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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from 18 June to 21 December 2021 and contains an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel and the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), including with regard to progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In addition, it includes 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. Following the conclusion of the 2020–2021 electoral cycles, democratic consolidation in the region remained inconsistent. A coup d'état took place in Guinea in the wake of a second coup in Mali. In contrast, a peaceful and credible presidential election was held in Cabo Verde, setting a positive example for democracy.

3. Dialogue processes continued in Burkina Faso, Senegal and Togo to build consensus on political and security matters. Conciliatory gestures by the Presidents of Benin and Côte d'Ivoire lowered political tensions in the two countries. Constitutional reform processes in the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau failed to move forward in polarized political climates. Transitional justice processes in Liberia and the Gambia prompted national conversations on justice, accountability and reconciliation. Against that background, the commitment expressed by the Heads of State of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to review and update Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security appears to signal the intention of ECOWAS to address underlying grievances related to governance deficits, non-respect of presidential term limits and unconstitutional changes of government.

4. On the security front, large-scale coordinated attacks by terrorist and extremist armed groups against military and civilian targets continued. The third meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development and the third meeting of the governors of the Liptako-Gourma border regions enabled stakeholders to exchange views on cross-regional and intercommunal cooperation with a view to responding to and addressing the root causes of insecurity, which continued to cause massive loss of



lives, displacements and infringements of children's right to education. Meanwhile, there was increased focus and attention on the potential impact on neighbouring countries, including those in the Sahel, of the withdrawal of foreign forces, foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya and elsewhere.

5. Despite resumed growth in the economies in the subregion, lack of access to essential services and socioeconomic inequality, compounded by the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, sparked protests in many countries.

A. Politics and governance

6. In Benin, the President, Patrice Athanase Guillaume Talon, met the former President, Thomas Boni Yayi, on 22 September, an encounter that was reportedly appreciated by national stakeholders. Mr. Boni Yayi called for the holding of an inclusive consultative forum, the release of detained political leaders and the return of opposition figures from exile.

7. In Burkina Faso, the President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, appointed new Ministers of Defence and Security on 1 July in a consensus-building gesture. Political dialogue between opposition parties and the Government resumed on 27 September following three months of deadlock over the opposition's demands related among other things, to persistent insecurity. The talks resulted in cross-party consensus on a strategy to tackle insecurity and strengthen the resilience of affected populations. On 9 December, the Prime Minister, Christophe Joseph Marie Dabire, resigned. He was replaced by Lassina Zerbo, who formed a new government of 25 ministers on 13 December.

8. In Cabo Verde, presidential elections were conducted, in a peaceful environment, on 17 October. The former Prime Minister, José Maria Pereira Neves, who was supported by the African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde, obtained 51.5 per cent of the vote, with 42.6 per cent going to Carlos Alberto Wahnon de Carvalho Veiga, who was supported by the ruling Movement for Democracy. Electoral observation missions from the African Union and ECOWAS positively appraised the process, and Mr. Neves was sworn in on 9 November.

9. In Côte d'Ivoire, on 27 July, the President, Alassane Ouattara met with the former President, Laurent Gbagbo, who had returned to the country in June following a 10-year absence owing to his indictment and subsequent acquittal by the International Criminal Court with regard to the post-election violence of 2010. Both men emphasized their commitment to promoting national reconciliation and fostering a new generation of political leaders. On 7 August, the President announced the release and pardon of 78 persons who had been detained in the aftermath of the post-electoral crisis of 2020. On 16 October, Mr. Gbagbo launched a new political party, the Parti des peuples africains-Côte d'Ivoire.

10. In the Gambia, the country's first presidential elections since its return to democratic rule were conducted in a peaceful manner on 4 December. Domestic and international observation missions deemed the poll to be inclusive and transparent. Of the 962,157 Gambians registered to vote, 57 per cent were women and 58 per cent were young men and women under 35 years of age. Voter turnout was 89.3 per cent, demonstrating high interest among Gambians in deciding the country's leadership. On 5 December, the Independent Electoral Commission declared the incumbent, Adama Barrow, of the National People's Party, the winner with 53 per cent of the vote, followed by Ousainou Darboe of the United Democratic Party with 28 per cent, followed by four other candidates: Mama Kandeh of the Gambia Democratic Congress (12 per cent); Halifa Sallah of the People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (4 per cent); Essa Faal, independent (2 per cent); and

Abdoulie Ebrima Jallow of the National Unity Party (1 per cent). While Mr. Darboe and Mr. Kandeh both rejected the results, only Mr. Darboe filed a complaint with the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, on 25 November, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission submitted its final report to the President, who has 30 days to make the report public. The Government has six months from the date of the submission of the report to produce a white paper outlining its position with regard to the recommendations made by the Commission.

11. In Ghana, in August, the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress, unveiled its demands for electoral reform, following proposals made by the Electoral Commission in May. Among other things, it called for the institutionalization of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee and the creation of a separate office for the regulation of political parties. On 5 August, Kissi Agyebeng was sworn in by the President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, as the country's special prosecutor to investigate and prosecute corruption cases, following the previous office holder's resignation in 2020.

