



Security Council

Distr.: General
29 June 2022

Original: English

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 22 December 2021 to 22 June 2022 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). It also highlights progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and 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 coups d'état in Mali and Guinea in 2021, the military takeover in Burkina Faso and the attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau in the first half of 2022 have further exposed the underlying fragilities of democratic governance in the subregion. Despite initial promises, the de facto authorities are yet to address systemic on security and governance. Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali remain suspended from both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union. To date, de facto authorities have resisted demands by ECOWAS for a "timely" return to constitutional order. In Burkina Faso, however, the appointment of the former President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, as ECOWAS Mediator for Burkina Faso raises the prospects for progress on the attainment of a consensual road map. Against this backdrop, ECOWAS continued the review of its 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and related legal instruments towards strengthening democracy, freedom and good governance in the subregion.

3. In contrast, peaceful and participatory parliamentary and local elections were held in the Gambia in April and in Senegal in January, respectively. However, as highlighted in subsequent sections of the report, the low number of women elected to public office in both countries underscores the need for increased efforts to address structural impediments to women's full and meaningful participation and representation in politics across the subregion. In some countries of the subregion, the continuing trends of political polarization and disagreements over the inclusivity of electoral processes and institutions risked compromising electoral contests and outcomes in the reporting period. In other countries, the alleged instrumentalization



of the judiciary in targeting opposition actors and independent bodies further undermined trust in State institutions. On a positive note, in Côte d'Ivoire political dialogue initiatives progressed and contributed to assuaging long-standing grievances.

4. The insecurity engendered by activities of non-State armed groups increased, resulting in rising levels of displacement both within and across borders, jeopardizing progress in education and other sectors. Terrorist incidents in coastal countries of the subregion demonstrated the persistent threat of a southward expansion of terrorism. As part of their efforts to address and prevent terrorist attacks, coastal countries have intensified collaboration under the Accra Initiative. Burkina Faso and the Niger have recalibrated their counter-terrorism strategies to include local dialogue and reintegration initiatives.

5. The humanitarian situation reached alarming proportions, compounded by a bleak outlook for harvests as violence and insecurity hampered access to farmlands in some areas. Over 40,800 people fled their countries, bringing the total number of refugees across the subregion to nearly 1.1 million as at May. At the same time, as regional economies emerged from the aftershocks of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, rising food and energy prices have further exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and inequalities.

A. Politics and governance

6. In Benin, preparations advanced for the holding of legislative elections on 8 January 2023. A new six-member leadership (including one woman) of the General Directorate for Elections was appointed on 28 February. Two political parties, Restaurer la confiance of Iréné Josias Agossa and La nouvelle alliance of Théophile Yarou, were legally recognized by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security, bringing the total number of political parties in the country to 16. All political parties are required to form coalitions to contest in the elections.

7. On 24 January, amid a deepening security crisis, a coup d'état in Burkina Faso perpetrated by the Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration, led by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, suspended the Constitution, overthrew the President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, and dissolved the Government and the National Assembly. The ousted President was kept in custody and later transferred to his residence, where he remains under close surveillance despite calls by ECOWAS for his unconditional release. On 1 March, Lieutenant Colonel Damiba signed a transition charter defining a three-year transition period towards general elections. However, the latter indicated that the duration of the transition would depend on the security situation in the country. The appointment of some high-profile officials who served under the former President, Blaise Compaoré, has drawn criticisms from forces that led the 2014 insurrection that ousted him. Meanwhile, on 6 April, Mr. Compaoré and two others were convicted in absentia to life imprisonment for the assassination of the former President, Thomas Sankara.

8. In Cabo Verde, the Government of the Prime Minister, Ulisses Correia e Silva, of the Movement for Democracy, pursued reforms aimed at improving governance, sustaining social cohesion and creating a conducive business environment.

9. In Côte d'Ivoire, the political dialogue process launched on 16 December 2021 concluded on 4 March, with the adoption of consensual recommendations to, inter alia, review the electoral framework and advance national reconciliation. Twenty-one political parties and groups, such as the opposition Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire – Rassemblement démocratique africain of Henri Konan Bédié, the Front populaire ivoirien of Pascal Affi N'Guessan, and the Parti des peuples africains –

Côte d'Ivoire of Laurent Gbagbo, as well as 26 civil society organizations, including several women's groups, participated in the process. A follow-up mechanism under the leadership of the Minister of Interior and Security was established. On 21 March, the Minister of Reconciliation and National Cohesion launched an inter-community dialogue process to promote social cohesion. In another development, following a two-year vacancy, Tiémoko Meyliet Koné was sworn in as Vice-President on 20 April, the same day that a slimmed-down cabinet under the Prime Minister, Patrick Achi, was appointed by the President, Alassane Ouattara. On 7 June, Adama Bictogo was elected the new Speaker of the National Assembly, following the death of the incumbent, Amadou Soumahoro.

