amount, \$65 million was given to 9 of the 10 countries of the Sahel that were prioritized.

52. UNOWAS provided technical and financial support to partners in Benin, Ghana, Guinea, the Gambia and Togo for a project launched on 29 January aimed at involving young people in peace processes in West Africa and the Sahel, including through awareness-raising activities on Security Council resolutions [2250 \(2015\)](#) and [2419](#)

(2018) on youth and peace and security. It was focused on data collection at the national level and partnership building with national and local media.

53. Following the assumption by Burkina Faso in February 2019 of the presidency of the Conference of Heads of State of the G5 Sahel, UNOWAS undertook an assessment mission to the country in March to identify areas for United Nations support. The United Nations and the G5 Sahel signed agreements on support for the secretariat of the Burkina Faso presidency of the Group and on organizing a forum on the issue of the inability of children to attend school in areas affected by conflicts in the Sahel subregion. The United Nations and the G5 Sahel also decided to jointly support community dialogue projects in cross-border areas and to assist in transferring the Sahelian Centre for Threat Analysis and Early Warning from Nouakchott to Ouagadougou.

54. As part of its support for the G5 Sahel in building resilience in the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in collaboration with UNOWAS, launched a process to develop a manual of best practices for the process. In that context, experts of the Regional Cell for the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism from G5 Sahel countries met in Nouakchott from 26 to 28 March. They shared experiences and identified more than 30 best practices. A validation workshop to complete the process was subsequently organized in Nouakchott in May 2019.

55. On 10 May, at the invitation of my Special Representative, the biannual meeting of the heads of United Nations peace missions in West Africa and the Sahel was held in Guinea-Bissau, with the participation of my Special Representative in the country and United Nations resident coordinators for Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. Participants exchanged views on the peace and security situation in the region and agreed to continue cooperation and strengthen information-sharing on key issues, including cross-border criminality.

56. Pursuant to requests in two Security Council documents (S/2018/749 and S/PRST/2018/3), UNOWAS, with support from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, formed a close partnership with the World Food Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNDP, the World Bank, national Governments and other key partners, including independent experts, for a possible response to climate-related security risks in West Africa and the Sahel region. UNOWAS and ECOWAS also launched a joint effort to explore ways of introducing conflict-sensitive approaches to national climate change adaptation plans in West Africa.

57. The United Nations System Staff College, UNOWAS and ECOWAS jointly developed a capacity enhancement programme in conflict analysis and prevention for women. On 4 and 5 December 2018, UNOWAS hosted a design workshop in Dakar to develop the methodology for the programme, which was subsequently rolled out from 13 to 17 May at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra.

Security sector reform

58. During the reporting period, UNOWAS continued to facilitate security sector reform processes in the region. In the Gambia, the United Nations security sector reform advisory team provided support to national authorities, including in finalizing the national security policy and strategy to guide short- and long-term reforms in the security sector, ensuring that institutions attain the capacities necessary to independently provide security services to the population, in anticipation of the future withdrawal of the ECOWAS Mission in the Gambia. The national security policy was launched by the President on 10 June. The security sector reform team also worked

closely with the Government to strengthen its national coordination bodies and mainstream gender into the security sector reform process, including through regular training and advisory meetings. The United Nations worked with international partners, including ECOWAS, the African Union and the European Union, to develop joint analysis and enhance coordination in the delivery of security sector reform-related assistance to the country.

59. In response to the challenging security situation in Burkina Faso, the United Nations security sector reform strategic advisory team focused its support for national authorities on developing a national security policy and architecture, as well as sectoral strategies for justice, defence and internal security, with a view to enhancing national capacities to protect citizens against threats posed by violent extremist groups and illegal self-defence groups. The team also intensified efforts to strengthen security sector governance and oversight, including capacity-building for parliamentarians and support for the establishment of a civil society platform in which members were trained and deployed to local communities in various regions of the country.

60. In Guinea, the security sector reform advisory team continued to provide support by reinforcing the oversight mechanisms for the parliament and the General Inspectorate of Security Services. The team also provided support to the Government for the preparation of a draft bill against terrorism, which was submitted to parliament, and for the elaboration of a presidential decree establishing a training centre for peacekeeping operations, as part of the country's contribution to international peacekeeping.

61. In Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations security sector reform advisory team provided support to national authorities for the enhancement of civilian control over security forces, as well as the socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants.

62. The support given to the above-mentioned countries was facilitated by resources from the Peacebuilding Fund and assistance from United Nations entities.

Conflicts between herders and farmers

63. During the period under review, UNOWAS continued discussions with ECOWAS on the organization of a joint experience-sharing workshop to identify best practices in ECOWAS member States for a regional approach to preventing and resolving disputes between farmers and herders. Meanwhile, the Peacebuilding Fund provided funds to develop projects to operationalize the analysis and recommendations of a study on pastoralism and security in West Africa conducted by ECOWAS and the Economic Commission for Africa. Implementation of related projects funded with \$10 million by the Fund in 2018 continued during the first semester of 2019.