12. In Guinea, on 5 September, a coup d'état led to the overthrow of the President, Alpha Condé, and his Government and the suspension of the Constitution of 2020. Subsequently, the African Union and ECOWAS suspended the membership of Guinea, while the coup leaders, who established the Comité national du rassemblement pour le développement (National Committee for Reconciliation and Development, CNRD), appeared to enjoy the support of national stakeholders. ECOWAS also set a six-month deadline for the transition and imposed sanctions on the members of CNRD and their families. On 27 September, following consultations with multiple national stakeholders, CNRD issued a transition charter providing for a civilian government and an 81-member national transitional council. Once established, the council will be tasked with drafting a new Constitution and devising a transition calendar. The charter barred all members of the transitional institutions from running in national and local elections, which have yet to be scheduled. The coup leader, Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya, was sworn in as transitional President on 1 October, and Mohamed Beavogui was appointed as Prime Minister on 6 October.

13. In Guinea-Bissau, against the backdrop of continuing strikes in the public sector, the Government made efforts to address issues of economic governance in cooperation with international financial institutions. Meanwhile, tensions between the President, Úmaro Sissoco Embaló, and the parliament continued with regard to parallel and competing constitutional reform processes. Relations between the President and the Prime Minister, Nuno Gomes Nabiam, have been further strained over the arrival in October of an aeroplane without the Government's knowledge and the reported signing of an oil exploration agreement with Senegal without either the Government's or the parliament's knowledge, prompting the latter to declare the agreement null and void.

14. In Liberia, the Senate submitted a report to the President, George Manneh Weah, advising against the establishment of a special war and economic crimes court, which had been recommended in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2009. Instead, it proposed the creation of a transitional justice commission to review the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The proposal was criticized by human rights groups, who argued that a new commission would subvert the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and duplicate the role of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights. During the reporting period, repeated protests driven by socioeconomic grievances occurred.

15. In Mali, the political situation remained fragile. Following a second military coup on 24 May, the coup leader, Colonel Assimi Goita, assumed the transitional presidency. The development added to the uncertainty surrounding the agreed 18-month

transition, which was initially planned to be concluded in February 2022 with the holding of presidential and legislative elections. However, preparations for the polls ground to a halt as authorities turned their focus to the holding of a wide-ranging national dialogue on reform (Assises nationales de la refondation) scheduled to conclude on 30 December. The forum is set to determine the modalities of key political and institutional reforms, as well as a new date for the polls. On 7 November, ECOWAS leaders imposed targeted sanctions on individual members of the transitional authorities and their families.

16. In Mauritania, against the backdrop of increasing public expectations for concrete outcomes, the President, Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani, continued to hold bilateral discussions with opposition leaders on issues related to social cohesion and socioeconomic challenges. Opposition parties, for their part, reiterated their call for an institutionalized political dialogue. The judicial process against the former President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and other members of his Government in relation to a corruption probe led to the arrest and detention of the former President on 22 June.

17. In the Niger, the new Government focused on addressing the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the country's volatile regions and on increasing literacy rates and access to education, especially for girls. Meanwhile, the defeated presidential candidate, Mahamane Ousmane, continued to reject the outcome of the presidential elections of 21 February and, on 21 June, appealed to the ECOWAS Court of Justice. Against that background, there was little progress on political dialogue, although the Government reiterated its willingness to engage with all political parties. Efforts continued between Mali and the Niger to mend their relations after the President of the Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, made remarks on 9 July strongly condemning the second coup of 24 May in Mali.

18. In Nigeria, on 1 October – the country's independence day – the President, Muhammadu Buhari, reaffirmed the Government's commitment to national unity and called for dialogue. On 12 October, the parliament passed a bill amending the Electoral Act which, inter alia, requires that the transmission of electoral results would be carried out electronically and that political party primaries would be organized by the Independent National Electoral Commission. At its national convention, held on 30 and 31 October, the main opposition People's Democratic Party elected the members of its National Working Committee to lead the party, with the former Senate President, Iyorchia Ayu, as its National Chairman. On 6 November, gubernatorial elections were held in Anambra State in a relatively peaceful environment.

19. In Senegal, the Political Commission for National Dialogue, reached a consensus on most issues tabled, including on the direct election of mayors and heads of municipal councils. However, a new electoral code adopted by the National Assembly on 12 July was contested by opposition parties, and amendments to the Penal Code, adopted on 25 June, were criticized as adversely affecting free expression. Ahead of the local elections being held on 23 January 2022, two new opposition alliances emerged, clustered around Pastef-Les patriotes, led by Ousmane Sonko, and the Parti démocratique sénégalais, led by Abdoulaye Wade. In November, following the postponement of the trial of Barthélémy Dias, an opposition candidate of the Yewwi Askan Wi coalition in the Dakar mayoral elections scheduled for January 2022, clashes occurred between the police and Yewwi Askan Wi supporters.

20. In Sierra Leone, on 13 September, the Consortium of Progressive Political Parties, comprising 10 opposition parties including the All People's Congress, signed a memorandum of understanding to work together to promote national reconciliation in the context of the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2023.

21. In Togo, national consultations between political parties concluded with a series of recommendations on constitutional and electoral reforms. Most political parties participated in the dialogue, which was established in February, but the opposition party Alliance nationale pour le changement subsequently withdrew, citing doubts over the credibility of the process. Laws relating to elections, decentralization and public liberties were adopted by the parliament on 1 October.