10. In the Gambia, peaceful parliamentary elections were held on 9 April. The National People's Party of the President, Adama Barrow, obtained 18 of the 53 elected seats in Parliament, while the main opposition United Democratic Party gained 15 seats. The Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), allied to President Barrow, gained two seats but lost all seats in their former stronghold of Foni, which were captured by independent candidates campaigning for the return of the former President, Yahya Jammeh. Only three of the 53 elected Assembly Members were women. Using his prerogatives under the 1997 Constitution, the President nominated five additional members of parliament, including two women; he also designated the APRC leader, Fabakary Tombong Jatta, as the Speaker of Parliament. On 4 May, the President appointed 18 ministers, including 3 women. The Vice-President, Isatou Touray, was replaced by Alieu Badara Joof. On 25 May, the Government released its white paper on the recommendations of report of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, in which it endorsed almost the entirety of the Commission's recommendations.

11. In Ghana, the 2022 budget was approved on 29 March, in the absence of the opposition, which staged a walk-out. This development occurred after prolonged disagreements between the ruling New Patriotic Party and the main opposition National Democratic Congress over the Government's new electronic transfer levy which, according to the opposition, would disproportionately disadvantage poorer segments of society.

12. In Guinea, a National Transition Council was inaugurated on 5 February. On 11 May, it adopted a proposal submitted by the Comité national du rassemblement pour le développement (National Committee for Reconciliation and Development, CNRD) and set the time frame for the transition at 36 months, as opposed to the 39 months originally proposed. Key political parties and civil society coalitions rejected the decision and demanded the convening of a political dialogue process on the transition. Meanwhile, numerous prominent political figures were charged with economic crimes and detained. In a campaign launched by the de facto authorities to "reclaim State properties", houses belonging to prominent political figures, including opposition figures Cellou Dalein Diallo and Sidya Touré were either seized or demolished. In May, the Attorney General announced judicial proceedings against the deposed President, Alpha Condé, and 26 former Ministers and high-level officials for crimes including murder, rape and torture.

13. In Guinea-Bissau, on 1 February, armed elements stormed a meeting of the Council of Ministers chaired by the President, Úmaro Sissoco Embaló. The attack, which reportedly resulted in 11 deaths, was eventually repelled. Regional and international partners condemned the incident and called for transparent investigations. Subsequently, at the Government's request, ECOWAS commenced the deployment of its stabilization support mission to the country. Meanwhile, there was no progress on constitutional and other democratic reforms, and the opposition African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) continued to accuse the Government of instrumentalizing the judiciary to prevent the holding of

its congress. On 16 May, the President dissolved the People's National Assembly, citing insurmountable differences between ANP and other sovereign organs, the systematic refusal of ANP to make its accounts available to the Court of Auditors and the protection provided by Parliament to members of parliament indicted for corruption and embezzlement. The President also announced that early legislative elections would take place on 18 December and that the Prime Minister, Nuno Nabiam, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Soares Sambú, would retain their positions until the holding of the elections. On 9 June, the new Government, comprising 23 ministers and 12 secretaries of State, were sworn in, including three and four women respectively. On 10 June, the President dismissed three of the new ministers by decree.

14. In Liberia, preparations for general elections scheduled for 2023 advanced. On 24 February, the House of Representatives passed amendments to the 1986 electoral code, introducing quotas for women's participation, allowing diaspora voting and establishing an independent complaints mechanism. The amendments have been submitted to the Senate for review.

15. In Mali, efforts to facilitate dialogue to reach agreement on the extension of the transition time frame continued. They were led by the ECOWAS Mediator for Mali, the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, supported by the local follow-up committee on the transition, composed of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the representatives of ECOWAS and the African Union in the country. On 4 May, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Mali and Togo announced the agreement of the President of Togo, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, to act as a facilitator in the Malian crisis. On 6 June, the de facto authorities signed a decree extending the duration of the transition period by two years from March 2022. ECOWAS expressed regret that this decision was made while negotiations were still ongoing to reach a consensus.

16. In the Niger, Tahirou Saïdou of the opposition Mouvement Démocratique Nigérien pour une Fédération Africaine-Lumana Africa (Moden-Fa Lumana Africa) assumed the position of parliamentary opposition leader, following negotiations with the ruling Parti nigérien pour la démocratie et le socialisme (PNDS). However, consultations under the national political dialogue framework have not resumed, amid continued denunciations by opposition parties of pervasive insecurity, rising food prices and restrictions of civil liberties. On 8 April, the former Minister of Interior, Cissé Ousmane Ibrahim, was detained on allegations of fomenting coups in March 2021 and March 2022. On 22 April, the National Assembly approved a resolution to host allied forces on Nigerien soil and allowing them to participate in joint military operations to fight terrorism.

17. In Nigeria, on 3 March, the National Assembly passed several bills aimed, inter alia, at strengthening the autonomy of local governments, separating the office of Attorney General and Minister of Justice and introducing compulsory free basic education. However, the National Assembly rejected bills on affirmative action for women in political parties, on special seats for women in the legislature and on reserved seats for the diaspora. Preparations are ongoing for the presidential and parliamentary elections to be held on 25 February 2023 and for gubernatorial and State assembly elections, scheduled for 11 March 2023. On 25 February, the President, Muhammadu Buhari, signed into law the Electoral Act Amendment Bill. In May, the main opposition People's Democratic Party elected the former Vice-President, Atiku Abubakar, as its presidential candidate. On 8 June, the ruling All Progressives Congress elected a former Governor of Lagos State, Bola Tinubu, as its presidential candidate.