64. In November 2018, I requested my Special Representative to bring together the United Nations system to develop a road map to address the long-term causes and drivers of the conflicts between herders and farmers, including through analysis and information-sharing, prevention and advocacy, with a focus on strengthening regional and cross-border efforts and linking regional efforts to the country level through the engagement of my resident coordinators.

Lake Chad basin

65. During the reporting period, implementation of Security Council resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#) on a regional response to the crisis in the Lake Chad basin continued. A joint technical assessment mission of UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) was deployed to Cameroon and Chad from 11 to

24 February, and to the Niger from 11 to 17 March. From 14 to 16 March, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa undertook a high-level joint mission to Chad with the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the European Union Special Representative for the Sahel, Ángel Losada. The Special Representatives subsequently visited Cameroon from 23 to 27 April and the Niger from 28 to 30 April. In all three countries, they met government officials, the Commanders of the Multinational Joint Task Force, relevant institutions, members of the diplomatic corps, civil society representatives and the United Nations country team. Discussions were focused on the security and humanitarian situation in those countries, as well as the local, national and international responses to the daunting security and humanitarian challenges in the Lake Chad basin as a whole.

66. The UNOCA-UNOWAS team visited Gomirom Doumou in Chad, the northernmost region of Cameroon and the Diffa region of the Niger. It visited camps of refugees and internally displaced persons and met former Boko Haram fighters who had surrendered. It stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges posed by Boko Haram, including security, governance and development aspects, and encouraged Cameroonian authorities to speed up the preparation of a territorial action plan for the North and Far North regions within the framework of implementing the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. During the reporting period, UNDP continued to strengthen the management and coordination capacity of the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority.

Strategy for cross-border security in the Mano River Union

67. From 13 to 17 May, UNOWAS conducted a technical mission to the Mano River Union secretariat in Freetown and to the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja. The discussion between the mission and the ECOWAS Commission was focused on the functioning of the joint border security and confidence-building units of the Union, which play a significant role in social cohesion and conflict prevention in the subregion. The mission discussed the need to update the 2003 strategy for cross-border security in the Union and the revitalization of the Union secretariat. From 21 to 23 June, UNOWAS conducted an assessment mission to the Union secretariat on new and emerging cross-border security threats in the subregion.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

68. During the reporting period, efforts against maritime crime continued to be focused on bolstering the operational capacity of relevant agencies to patrol their waters and on strengthening the capacity of the criminal justice chain to detect, investigate and prosecute cases of piracy and maritime crime. Countries around the Gulf of Guinea continued to build a collective maritime security response in the various coordination zones through the Interregional Coordinating Centre, the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in West Africa and the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa. The United States Navy, jointly with 33 other countries, conducted a two-week maritime training course in the Gulf of Guinea to improve monitoring and maritime safety on the West African coastline.

Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

69. My Special Representative continued to advocate efforts against drug trafficking and transnational organized crime in close cooperation with relevant partners in the region.

D. Implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel

70. During the period under review, UNOWAS continued to work closely with my Special Adviser for the Sahel on the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. My Special Adviser ended his tenure in March with an officer in charge covering his functions and ensuring continuity in implementing the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. I requested the United Nations system to undertake an internal review to determine the functions and capacities further required to advance the strategy efficiently, while addressing the humanitarian-development nexus and its linkages to peace and security. My Special Representative continued to advocate support for the implementation of the recommendations of the high-level meetings on the Sahel in the region, as well as those of his bilateral engagements.

71. My Special Adviser and the officer in charge continued to implement the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel and advocate for further investment in the countries of the region. A joint programme on climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture has been developed for immediate implementation in conjunction with the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority. The joint programme, which principally targets women agricultural producers of the border regions of Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger, will be implemented jointly by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), UNEP, UNDP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations with the support of Sweden. The countries of the region have started the implementation of the priority investment plan through their emergency development programme in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, in partnership with the Alliance for the Sahel and the United Nations.

72. My Special Representative attended the joint conference for the launch of the regional refugee response plan for Nigeria for 2019 and 2020, organized on 29 January by UNDP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Abuja, for 200 participants from the federal and state Governments, including officials of Chad, Cameroon and the Niger and representatives of the diplomatic corps, NGOs and civil society organizations, entities of the United Nations system and the private sector. The refugee response plan for Nigeria represents one of the first examples of concrete implementation of the “New way of working” of the triple nexus, linking humanitarian, development and peace issues in refugee operations in Africa. In addition, UNDP had been leading the elaboration of the United Nations joint regional project in support of efforts toward improving livelihoods and the economic and human security of communities and vulnerable groups throughout the border areas of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger (member States of the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority).