22. On 5 October, at an extraordinary ministerial meeting in Accra, ECOWAS member States agreed on a new structure of the ECOWAS Commission and related bodies to enhance the organization's efficacy. Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, the Niger, Nigeria and Togo each obtained a position in the new seven-member Commission, with the Gambia holding the next presidency of the Commission. At its sixtieth ordinary session, held in Abuja on 12 December, the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS decided to pursue further consultations with a view to finalizing the allocation of the statutory appointees to the ECOWAS Commission and extended the tenure of the current postholders by six months to June 2022.

B. Security situation

23. Despite national, regional and international efforts, the security situation remained complex and challenging. Violent extremist groups continued expanding their scope of operations in the Sahel, notably in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, targeting both civilians and security forces.

24. In Burkina Faso, civilian defence groups and military targets suffered several attacks during the reporting period, including on 11 July, when at least seven civilian defence elements were killed in an attack on the Niha-Mossi village, Centre-Nord region; on 8 August, when 14 soldiers were killed in the village of Dounkoun, Toéni department, near the border with Mali; and on 4 October, when a military detachment was ambushed in Yirgou, Centre-Nord region, leaving 14 soldiers dead. A major attack occurred on 18 August, when a convoy of 80 vehicles was ambushed on the Aribinda-Gorgadji road, Sahel region, causing at least 86 fatalities, including 65 civilians. The Sud-Ouest region of Burkina Faso emerged as a hotspot, with extremist cells intimidating the population and local authorities. Improvised explosive devices were used in Comoé province bordering Côte d'Ivoire, causing fatalities among the military. An attack on a gendarmerie post, on 14 November in Inata, Sahel region, killing more than 50 gendarmes, triggered popular demonstrations against the growing insecurity, following which the leadership of the country's security apparatus was reshuffled. Following an increase in security incidents since early November, over 80,000 internally displaced persons have been reported.

25. In Mali, the reporting period was marked by persistent attacks, largely involving improvised explosive devices and indirect fire on security forces and civilians. Repeated attacks with improvised explosive devices were carried out on convoys of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, particularly in the northern axis of Kidal, Aguelhok and Tessalit. There were also frequent attacks against Mission camps, including on 15 July, when three attacks occurred on camps in Tessalit, Ménaka and Gao. Malian defence forces also suffered repeated assaults, such as those carried out on 19 August and 6 October between Boni and Douentza and in Bandiagara, respectively. Civilians bore the brunt of extremist blockades, intimidation and attacks, particularly in central Mali, including against the population in Niono *cercle*. Attacks on trucks on the main road linking Bamako to Senegal were also a cause for concern.

26. In the Niger, despite an overall decrease in the number of terrorist attacks, raids against civilians and assassinations of traditional leaders caused new displacements of persons, especially in the Tillabéri region, where multiple attacks caused numerous civilian fatalities in July and August alone. The military was also targeted. On 25 August, Boko Haram militants attacked an army post in Baroua on the border with Chad, killing at least 16 soldiers. Reprisal actions by the security forces neutralized about 50 militants in Diffa region.

27. Clashes between Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin were reported in the border regions between Burkina Faso and Mali. However, both groups were severely impacted by international forces in large-scale operations conducted by Burkina Faso, Mali and Operation Barkhane forces, including the killing, on 16 August, of the leader of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara continued to actively challenge Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin.

28. The situation in Nigeria remained concerning, with multifaceted security challenges in addition to the Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province insurgency. On 23 October, militants belonging to the Lake Chad faction of Islamic State West Africa Province ambushed Boko Haram fighters in the Abadam local government area of Borno State, killing two high-ranking commanders and several Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad militants. Clashes between the two groups during the reporting period left dozens of militants dead. Islamic State West Africa Province fighters also clashed with the Nigerian military forces in Borno and Yobe States. On 30 October, the convoy of the governor of Borno State came under attack by suspected Islamist militants in Mallam Fatori near the border with the Niger. Violence perpetrated by criminal gangs in the north-west escalated, including kidnappings for ransom of secondary school students and community leaders. On 17 August and 1 September, armed gangs invaded schools in Sakkai, Katsina State, and in Maradun, Zamfara State, abducting dozens of students. On 4 July, 10 people were abducted from a hospital in Kaduna. Intercommunal clashes and reprisal attacks, often involving farmers and herders, continued to be reported, including in the central States of Benue and Plateau. In the south-east, following the arrest of Indigenous People of Biafra leader Nnamdi Kanu, the situation remained tense. Military installations were also targeted, with attacks on the Nigerian Defence Academy in Kaduna State on 24 August and on a military base in Zamfara State on 11 September. For its part, the military staged robust operations against Boko Haram factions. According to military sources, 13,000 former Boko Haram associates and family members have surrendered, reportedly as a result of fighting between extremist groups and pressure from security forces. On 3 October, Islamic State West Africa Province-affiliated militants attacked a camp housing surrendered Boko Haram elements, but were pushed back by security forces. In the same month, military leaders announced the death of Abu Musab al-Barnawi, head of Islamic State West Africa Province, and, subsequently, of his successor, Malam Bako.