18. In Senegal, local elections were held on 23 January. The ruling Benno Bokk Yakaar coalition won the majority of the seats, but the opposition Yewwi Askan Wi coalition, led by Ousmane Sonko, won several cities, including Dakar and Ziguinchor. Only 3.5 per cent of the elected mayors and departmental council heads are women. Ahead of the legislative elections scheduled for 31 July, disagreements between the Government and the opposition over the sponsorship system (parrainage) persisted. On 17 June, clashes between security services and opposition protesters reportedly resulted in at least three deaths.

19. In Sierra Leone, preparations continued for the presidential, parliamentary and local elections to be held on 24 June 2023. On 13 January, the President, Julius Maada Bio, published a white paper on constitutional amendments to be submitted to Parliament. In it, he proposes provisions for a quota for women's political representation and the establishment of an electoral system based on proportional representation. The political climate in the reporting period was marked by tensions. The investigations by the Anti-Corruption Commission and the hearings by a new tribunal into alleged misconduct by the country's former Auditor General, Lara Taylor-Pearce, stoked allegations of instrumentalization of the judiciary, as did a court injunction against the members of the national executive of the main opposition All People's Congress (APC). APC officials, including the 2018 presidential candidate, the spokesperson of the party and the mayor of Freetown also faced corruption-related charges, which the party denounced as "harassment" against its leaders.

20. In Togo, on 24 March, the National Assembly elected the 17 members of the Electoral Commission, including one woman. They were sworn in by the Constitutional Court on 4 April, paving the way for regional elections scheduled for 2023.

B. Security situation

21. In the reporting period, the security situation in the subregion was marked by a deterioration in the security environment in the central Sahel and a growing risk of terrorism and violent extremism spreading to coastal countries. Parts of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger experienced increased terrorist activities. Neighbouring littoral countries, notably Benin and Togo, also suffered attacks along their northern border areas. Meanwhile, Nigeria continued to experience persisting attacks by terrorist groups and bandits.

22. The region continued to be an arena for competing terrorist and criminal groups. In Nigeria, from January to May, insecurity related to Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups resulted in over 700 casualties, including civilians, in the north-east. According to the Government of Nigeria, 2,472 Boko Haram elements surrendered during the first quarter of 2022. In the Liptako-Gourma region, the Al Qaida-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin engaged in frequent confrontations with Islamic State in the Greater Sahara over access to resources and influence.

23. Reported incidents in coastal countries appear to indicate an increasing infiltration by terrorist groups from central Sahel. Several attacks were recorded in the Pendjari national park and W National Park in northern Benin, causing the deaths of nine forest rangers and five soldiers. According to government sources, the country's northern provinces of Alibori, Atacora and Borgou continued to see regular incursions by armed elements from Burkina Faso and the Niger. Meanwhile, in neighbouring Togo, on 11 May, 8 soldiers were killed and 13 wounded in the first deadly attack in the country, which targeted an army post in Kpendjal prefecture, close to the border with Burkina Faso. The authorities subsequently declared a "state of security emergency" in the northern border region.

24. In Burkina Faso, terrorists have strengthened their grip on the Sahel, East and Centre-Nord regions. A tactic of attrition, with the use of heavy weapons, the planting of mines and the destruction of water and power facilities, was carried out in cities such as Djibo, Pama and Dori. Sophisticated improvised explosive devices were also planted along main transport arteries to impede trade and humanitarian access. Civil defence volunteers suffered repeated attacks which, between 25 January and 25 February, triggered the displacement of over 60,000 persons in the Centre-Nord region. On 31 January, the Poni province of Burkina Faso, bordering Côte d'Ivoire, was the scene of an incident when a convoy of civil defence volunteers hit an improvised explosive device in Helintira. Assaults on civilians also intensified in the east, where educational and other government institutions were attacked, while infiltrations from Mali continued in the south-west. On 11 June, an attack in the town of Seytenga, in the Sahel region, resulted in at least 89 deaths and the displacement of over 16,000 people. Dozens of civil defence volunteers were also killed in different attacks across the northern and eastern regions.

25. The security situation in Mali was marked by deadly attacks perpetrated by groups affiliated with Islamic State in the Greater Sahara in the Gao region and by a considerable deterioration in the security situation in the Liptako-Gourma region, affecting Ménaka region, where hundreds of civilians were reportedly killed. On 18 and 19 June, at least 100 civilians were killed in attacks reportedly perpetrated by extremist groups against several villages in the Bandiagara region, Central Mali. Dozens of civilians were also reportedly killed by extremist groups in the region of Gao. Against the backdrop of the withdrawal of Operation Barkhane and Task Force Takuba forces, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin remained active in many regions, ostensibly in attempts to fill the security vacuum. Despite an intensification of operations by the Malian armed forces, civilians were exposed to violent attacks and increasing human rights violations and abuses. A counter-terrorism operation conducted by the Malian armed forces, in the village of Moura, Djenné Circle, from 27 to 31 March, raised allegations of summary executions and multiple other serious human rights violations. These were denied by the Malian authorities, who have announced an investigation to establish the facts. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is also investigating in accordance with its human rights mandate, although to date it has not been granted access to the site. MINUSMA also continued to be subject to attacks, including of improvised explosive devices, such as on 7 March and 1 June, which resulted in the deaths of three peacekeepers.