73. In January and May 2019, my Special Representative visited the Gambia and met with the President to discuss political developments, the security sector, sustainable development and economic reforms, as well as reconciliation efforts, for which United Nations Peacebuilding Fund has thus far contributed \$10.1 million. He returned to Banjul from 7 to 9 May for further consultations with government officials, the opposition, civil society and other stakeholders on these issues.

74. On 1 February, the Government of Mali, with the assistance of international partners, launched a new five-year national action plan to combat trafficking in persons and assimilated practices. UNODC conducted training for criminal justice practitioners in Mali and the Niger on international judicial cooperation in combating trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants. In March, UNODC also trained

100 officers of the police component of the Joint Force from Burkina Faso, with financial support from the Government of Germany and in collaboration with the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel and other partners, including the European Union, the International Criminal Police Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. UNODC, working in partnership with the University of Ouagadougou II, established a master's programme in anti-corruption at the University.

75. From 19 to 22 February, my Special Representative led an inter-agency mission to Burkina Faso. In its meetings with national authorities, civil society representatives, political parties and international partners, the mission recommended an integrated, scaled-up approach in United Nations support to immediate humanitarian and security-related priorities, as well as medium-term efforts to strengthen peacebuilding efforts, conflict prevention mechanisms and sustainable development. My Special Representative returned to Ouagadougou on 24 March to accompany the Security Council on its visit, amid rising security challenges in some parts of the country. Interlocutors expressed appreciation for the United Nations efforts and leadership in the humanitarian response and appealed for more international efforts towards addressing the security crisis and development challenges in the country.

76. Meanwhile, at the request of the Government of Burkina Faso, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Permanent Secretariat of the National Border Commission launched a programme to help to improve the country's border security and its capacity to detect and interdict violent extremists and terrorists.

77. Burkina Faso assumed the presidency of the G5 Sahel during the ordinary summit of Heads of State of the Group on 5 February in Nouakchott. Since then, there has been continued mobilization of partners and resources. Following a meeting held on the margins of the World Bank-International Monetary Fund meeting on 13 April 2019 in Washington, D.C., it was agreed that a more integrated approach would be strengthened to enhance the impact of development aid. On 26 April, the G5 Sahel and the Alliance for the Sahel met in Ouagadougou to review progress in the emergency development programme. On 14 May, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the G5 Sahel met with their European counterparts and European Union officials in Brussels, to discuss ways to address the recent deterioration of the security situation in the region, and reaffirmed the strategic importance of the Sahel for the European Union. On 16 May, they discussed long-term investment through development aid.

78. On 1 May, the G5 Sahel held an extraordinary summit of Heads of State in Ouagadougou. The Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, attended the meeting during her visit to the Sahel. Discussions were focused on the fight against terrorism and organized crime and the overall security challenges in the region. The Chancellor announced a pledge of \$51 million to support efforts by Burkina Faso to combat violent extremism. Participants called for further support for the operationalization of the Joint Force and for additional assistance to implement the emergency programme for development targeting vulnerable populations. They emphasized the prevailing views in the region, namely that the intervention of Western countries in Libya in 2011 at least partly engendered the current insecurity in the Sahel and that such countries should therefore redouble efforts to stabilize the country.

79. On 3 May, my Special Representative and the Head of the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel co-chaired the seventh meeting of the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel, hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, African Integration, International Cooperation and Diaspora of Chad, in N'Djamena. At the meeting, the worsening security situation in the Sahel, the impact of military

operations, and migration issues were discussed. Participants reiterated the importance of the platform as a mechanism enabling information exchange and coordination. They called for its strengthening and on donors to honour their pledges for the Joint Force and the priority investment plan, as well as the stabilization strategy developed by the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union. The Niger agreed to take over the presidency of the platform from Chad.

E. Promotion of good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming

80. Pursuant to its mandate to facilitate exchanges between stakeholders in the region in the promotion of a culture of human rights, the rule of law and good governance, UNOWAS organized a consultation on decentralization and its links to conflict prevention. Practitioners, policymakers and representatives from civil society and academia took part in the consultation to discuss linkages between conflict prevention and decentralization efforts in West Africa and the Sahel, focusing on Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

81. UNOWAS, in collaboration with the OHCHR Regional Office for West Africa, ECOWAS and the Network of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa, organized the annual regional consultations for national human rights institutions, which were held in Accra from 29 May to 1 June. The meeting, which was attended by representatives of those institutions, provided a platform for experience sharing between the institutions and a forum to review the human rights situation in West Africa and the Sahel, as well as to enhance the role of such institutions in addressing challenges arising from electoral violence, violent extremism and irregular migration. UNOWAS provided support to the NGO forum during the sixty-fourth ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, held in Egypt from 24 April to 14 May.