29. As part of a regional response, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire intensified joint counter-terrorism operations along their common border following attacks on security positions in Tougbo and Téhini, in northern Côte d'Ivoire, in June. Meanwhile, Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as the Niger and Burkina Faso, announced enhanced joint military operations. In an extraordinary meeting held on 31 August in Niamey, the Defence and Security Committee of the Group of Five for the Sahel discussed the development of a new concept of operations, taking into account the reconfiguration of Operation Barkhane and the partial withdrawal of Chadian troops.

30. Incidents of maritime insecurity decreased but continued causing disruptions and imposing additional costs on trade. According to a report released by the International Maritime Bureau in October, there were 28 incidents of piracy and

related insecurity in the first nine months of 2021, compared with 46 for the same period in 2020. The reduction was due, inter alia, to efforts made by Nigeria through the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure. During the reporting period, Denmark and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland deployed vessels to conduct anti-piracy security operations in the Gulf of Guinea.

C. Socioeconomic context

31. The World Bank regional economic outlook for October 2021 projected a growth rate of 3.2 per cent in 2021 for West and Central Africa, up from -0.8 per cent in 2020. West African economies are recovering from the COVID-19 shocks of 2020 but have so far not reached the growth path of the pre-crisis period. The West Africa subregion is estimated to grow by 3.6 per cent in 2022. The largest economy in the region, Nigeria, is projected to grow from -1.8 per cent in 2020 to 2.4 per cent in 2021 as a result of the better performance of the oil and non-oil sectors. Excluding Nigeria, the subregion is projected to recover from a poor rate of growth (0.7 per cent) in 2020 to 4.5 per cent in 2021 and 5.3 per cent in 2022. The West African Economic and Monetary Union is projected to achieve faster economic recovery with a growth rate of 5.6 per cent in 2021 and 6.1 per cent in 2022, catching up to its pre-crisis performance rate. Governments continued applying measures to strengthen resilience against the COVID-19 fallout, thereby driving up debt levels that restrict the fiscal space. According to a joint regional analysis (excluding Nigeria) by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, seven countries of the region had reached “high” risk levels of debt distress by 30 June. Higher debt ratios, coupled with increased reliance on more expensive financing sources, have pushed up interest payments for the region. Countries such as Ghana and Nigeria issued Eurobonds in dollars to raise \$3 billion and \$4 billion respectively in 2021 to support growth-oriented expenditures. Several Governments had to raise the price of utilities, increasing the strain on citizens already affected by the pandemic. Protests over socioeconomic conditions erupted in several countries.

D. Humanitarian context

32. The humanitarian situation across the subregion continued to be of grave concern, as violence, general insecurity, forced displacement, malnutrition and disease exacerbated high levels of vulnerability, notably in the Sahel region. According to an analysis by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, based on the INFORM Risk Index, the Sahel is in a humanitarian high-risk zone compared with 2020, and a deterioration was observed in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. In the Niger, the classification was raised from high risk to very high risk in the Maradi region and, in Burkina Faso, in the Boucle de Mouhoun, Est, Sahel and Nord regions.

33. Across the Sahel, the population of internally displaced persons rose by 200,000 to 5.5 million, mostly driven by insecurity in northern Burkina Faso and Mali, whereas in the Niger, the number of internally displaced persons remained stable. In Mali, the number of internally displaced persons had risen to slightly over 400,000 by the end of October.

34. The level of food insecurity remained alarmingly high. Across the Sahel region, close to 20 million people are facing severe food insecurity. Although the number of children under 5 years of age facing acute malnutrition in the Sahel has decreased by

500,000 to 5.8 million, overall malnutrition rates among children remain deeply concerning.

35. In the central Sahel, owing to insecurity, 195 health centres were closed – up from 136 in the previous reporting period – and most of those that were open were not fully functional. Women and girls also faced increasing risks of abduction, forced marriage and sexual assault. Education was also seriously affected. Across the Sahel, 5,400 schools were closed, up from 5,000 in the previous report, and about 13 million children were out of school. School closures increased markedly in Niger’s Tillabéri region.

36. Humanitarian access was constrained, depriving vulnerable people of critical assistance and exposing humanitarian personnel to increased risks. In Nigeria, threats to the Maiduguri-Damasak highway hindered the delivery of humanitarian supplies.

37. Heavy rains caused multiple fatalities and significant loss of property in several countries, especially in the Sahel. Subsequently, outbreaks of cholera were registered in the Niger and, to a lesser degree, in Nigeria.

38. As at early December, about 47 per cent of funding for humanitarian response plans, developed by Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, which required about \$2.7 billion to reach 16.2 million people, had been secured, up from 16 per cent in June.

39. As at early October, West Africa and the Sahel had registered an additional 192,000 COVID-19 cases and approximately 2,000 more deaths. Through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility and other channels, vaccination campaigns were intensified across the region, but rates remained low, with around 1 per cent of the population fully vaccinated in Burkina Faso and the Niger, compared with 36 per cent in Cabo Verde.

E. Human rights

40. During the reporting period, there were a number of developments, including the abolition of the death penalty as well as the establishment of sexual offences courts in Sierra Leone. In Burkina Faso, the trial of the former President, Blaise Compaoré, the former Chief of Defence Staff, General Gilbert Diendéré, and 12 others charged with the assassination of the former President, Thomas Sankara, in 1987, commenced in Ouagadougou.