26. A series of incidents was reported in the border area between Mali and Mauritania, leading to the killing of Mauritanian civilians. Other civilians reportedly disappeared in the same border area, raising tensions between the two countries. On 12 March, the Minister of National Defence of Mauritania and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali announced in a joint declaration the establishment of an ad hoc joint mission to investigate the incidents and identify steps to de-escalate tensions.

27. In the Niger, the civilian populations in the western regions of Tahoua and Tillabéri continued to endure attacks and were also impacted by fighting between Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. Among other incidents, on 16 March, 21 people were killed when militants attacked a passenger bus and a truck between Téra and Betelkoli near the border with Burkina Faso.

28. In Nigeria, in addition to the above-stated situation in the north-east, persistent insecurity linked to the activities of criminal groups continued in the north-west and north-central states. From January to May, more than 1,600 people were killed in connection with criminal activities in both regions. In Kebbi State, on 8 March,

gunmen attacked the convoy of the Deputy Governor, killing 19 soldiers and at least 62 members of civil defence groups. In Kaduna State, two attacks on 26 and 29 March, at the airport and on a train travelling between Kaduna and Abuja, reportedly resulted in the death and disappearance of numerous civilians. These attacks were preceded by assaults on the military academy and a hospital. In the south-east, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) organization continued to stage attacks, including one perpetrated on 21 February, when IPOB militants ambushed a joint police-military team in Ihiala Local Government Area, Anambra State.

29. In parallel, national and regional responses to the deteriorating security context have also evolved. The situation in Burkina Faso and Mali, as well as political tension among some Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) Member States, impacted on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. In the absence of G5 Sahel Defence and Security and Committee meetings, the Force Commander of the Joint Force, General Oumar Bikimo, nonetheless developed and implemented an operations campaign plan in consultation with the Chiefs of Defence Staff of the Group's Member States, prioritizing the Sectors Centre and West areas of operations of the Joint Force. Since January, the Joint Force has conducted three reconnaissance operations in Sector Centre in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

30. On 15 May, Mali announced its withdrawal from the institutions and organs of the Group, prompting Chad, the current Chair, to launch a diplomatic initiative aimed at persuading Mali to reconsider its stance. In the context of a gradual withdrawal and relocation of French and European forces, at a summit in Paris on 16 February, the Presidents of Benin, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, the Niger, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo agreed to enhance efforts against the expansion of terrorism to coastal countries. Additionally, during a joint meeting of chiefs of intelligence services and Ministers of Security in Cotonou, from 23 to 25 March, under the umbrella of the Accra Initiative, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo committed to deepening their security collaboration to combat and prevent terrorism and violent extremism. On a visit to Abuja on 1 April, the President of the Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, invited Nigeria to participate in a new regional force.

31. The security situation in the Gulf of Guinea continued to improve during the reporting period. No kidnappings of crews were reported in the first quarter of 2022, compared with about 40 in the same period in 2021, and incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea also declined, from 16 to 7. The Gambia, Morocco, Senegal and the United States of America conducted a joint naval exercise in March off the coasts of the Gambia and Senegal, with the aim of supporting the regional maritime security architecture.

32. In other security-related developments, the Senegalese military launched an operation on 13 March to dismantle bases of Salif Sadio's faction of the separatist Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance in the southern Casamance region.

C. Socioeconomic context

33. According to the World Bank, the post-COVID-19 economic recovery of West African countries will be negatively impacted by the global geopolitical context, inducing inflation of commodity prices, disruption in energy supplies and tighter monetary policies. Debt distress has increased in some economies, such as Ghana, whose currency depreciated by 17 per cent. Growth forecasts for 2022 have thus been revised downwards for most countries in the subregion. According to the World Bank, Côte d'Ivoire is estimated to achieve the highest growth rate in West Africa (5.7 per

cent). In Senegal, businesses have deplored the negative fallout from the sanctions on Mali on the country's economic performance.

D. Humanitarian context

34. The humanitarian situation remained dire across the region as insecurity, forced displacement, malnutrition and the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated already high levels of vulnerability, notably in the Sahel. Across the Sahel, over 6.2 million people have been displaced, which is considerably higher than the previous reporting period, mostly due to insecurity in northern Burkina Faso and Mali. While the number of internally displaced persons remained stable in the Niger, a spike in refugee arrivals was recorded in the first quarter of 2022, with more than 36,000 people fleeing attacks by armed groups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria. In a positive development, as at mid-April, Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Togo had formally declared the cessation clause for Ivorian refugees.

35. Climate shocks, such as severe droughts, affecting farming, trade and transhumance, contributed to a dramatic food crisis. This was compounded by the global food crisis occasioned by the shortages of wheat, barley and fertilizer as a result of the war in Ukraine. Across Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, more than 13 million people are facing severe food insecurity, the highest number since 2016. This figure is expected to rise further during the 2022 lean season and exacerbate conflicts between farmers and herders.

36. Education is also seriously affected. Across the Sahel, over 6,800 schools remain closed or non-operational owing to violence, up from 5,400 in the previous report, and about 13 million children are out of school. School closures jeopardize children's future, especially for girls, who are the least likely to return to school after prolonged interruptions.