82. During the reporting period, UNOWAS provided support to country representatives of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel for the training of more than 50 women and young people in Benin, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo, who were subsequently deployed to monitor the elections held in their respective countries.

83. On 3 April, my Special Representative chaired the first thematic session of the Working Group in 2019, which was focused on UNOWAS support to countries that organized elections in the first quarter of 2019, namely Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Senegal. A second session, held on 24 April, was attended by 100 participants from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. Participants took stock of the achievements of the Working Group, 10 years after its establishment by UNOWAS in partnership with ECOWAS, UN-Women and other stakeholders in the region.

84. From 15 to 17 April, UNOWAS provided support for the strategic planning workshop of the Network on Peace and Security for Women in the ECOWAS Region.

IV. Observations and recommendations

85. West Africa and the Sahel registered many positive developments during the reporting period. The deteriorating security situation, at the same time, negatively affected peace and stability in a number of countries, limiting the advancement of opportunities in the subregion. It is therefore imperative that the international

community intensify efforts to help countries to mitigate governance deficits and provide them with capacity-building support.

86. I am deeply troubled by the spiralling terrorist activities and violent extremism in the Sahel and Lake Chad basin, disrupting livelihoods and leading to loss of life, internal displacement and refugee flows; the serious humanitarian consequences, including reduced access to basic services, especially health, education, food and markets, are a matter of grave concern. I urge countries of the region and partners to redouble their efforts to address the root causes of the phenomenon, through a more integrated approach encompassing humanitarian assistance, development aid, security aspects and human rights dimensions.

87. I commend the countries participating in the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel for their efforts to address the multifaceted challenges in the subregion. I encourage partners to continue to support such initiatives.

88. I also urge Member States to intensify efforts towards addressing the root causes of insecurity and instability in the subregion, including poverty and inequalities, exclusion and marginalization, the lack of access to social services and economic opportunities, human rights violations and the impacts of climate change. I call upon partners to fully support holistic and integrated approaches to addressing those challenges, including through the implementation of the stabilization strategy for countries affected by the Boko Haram crisis, the G5 priority investment plan for the Sahel, the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel.

89. Climate change has continued to have an increasing impact on conflict dynamics in the Lake Chad basin and parts of the Sahel. I encourage national, regional and international partners to redouble efforts in response to prevent and respond to threats related to climate change, in line with the resilience pillar of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel.

90. The continuous limitation of humanitarian access in the Lake Chad basin and in the Liptako-Gourma region increasingly results in avoidable human suffering. I call upon the parties concerned to respect the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality and allow the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in need, especially children, the elderly, women and other vulnerable groups.

91. I appreciate the ongoing hospitality and support provided by the Governments of the region to refugees and host communities in West Africa and the Sahel, and urge partners to increase the humanitarian assistance.

92. I commend Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Senegal for holding generally peaceful elections during the review period. While elections have, for the most part, led to the peaceful exercise of and change in power in the subregion, significant gaps remain with regard to good governance. Pre-electoral and post-electoral periods continue to be characterized by tensions, antagonistic contests and disputes in some cases, such as in Benin, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. I encourage authorities and national stakeholders to work together to ensure a level playing field for peaceful, inclusive and credible elections in the region.

93. I welcome the progressive adoption and implementation of gender parity legislation and the growing number of women in senior government positions in West Africa and the Sahel. I urge countries in the subregion to take specific measures, in accordance with their national and regional commitments, to enhance inclusive processes and political, social and economic opportunities for women. I also welcome

the efforts made by some countries to enhance the participation of youth in national peace, security and development strategies.

94. I urge continued support towards enhancing institutional and operational frameworks for the promotion and protection of human rights. With key elections in the region approaching, I urge Member States to continue to ensure that the freedoms of assembly, expression and of the press, which are essential for a democratic process and contribute to the credibility of electoral processes, are respected.

95. It is equally crucial to address the apparent instrumentalization of rule of law institutions, in particular the judiciary and parliaments, for political ends because this tends to erode confidence in State institutions and could threaten the maintenance of law and order.

96. I welcome the renewed commitment of the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria to completing the demarcation of the land and maritime boundaries between the two countries. I encourage them to renew efforts to resolve any residual differences in accordance with the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 10 October 2002, with a view to accelerating the completion of the mandate of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission.

97. I wish to express my appreciation to the Governments of West Africa and the Sahel region, the African Union, ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I also extend my appreciation to the United Nations system entities in West Africa and the Sahel, civil society organizations and other institutions for their close partnership with UNOWAS. I commend and further encourage the close collaboration between the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and UNOWAS on an increasing range of topical and transversal challenges, which reflects and responds proactively to the enhanced cooperation between the Economic Community of Central African States and ECOWAS. I wish to express particular appreciation to my Special Representative, as well as the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.