41. Delays were noted in the transitional justice processes under way in the Gambia and Liberia. In the Gambia, 17 human rights organizations backed a call made by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance for the prosecution of perpetrators of human rights violations committed during the era under the former President, Yahya Jammeh.

42. In Benin, human rights actors continued denouncing instances of the alleged instrumentalization of the judiciary and decried the continued detention and prosecution of prominent political figures on charges including terrorism.

43. The reporting period was marked by concerns about freedom of assembly. On 28 September, clashes between members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria and security forces led to the arrest of 57 persons and several alleged casualties, which were denied by the police. In Liberia, the use of excessive force by the police during peaceful protests was also reported. Meanwhile, in Guinea, civil society organizations urged the transitional authorities to address past and recent human rights violations.

44. In Ghana, activists and independent experts of the Human Rights Council raised concerns about a bill on the promotion of proper human sexual rights and Ghanaian

family values, under discussion in the parliament, which could have implications for the country's compliance with its international human rights obligations. On 5 August, 21 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender activists, who had been arrested on 20 May and charged with unlawful assembly, were acquitted.

45. The prevailing security situation in the subregion raised new concerns over the respect of international humanitarian and human rights law within the context of preventing and countering violent extremism. On 15 September, approximately 10 civilians were reportedly killed during an air strike by the Nigerian Air Force on Buhari village in Yobe State.

F. Gender issues

46. Developments regarding women's participation and representation in politics produced mixed results. In Burkina Faso, the government reshuffle of 1 July led to the achievement of the 30 per cent quota for women for the first time; by contrast, only one woman was among the 15 new commissioners appointed to the country's Independent National Electoral Commission on 7 July, and the number of women ministers was reduced from nine to seven in the new cabinet announced on 13 December. In Liberia, several women were appointed as assistant and deputy ministers. Decentralized national action plan structures for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), on women and peace and security, were put in place in several countries. However, there were no women candidates in the presidential elections held in Cabo Verde and the Gambia. In terms of institutional frameworks, on 15 October, ECOWAS adopted a strategy on combating sexual violence and a policy on addressing sexual harassment in the workplace and in educational institutions. At the national level, Burkina Faso established an information mechanism on gender-based violence and adopted guidelines on gender-responsive budgeting.

G. Youth issues

47. In Mali, on 17 September, members of the National Youth Council met with the Prime Minister, Choguel Kokalla Maïga, to discuss youth participation in a planned national conference and the youth contribution to the transition process. The fourth General Assembly of the West African Network of Young Women Leaders was held in Senegal from 2 to 5 August, bringing together representatives from all ECOWAS countries to discuss ways to restructure and revitalize the Network. In Togo, dialogue sessions started on 2 July, involving local authorities and youth groups, with a view to promoting youth participation in decision-making processes. On 23 and 24 September, a national youth dialogue on Sustainable Development Goal 16 was held in Accra, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to discuss youth-led initiatives towards the realization of the Goal.

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

A. Good offices and special assignments of the Special Representative

48. In close collaboration with regional organizations and international and development partners, as well as resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, with the support of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and Head of the United Nations

Office for West Africa and the Sahel supported efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace, while advocating for institutional reform and inclusive approaches to constitutional, electoral and security reform processes.

49. Following the coup d'état in Guinea, the Special Representative conducted a mission to Conakry, on 13 September, during which he met with the then leader of CNRD, Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya, and relevant national and international actors. The Special Representative stressed the need for a peaceful and inclusive transition based on a consensual transition calendar and a swift return to full constitutional order. He assured interlocutors of the commitment of the United Nations to accompanying Guinea through the transition process and working closely with ECOWAS and the African Union. The Special Representative attended the extraordinary sessions of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, held on 8 and 16 September and on 7 November. On 9 November, he travelled once again to Guinea, where he launched a grass-roots social cohesion initiative spearheaded by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in cooperation with UNOWAS and the United Nations country team in Guinea. He launched a similar initiative in the Niger, on 12 November, in support of national efforts to strengthen social cohesion and dialogue through the establishment of a community volunteer mediation system.

50. On 9 September, the Special Representative met with the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou. They discussed stalled dialogue and constitutional processes, upcoming elections, and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, among other issues. Mr. Brou agreed to expedite the deployment to Guinea-Bissau of constitutional experts, who were eventually deployed in October.

51. Following his introductory visit in June, the Special Representative returned to Guinea-Bissau from 28 to 30 September. In meetings with the President, Úmaro Sissoco Embaló, and other national actors, he urged the majority and opposition parties to resume dialogue. As a result, consultations are ongoing with a view to setting up a dialogue framework to build consensus among political stakeholders ahead of the legislative elections of 2023.

52. On 6 September, the Special Representative travelled to Freetown, where he held consultations with the President, Julius Maada Bio, and national stakeholders to promote dialogue between the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party and the main opposition All People's Congress. On 11 October, he returned to Sierra Leone for discussions with the President and with the former President, Ernest Bai Koroma, on the need for concrete conciliatory gestures to ease prevailing tensions ahead of elections in 2023.