37. Women and girls faced increased risks of abduction and sexual and gender-based violence. In Mali, the number of reported gender-based violence cases increased by 40 per cent compared with the same period last year. In the central Sahel, nearly 200 health centres were closed owing to insecurity, and the majority of those that remained open were not fully functional.

38. Humanitarian access remained constrained, depriving vulnerable populations of critical assistance and exposing humanitarian personnel to increased risks. In Nigeria, security threats along the Maiduguri-Damasak highway continued to hinder the delivery of humanitarian supplies.

39. Over 30 million people in the Sahel will need assistance and protection in 2022, almost 2 million more than in 2021. Humanitarian assistance needs to be further scaled up to cope with the volatile and deteriorating situation. As at 22 June, less than 20 per cent of funding for the humanitarian response plans developed by Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, and requiring over \$2.9 billion, had been secured.

40. From early 2022 to 22 June, West Africa and the Sahel registered an additional 1,086,315 COVID-19 cases and approximately 14,511 deaths. Through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility and other channels, vaccination campaigns continued to be carried out across the region, but rates remained low and varied, with approximately 6 per cent of the population fully vaccinated in Nigeria, compared with over 55 per cent in Cabo Verde.

E. Human rights

41. The deteriorating security situation in parts of the Sahel and Nigeria continued to impact on human rights. Numerous reports of breaches of international human rights and humanitarian law, such as attacks against civilians, extrajudicial killings allegedly perpetrated by security forces and the widespread closure of education facilities, which deprived children of their right to education. Counter-terrorism operations which included attacks or violence reportedly based on ethnicity, as well as arbitrary arrests, torture, indiscriminate confiscation of cattle and extrajudicial killings targeting communities considered to be affiliated with armed elements or violent extremist groups raised concerns.

42. Restrictions on civic and political space and attacks on free speech remained a major concern, particularly in the context of military transitions. Human rights actors raised concerns over detentions of prominent political figures in Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea and the Niger, with implications for the rule of law, as well as for political dialogue and national reconciliation processes. With regard to Guinea, the High Commissioner for Human Rights called on the de facto authorities to revoke the ban that they had imposed on public demonstrations and expressed concern over the demolition of private properties. In Ghana, human rights defenders raised concerns about press freedom, while in Senegal similar concerns were raised concerning possible denial of political participation caused by the electoral sponsorship system ahead of the legislative elections in July.

43. With regard to Guinea-Bissau, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders expressed concern for the safety of members of civil society organizations. In the aftermath of the attempted coup d'état on 1 February and in the context of the detention of alleged perpetrators, several human rights defenders have reported receiving death threats. On 8 February, armed men attacked Rádio Capital, injuring staff and damaging the facilities. The following day, a political analyst at that radio station was attacked. On 19 March, Sana Canté, a former president of the Movement of Conscious and Nonconforming Citizens, was abducted and subjected to violence before being released.

F. Gender issues

44. The representation and participation of women in politics suffered setbacks in both the Gambia and Nigeria, where the National Assemblies failed to adopt bills that would, among other measures, have reserved seats for women in Parliament. Only three women were elected to the 53-member National Assembly of the Gambia. In Senegal, women made up just 3.5 per cent of elected mayors and departmental council heads. However, on 6 April, the Federal High Court in Nigeria ordered the Federal Government to enforce the National Gender Policy by allotting 35 per cent of appointments in the public sector to women.

45. Conversely, progress was made concerning regional normative frameworks. On 7 April, ECOWAS validated an evaluation report on the women and peace and security component of its conflict prevention framework. On 24 March, the G5 Sahel launched a gender award in the defence, security and justice sectors. With support from the United Nations, the award will provide funding for study trips and capacity-building activities to individuals who have contributed to the advancement of gender issues in the defence, security and justice sectors.

46. Concerning gender-based violence and women's health, on 17 January, the President of Côte d'Ivoire promulgated a law aimed at protecting victims of domestic and sexual violence, including rape. Sierra Leone established integrated centres in

seven districts to provide holistic services to victims of sexual violence. In Guinea-Bissau, five municipalities in the Tombali region in the south-east of country committed to abandoning practices harmful to the health of women and children.

G. Youth issues

47. In the reporting period, the Niger launched a consultative process towards developing a national action plan on youth, peace and security in line with Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#). In Mali, the national action plan was validated on 12 March. Across the subregion, youth groups and organizations, with support from the national chapters of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, conducted awareness-raising, sensitization and training activities on resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#).

48. At the subregional level, from 29 to 31 March, ECOWAS held a workshop in Lagos for representatives of youth organizations across the region on reinforcing youth capacities on conflict prevention and international humanitarian and human rights law. Participants at the workshop called for the coordination of youth initiatives focusing on the promotion of the organization's youth, peace and security agenda and the youth empowerment component of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework.

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

A. Good offices and special assignments of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel

49. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, and Head, United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel supported efforts to sustain peace while advocating for inclusive political transitions towards a speedy return to constitutional order in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, in collaboration with regional organizations and international and development partners, as well as the United Nations country teams. He maintained constant communication with relevant stakeholders, including with the de facto authorities in Burkina Faso and Guinea, and participated in the extraordinary sessions of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government convened on 9 January, 28 January, 3 February and 4 June, at which the Authority addressed the situation in these countries.

50. On 31 January, following the coup d'état in Burkina Faso, the Special Representative participated in a joint mission with ECOWAS to Ouagadougou. He met with the de facto authorities and called for the swift return to constitutional order and the release of President Kaboré. After the adoption of the Transition Charter, the Special Representative returned to Burkina Faso, from 11 to 12 April, for consultations with the de facto authorities, as well as national and international partners. In his meeting with Lieutenant Colonel Damiba, he reiterated the need to shorten the transition period in line with ECOWAS requirements.

51. Following the attempted coup of 1 February and the dissolution of Parliament in Guinea-Bissau on 16 May, the Special Representative has remained engaged with President Embaló, other national stakeholders – including the opposition PAIGC leader, Domingos Simões Pereira, the diplomatic corps and the United Nations country team, to advocate for constructive dialogue. The Special Representative also continued to support renewed ECOWAS efforts for stabilization and political dialogue ahead of the legislative elections on 18 December.

52. In a joint mission with ECOWAS to Conakry, from 27 to 28 February, the Special Representative reiterated the international community's solidarity with the people of Guinea and urged the de facto authorities to accelerate the return to constitutional order.

53. The Special Representative also continued to engage with political actors and other stakeholders to defuse tensions following elections, as well as with the G5 Sahel to overcome challenges and rebuild fractured trust among the Group's member States, against the backdrop of the redeployment of foreign forces in the region. He met with the Group's Executive Secretary, Yemdaogo Eric Tiaré, on 11 January to discuss possible ways to solve political differences. On 19 January, he attended the inauguration of President Barrow in the Gambia and further engaged with national stakeholders, including the defeated candidates of the vote of 4 December 2021.

54. From 31 March to 1 April, the Special Representative travelled to Freetown, continuing his shuttle diplomacy between the President of Sierra Leone and the leader of the main opposition APC, the former President, Ernest Bai Koroma, to ease tensions ahead of the 2023 general elections. In Côte d'Ivoire on 27 and 28 April, the Special Representative interacted with national authorities on a social cohesion project to support the country's national reconciliation process.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

55. The physical demarcation of the Bakassi border between Cameroon and Nigeria proceeded, with the placement of 327 new pillars, reaching a completion rate of about 75 per cent. The placement was accompanied by local confidence-building activities. The subcommission on demarcation submitted a report with recommendations to resolve three more outstanding areas of disagreement. Under the leadership of the resident coordinators, discussions are ongoing with the United Nations country teams in Cameroon and Nigeria for more programmatic support to populations affected by the demarcation.

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

56. UNOWAS maintained its collaboration with regional partners, notably through its liaison cells to ECOWAS in Abuja and the G5 Sahel in Nouakchott. On 11 April, the Special Representative met with the President of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, in the latter's capacity as Chair of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, to discuss the revision of the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which is expected to be considered at the ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government on 3 July.

57. UNOWAS maintained close contact with ECOWAS on the ongoing development of plans of action for the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. On 7 and 8 March, UNOWAS and ECOWAS held their regular desk-to-desk meeting in Dakar, during which they took stock of regional challenges, reflected on collaborative responses to address them and developed a joint workplan on conflict prevention in collaboration with civil society.

58. UNOWAS continued to provide technical support to the G5 Sahel. In addition, from 18 to 19 January, the Office organized a workshop on inter-religious dialogue in the Sahel in N'Djamena in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Regional Cell for the Prevention of Radicalization and

Violent Extremism. The workshop brought together actors from Cameroon, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger, who decided to establish a collaborative monitoring mechanism to address interreligious tensions and violence.

59. At their annual desk-to-desk meeting in Dakar from 17 to 18 March, UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) committed to further strengthening interregional cooperation between ECOWAS and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and to advocate for the adoption and implementation of legislation to protect human rights defenders.

60. From 30 April to 4 May, the Special Representative took part in my solidarity visits to Senegal, the Niger and Nigeria, during which I exchanged views with the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, the President of the Niger, Mr. Bazoum, and the President of Nigeria, Mr. Buhari, as well as with religious, civil society and business leaders and communities affected by insecurity and the climate crisis.

1. Dynamics between farmers and herders

61. On 26 and 27 May in Dakar, UNOWAS organized a seminar with experts from ECOWAS, the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel and the regional United Nations working group on climate change, security, environment and development to review an updated version of the UNOWAS-ECOWAS joint manual on good practices for resolving farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa. Participants agreed to launch a final version of the manual by the second half of 2022. The seminar was preceded by a technical workshop from 10 to 11 March to review and consolidate field data. for the case

2. Lake Chad basin

62. In support of the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas in the Lake Chad Basin Region, a workshop was held in Abuja from 7 to 9 March, bringing together multiple regional and United Nations actors, community representatives and representatives of the Multinational Joint Task Force. Participants discussed collective actions to complement the Strategy's territorial action plans. The new 2022–2024 Regional Action Plan was subsequently adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Lake Chad Basin Commission on 17 March.