53. On 26 October, the Special Representative visited the Gambia, jointly with the President of the ECOWAS Commission and the Executive Secretary to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, to support a national stakeholders' forum ahead of the presidential elections being held on 4 December. At the event, which was jointly organized by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UNOWAS and the Interparty Committee of the Gambia, political parties made a public pledge for a peaceful election free of hate speech. Earlier in October, the Special Representative had conducted a mission to the Gambia, during which he had called for the depoliticization of the transitional justice process following the postponement of the report of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. On 3 December, he returned to the Gambia, together with the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee of the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, and interacted with national and international stakeholders ahead of the presidential election.

54. As part of ongoing efforts to resolve the situation of Ivorian refugees and support national reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire, on 7 September, the Special Representative attended a regional conference, at the request of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. At the event, Côte d'Ivoire signed an agreement with neighbouring countries and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on ending the refugee status of Ivorian refugees in those countries by 30 June 2022 in the light of the progress that had been made in Côte d'Ivoire.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

55. Despite residual restrictions to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, demarcation and related activities were fully resumed during the reporting period. A total of 329 boundary pillars were constructed, leaving 1,023 still to be built out of an expected total of 2,696. High-level meetings between the Special Representative and the United Nations Resident Coordinators in Cameroon and Nigeria initiated new confidence-building efforts in support of affected communities, while final mapping and other processes continued through remote collaboration.

56. At a meeting in Yaoundé from 20 to 25 September, the Subcommission on Demarcation resolved two of the eight outstanding points of disagreement. Chaired by the Special Representative, the thirty-third session of the Mixed Commission, held in Yaoundé from 17 to 19 November, resolved two more areas of disagreement and decided to proceed with the construction of 327 pillars starting in January 2022.

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

57. UNOWAS maintained its close collaboration with regional partners. On 1 July, the Office deployed staff to its ECOWAS Liaison Cell in Abuja. On 12 and 13 July, UNOWAS held consultations in Abuja with ECOWAS focal points and civil society organizations on the ongoing evaluation of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. The deliberations were part of a Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs project aimed at strengthening regional conflict-prevention capacities by enhancing civil society collaboration with regional organizations. The initiative built on the outcome of a consultative meeting with civil society organizations, held in Accra in June and jointly organized by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UNOWAS, ECOWAS and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding. Among the key recommendations of the two meetings was to establish a coordination platform and to operationalize the ECOWAS Economic and Social Commission with a view to enabling civil society organizations to interact regularly with ECOWAS.

58. UNOWAS continued cooperating closely with the Group of Five for the Sahel and supporting its presidency, including through the establishment of a mechanism for collecting data on school closures. On 23 September, UNOWAS co-facilitated the first meeting of the Steering Committee of the Group's Sahelian Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre in Ouagadougou. The meeting assessed operational challenges, drawing on a workshop organized by UNOWAS and the Group of Five for the Sahel, held in Ouagadougou on 21 and 22 August, which focused, among other things, on the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into the Centre's activities.

59. From 27 to 30 September, UNOWAS conducted a joint technical assessment mission with ECOWAS to Cabo Verde ahead of presidential elections on 17 October.

The mission identified best practices with regard to confidence-building among political actors in the context of elections.

60. UNOWAS continued its participation in an ongoing fragility and resilience assessment with regard to the Mano River Union, jointly with the African Development Bank, the Mano River Union secretariat, ECOWAS, the Peacebuilding Support Office and other United Nations entities.

61. UNOWAS took part in the virtual components of the hybrid assessment visits of the Counter-Terrorism Committee to Benin and Nigeria, held from 6 to 23 July and from 11 to 27 October respectively. The assessments were conducted within the framework of the Committee's work to monitor, facilitate and promote the implementation by Member States of relevant Security Council resolutions relating to countering terrorism and violent extremism.

1. Dynamics between farmers and herders

62. UNOWAS continued to convene the regional working group on pastoralism and conflict prevention, which agreed a number of activities to address analytical gaps, including on gender, youth, extractive industries and climate change. Moreover, UNOWAS contributed to discussions on the prevention of farmer-herder conflicts, held by ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States, UNDP and others, focusing attention on cross-border solutions.

2. Lake Chad basin

63. On 4 and 5 October, the Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel participated in the third meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development, in Yaoundé. The Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Office for Central Africa, the UNDP Regional Director for Africa, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and other United Nations entities were also in attendance. The meeting assessed civil-military-humanitarian cooperation, the rehabilitation of persons associated with Boko Haram, cross-border collaboration and the revitalization of Lake Chad. The Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel called for the rapid implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region and urged that linkages with the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel be strengthened. In addition, the Special Representative underscored the need to promote the participation of women and youth, to strengthen national ownership and leadership, and to enhance the respect for human rights and the rule of law.

64. From 18 to 22 October and from 29 October to 2 November, the Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, jointly with the Special Representative for Central Africa, undertook a high-level mission to the Boko Haram-affected countries of Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria. Interacting with national and local authorities, as well as affected communities, the Special Representatives underlined the need for sustained political will in order to accelerate the implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy and advocated that a more holistic approach be taken that integrated the peace-development nexus.

65. With the support of the UNDP-led Regional Stabilization Facility for Lake Chad, cross-border trade along the Banki-Am Chidé corridor between Nigeria and Cameroon resumed. In the Niger, the Facility enabled the voluntary return of over 40,000 internally displaced persons to their places of origin in 22 villages in Diffa region, between 20 June and 31 July.