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

63. Following the Special Representative's meeting with the Secretary-General of the Mano River Union in September 2021, UNOWAS provided technical assistance to the Union towards the digitalization of identity documents to facilitate cross-border movements, in consultation with civil registration, immigration and electoral management bodies of Liberia and Sierra Leone.

4. Adverse implications of climate change

64. On 2 and 3 March, UNOWAS organized a seminar to discuss the outcomes of climate security risk assessments carried out in Liberia, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. On 22 March, the Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel presented findings from the assessments at a meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on climate-related peace and development challenges in the Sahel. UNOWAS plans to undertake 10 more climate security assessments in the region to inform and support ECOWAS and member States' efforts to develop long-term strategies to address the adverse impacts of climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters.

65. On 6 and 7 April, UNOWAS and the Government of Ireland, in cooperation with ECOWAS, held a regional conference on climate change, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel. More than 100 participants, including government and climate change experts, local actors, regional bodies and women's and youth groups, as well as United Nations partners, reviewed case studies and discussed response strategies, building on local, national and regional adaptation efforts. The participants at the conference adopted a call to action urging more inclusive and evidence-based analysis and policymaking, integrated partnerships and scaled-up conflict-sensitive climate finance. As the secretariat of the United Nations Regional Working Group on Climate Change, Security, Environment and Development in West Africa and the Sahel, UNOWAS is leading the implementation of the call to action in collaboration with ECOWAS, the United Nations climate security mechanism and other partners.

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

66. The Special Representative engaged with leaders in the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau to advocate for the implementation of security sector reform processes. UNOWAS continued to call on Governments in the subregion to operationalize the ECOWAS Security Sector Reform and Governance Policy Framework, launched on 11 November 2021. During the desk-to-desk meetings with ECOWAS and UNOCA, UNOWAS agreed to carry out stocktaking exercises to identify bottlenecks and best practices on security sector reform processes in the subregion.

67. Building on consultations carried out in Guinea-Bissau by the Special Representative, from 24 to 29 April, a joint UNOWAS-UNODC delegation met with the Prime Minister and members of the Government to discuss the implementation of capacity-building activities for the judicial and maritime police to, respectively, combat drug trafficking and safeguard Guinea-Bissau's maritime space.

68. In relation to transnational organized crime, on 18 January, the United Nations and Spain jointly organized a meeting in Dakar on coordinated efforts to combat drug trafficking. Technical and financial partners, as well as representatives from several Member States and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) participated in the event. Also in Dakar, from 2 to 4 February, UNOWAS participated in a workshop on organized crime convened by ECOWAS with support from Germany and the European Union, highlighting the importance of the West Africa Coast Initiative, and contributing to a review of the normative texts to be adopted by ECOWAS.

6. Intercommunal violence in the Liptako-Gourma area

69. The United Nations continued to support the activities of the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority within the framework of the Liptako-Gourma Stabilization Facility, aimed at strengthening the resilience of border communities and facilitating the return of displaced persons.

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

70. The implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel was focused on the provision of basic social services while supporting stability and restoration of State authority. Among several initiatives, the United Nations launched a \$180 million project targeting 1.6 million people in the Liptako-Gourma area aimed at improving economic opportunities and livelihoods, with a focus on women, youth and pastoralists.

71. On 22 March, the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel briefed the Peacebuilding Commission on climate-related peace and development challenges in the Sahel, drawing on an initiative on transhumance and conflict prevention that has been successfully implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration within the framework of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and its Support Plan for the Sahel.

72. On 5 and 6 May, the 13th meeting of the steering committee of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel was held in N'Djamena. Participants assessed the implications of the United Nations engagement in countries undergoing military transitions, the impact of sanctions imposed by ECOWAS on Mali and the global geopolitical context. Participants at the meeting agreed to accelerate the implementation of the strategy, focusing on addressing root causes of conflicts.

73. A regional platform for youth across the 10 Sahelian countries was launched under the strategy. The platform aims to provide an integrated framework for United Nations support in enhancing youth capacities and access to social, political and economic opportunities.

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

74. As a follow-up to the recommendations of the 2021 open day on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), UNOWAS convened a regional forum in Nouakchott, on 14 and 15 March, focused on women's participation in decision-making processes. Organized in partnership with regional and United Nations entities and supported by the Government of Mauritania, the forum brought together about 150 participants from 15 countries. Participants at the Forum called, inter alia, for the introduction and application of gender quotas or parity laws.

75. UNOWAS supported the holding of leadership workshops for women and girls in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Togo. UNOWAS continued to support the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, and from 31 May to 3 June, held a workshop in Accra for United Nations Peace and Development Advisors on gender-sensitive conflict and political analysis.

76. Concerning the rule of law and human rights, in a follow-up to the expert meeting held in Accra in December 2021, UNOWAS, in collaboration with the Government of Ghana, the ECOWAS Commission and other United Nations entities, held a meeting of Ministers of Justice of the ECOWAS region on 27 April. The Ministers endorsed a draft proposal for the establishment of a regional platform of Ministers of Justice, which will be submitted for approval at the summit of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government scheduled for July.