3. Cross-border security strategy in the Mano River Union

66. In follow-up to a high-level meeting in January and a meeting with the Chiefs of Defence and Security Forces in May, the Special Representative met with the Secretary-General of the Mano River Union in Dakar on 12 September. After reviewing the challenges affecting the region, he offered support, including through the provision of technical expertise with regard to civil registration, to assist the Union's efforts to promote free movement.

4. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

67. No discernible progress was made during the reporting period with regard to the operationalization of an interregional maritime security architecture. On 21 September, United Nations entities launched a consultative mechanism to support regional efforts aimed at addressing maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The launch was the outcome of joint technical preparations by UNOWAS and ECOWAS and was based on the conclusions of the meeting of the Special Representative for Central Africa, the Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, the Presidents of the Commissions of ECOWAS and of the Economic Community of Central African States, and the Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, held on 18 March.

5. Adverse implications of climate change

68. In cooperation with the Governments of Ireland and the Niger and with ECOWAS, UNOWAS started preparations for a regional conference on climate change, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel, set to be held in the first quarter of 2022.

6. Security sector reform, drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

69. On 25 November, UNOWAS and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime organized a conference to strengthen collaboration between defence attachés with regard to cross-border and cross-cutting challenges to peace and security in the region.

7. Intercommunal violence in the Liptako-Gourma area

70. In collaboration with relevant United Nations entities, UNOWAS started implementing the recommendations contained in the annex to my previous report on the activities of UNOWAS (S/2021/612). On 30 July, the Special Representative attended the launch of the Liptako-Gourma Stabilization Facility – spearheaded by the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority with UNDP support – and the first meeting of the Facility's Regional Steering Committee. On 11 and 12 August, he participated in the third meeting of the governors of the Liptako-Gourma border regions in Ouagadougou. The governors expressed concern about an increase in kidnappings and in attacks on schools, among other security and governance challenges. They called for an acceleration of stabilization programmes and agreed on measures to institutionalize cooperation. At a meeting on 30 July, the Special Representative assured the President of Burkina Faso of the full support of the United Nations with regard to regional stabilization efforts.

71. In November, UNOWAS, UNDP and the Group of Five for the Sahel held consultations aimed at launching a joint community dialogue initiative in the Sahel for border communities affected by conflict, including farmers and herders. The consultations led to the identification of conflicts along religious lines in the border areas of Chad and the Niger, farmer-herder conflicts in the border areas of Burkina

Faso and the Niger, and conflicts linked to violent extremism and ethnic tensions in Mali and the Niger. Three non-governmental organizations have been identified to lead the implementation of the initiatives.

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

72. The implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel advanced at the institutional and programmatic levels. At the meeting of the steering committee, held on 3 and 4 November in Dakar, United Nations entities discussed the repositioning of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel within the region's evolving geostrategic context; the progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel road map for the period 2021–2022, including resource mobilization; the development of a common chapter to enhance national ownership of the strategy by anchoring it in country frameworks, as well as in the work of Governments, civil society, regional institutions and other development partners; and the delivery of comprehensive multi-country initiatives.

73. On 30 October, the Ministers of Justice of the Group of Five for the Sahel met in N'Djamena to discuss the harmonization of judicial cooperation protocols. The meeting concluded with a signed agreement between the Judicial Regional Platform of Sahel countries and the Group of Five for the Sahel to improve judicial cooperation in the region.

74. With regard to the security pillar of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, several capacity-building events on disarmament and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons were held in the Liptako-Gourma region, attended by security forces and civil society organizations. The events were aimed, among other things, at enhancing women's participation in peace and security advocacy efforts.

75. In relation to the resilience pillar, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes stepped up their climate-resilient programming with a view to mitigating related risks. In line with the pillar's priority area on renewable energy, partners set up a solar-energy support hub and launched studies to identify power needs and find technical solutions to providing social infrastructures with access to energy.

76. On 1 and 2 July, UNOWAS co-chaired the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Sahel Programme Steering Committee, which was attended by the secretariat of the Group of Five for the Sahel and representatives of the ministries of justice, security and foreign affairs of the Group's member States. Participants expressed concern about a marked increase in drug trafficking and called for a response to the documented linkages between terrorism and organized crime.

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

77. The Special Representative continued to advocate the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. On 9 November, in Bissau, he co-chaired, alongside the President of Guinea-Bissau, the twelfth regional open day on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#). Furthermore, UNOWAS continued to provide its regular support to the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel and facilitated its bimonthly thematic exchange sessions, including with ECOWAS. From 26 June to 2 July, the Working Group, which is coordinated by UNOWAS, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

(UN-Women), conducted a visit to N’Djamena to advocate the meaningful participation of women and youth in the transition following the death of the former President, Idriss Déby Itno. UNOWAS organized a workshop for 50 trainers from Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo on the political participation of women and youth, held from 31 August to 6 September. As part of efforts to promote the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda, in line with resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), UNOWAS supported awareness-raising programmes in schools and social media campaigns in several countries.

78. In follow-up to regional consultations in April on the instrumentalization of the justice system, and in collaboration with ECOWAS and other United Nations entities, UNOWAS held an expert meeting in Accra, on 8 and 9 December, to discuss the establishment of a regional platform of Ministers of Justice.

79. On 31 August, UNOWAS, in cooperation with ECOWAS and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, organized a virtual regional consultation for media practitioners and human rights defenders on enhancing freedom of expression towards democratic consolidation in West Africa and the Sahel. Participants agreed to strengthen the exchange of information and knowledge and called for stronger United Nations advocacy on the protection of fundamental freedoms.

IV. Observations and recommendations

80. I welcome the progress being made towards the consolidation of democratic culture in many countries of West Africa and the Sahel. I commend the people of Cabo Verde for maintaining that standard in the country’s most recent presidential elections, and the people of the Gambia for the peaceful holding of the presidential elections of 4 December. The impressive voter turnout is testament to the continued commitment of the Gambian people to preserve and advance democracy.

81. I am, however, concerned by instances of the unconstitutional extension of presidential mandates and coups d’état in parts of the subregion and across Africa. The coup d’état in Guinea – and its causes – was yet another warning sign of a democratic retreat across parts of the subregion. I commend ECOWAS for its efforts to review its foundational protocols, including the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and to consider adopting other measures to counter the phenomenon. The United Nations is ready to accompany and support this initiative. I likewise welcome the efforts made by ECOWAS to set up a platform of Ministers of Justice.

82. Regarding countries in transition, the United Nations is committed to accompanying regional and national efforts for peaceful and inclusive transitions culminating in a swift return to full constitutional order with the holding of peaceful, credible and inclusive elections.

83. It will be equally important for stakeholders in the subregion to review the 2020–2021 electoral cycles to identify lessons learned and best practices and to ensure the timely adoption of recommendations made by electoral observation missions and other relevant stakeholders ahead of the next electoral cycle starting in 2023.

84. The progress made through dialogue processes in several countries of the region helped to build consensus on matters of national interest and strengthen social cohesion in often polarized environments. It is essential to pursue these efforts, while ensuring the full participation of civil society, including women and youth. It is also important to conclude ongoing transitional justice processes to promote reconciliation and strengthen national cohesion.

85. The implementation of pending institutional reforms outlined in the Conakry Agreement on the Implementation of the Economic Community of West African States Road Map for the Resolution of the Political Crisis in Guinea-Bissau of 2016 and the ECOWAS six-point road map entitled “Agreement on the resolution of the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau”, in particular the completion of a consensual constitutional reform, remains essential for the country’s political stabilization process.

86. The volatile security situation in the subregion, especially in the Sahel, remains a major concern. Armed groups have again demonstrated their capacity to mount large-scale attacks, putting civilian populations at risk, driving displacement and depriving children of education. Notably, the closure of schools is a violation of individual human rights on a massive scale and risks hindering development in the region. I urge all parties to respect the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality and to facilitate the delivery of emergency assistance to populations in need.

87. While there have been no major militant attacks in coastal States, the scenario of a southward expansion of a latent climate of insecurity remains a threat. I therefore welcome the steps taken by some countries in the subregion to enhance their cross-border cooperation and information-sharing.

88. Security challenges in the Sahel are also an existential global threat. I therefore commend efforts by the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Multinational Joint Task Force to stem the tide of terrorism and violent extremism in the subregion. It remains vital for countries of the region to further enhance coordination and to put human rights at the heart of their operations. I urgently call on international partners to scale up support to these initiatives, often undertaken at the expense of economic and social interventions. I also urge partners to increase their contributions to the Liptako-Gourma Stabilization Facility and to support the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. For its part, ECOWAS should accelerate resource mobilization for its action plan for the eradication of terrorism for the period 2020–2024.

89. Despite notable efforts at the national level, the lack of progress towards the operationalization of the Gulf of Guinea maritime security architecture is regrettable. Member States should collaborate urgently to address this issue.

90. Cognizant of the limitations of a security-focused approach, it is essential that States in the region intensify efforts to address the root causes of instability through a comprehensive approach by integrating humanitarian, development, governance, human rights and sustaining peace responses and promoting community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. I call upon States of the region and international partners to support holistic approaches, including through the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the Priority Investment Plan of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

91. Human rights institutions should continue playing their crucial roles in the protection and promotion of human rights and in ensuring accountability for human rights violations.

92. I commend the Group of Five for the Sahel for adopting a concrete plan of action to advance gender equality in the security sector and reiterate my call that countries in the region take all measures necessary to comply with their national and regional commitments on gender equality, including by ensuring adequate budgetary allocations for the meaningful implementation of national action plans for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and related resolutions.

93. I welcome the convening – for the first time since 2014 – of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission. I commend the Governments of the two countries for their steadfast commitment and encourage them to persevere to resolve residual areas of disagreement, in accordance with the mandate of the Commission.

94. While it is encouraging that the economies of West Africa and the Sahel have resumed a trajectory of growth after the contraction and concomitant hardships and the exacerbation of inequalities spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, I reiterate my call to all parties concerned to ensure equitable access to vaccines to avoid new waves of infection and enable societies to emerge from the crisis with greater resilience.

95. I wish to express my appreciation to the Governments of the ECOWAS region, the African Union, the Group of Five for the Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. Effective partnerships between UNOWAS, the United Nations entities in West Africa and the Sahel, civil society organizations and other institutions are essential to create synergies to support the region. I would like to express special appreciation to my Special Representative, Annadif Khatir Mahamat Saleh, as well as the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, and the Resident Coordinators, for their unrelenting efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.