IV. Observations and recommendations

77. I remain concerned about the impact of unconstitutional changes of government on the stability of, as well as on the political, economic and social progress in, the subregion. I welcome efforts by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government to address the situation in the affected countries. I urge the authorities in these countries to reach agreements with ECOWAS on acceptable road maps towards a rapid restoration of constitutional rule. I acknowledge the progress made by ECOWAS towards the review of its Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the operationalization of its Conflict Prevention Framework and the

establishment of a regional platform of Ministers of Justice as important measures to consolidate democratic governance in the subregion. The United Nations stands ready to accompany and support these initiatives, which are pertinent preventive measures to address concerns about governance deficits.

78. Following the attempted coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau, I note the ongoing deployment of an ECOWAS stabilization support mission to the country. To be successful, this deployment should be complemented by targeted initiatives to address the drivers of recurrent political instability and institutional fragility in the country, particularly considering the continuing setbacks to key reforms and allegations of reprisals against the press and human rights activists. Concerted efforts by national, regional and international stakeholders are required to establish a meaningful national dialogue in Guinea-Bissau ahead of the upcoming early legislative elections scheduled for 18 December.

79. I welcome the peaceful legislative and local elections held in the Gambia and Senegal. I reiterate my recommendation to stakeholders in the subregion to review the 2020–2021 electoral cycles to identify lessons learned and best practices and to ensure the timely implementation of pertinent recommendations made by electoral observation missions, and national and other relevant stakeholders, ahead of the next electoral cycle starting in 2023.

80. I note the continued underrepresentation of women in decision-making instances across the region. I reiterate the importance of promoting the full and meaningful participation and representation of women in all political processes, including in elections and transitions. I urge national parliaments to adopt legislation to promote non-discriminatory practices and women's participation in political processes, including through temporary special measures. I call upon all stakeholders, in particular governments and political parties, to ensure the effective implementation of existing instruments on women's empowerment and gender equality.

81. I encourage political actors in Côte d'Ivoire to build on the outcome of the political dialogue process to strengthen social cohesion and build consensus on pending issues of disagreement ahead of the 2023 electoral cycle. Likewise, I urge stakeholders in the Niger to resume their consultations under the national political dialogue framework to overcome their differences and forge consensus on key issues of concern.

82. The highly volatile security situation, especially in the Sahel, remains a major concern, as the capacity of armed groups to mount large-scale attacks against security forces and the civilian population continues to grow, putting populations at risk, driving displacement and depriving children of education. During my visit to the Niger and Nigeria in early May, I witnessed first-hand the hope of populations displaced by insecurity to return home in safety and dignity, as well as efforts under way to fight insecurity through investments in livelihoods and reintegration. The United Nations is firmly committed to strengthening its partnership with regional leaders to advance peace, security and sustainable development in West Africa and the Sahel. I urge all parties to respect humanitarian principles and to facilitate the delivery of emergency assistance to populations in need.

83. I am concerned by the continued expansion of insecurity from the Sahel to coastal countries in the subregion. I salute ongoing efforts under the Accra Initiative to stem the tide and encourage the countries concerned to intensify their cooperation to halt the southward terrorist drive. I also urge partners to increase their contributions to the Liptako-Gourma Stabilization Facility and to the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas in the Lake Chad Basin Region. The United Nations will continue to assist with counter-terrorism efforts in the region, including tackling the root causes

of terrorism and violent extremism. To this end, the African Union Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and I, in consultation with ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel, recently appointed the former President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, as Chair of the independent high-level panel on security and development in the Sahel. In this capacity, he will undertake an independent strategic assessment on the security and governance situation and response initiatives in the region to address drivers of the recurring conflicts and vulnerabilities and proffer practical solutions to strengthen response mechanisms and coordination.

84. I remain deeply concerned about reports of human rights violations against civilian populations in the pursuit of counter-terrorism operations. Impartial and transparent investigations must restore trust and bring perpetrators to justice. I urge security forces in the region to adhere strictly to international human rights and humanitarian law during counter-terrorism operations.

85. I further note concerns by the opposition parties and civil society over growing restrictions on civil liberties, including bans on peaceful demonstrations, and the detention of political opponents and journalists in some contexts. I reiterate that human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential to both a functioning democracy and transitional processes, and encourage national authorities to fully promote and protect human rights and the rule of law.

86. It remains essential that States in the subregion intensify efforts to address the root causes of instability through a holistic and comprehensive approach while promoting community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. I call upon international partners to support these efforts including through the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, the Priority Investment Plan of the G5 Sahel, and the regional stabilization strategy in the Boko Haram-affected areas in the Lake Chad basin.

87. With the official inauguration of the West Africa Regional Maritime Safety Centre, it is my hope that Member States will intensify efforts to ensure its full operationalization under the Gulf of Guinea maritime security architecture to consolidate gains recorded in maritime security.

88. I welcome progress made by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and encourage all concerned parties to persevere to resolve residual areas of disagreement, allowing for the completion of the Commission's mandate.

89. Just as economies of West Africa and the Sahel had resumed a trajectory of growth after the contraction and exacerbation of inequalities spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, the global context has once again dampened the economic outlook of the region. Considering the impact of the crisis, I urge international partners to remain focused on pursuing assistance to West Africa and to Africa as a whole.

90. 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 creating synergies in support of the region. I would like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, 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.