



# Security Council

Distr.: General  
26 March 2025

Original: English

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

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from 1 December 2024 to 31 March 2025. It 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), as well as progress in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and 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. On 29 January, the three States that established the Alliance of Sahel States, Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, formally withdrew from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Mediation efforts to maintain open dialogue channels and preserve the gains of regional integration will continue over a six-month period, in accordance with the decision of the Authority of Heads of State and Government.

3. The overall security situation in the region remained volatile, while Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger deepened regional cooperation, including through the creation of a joint military force. The period saw a resurgence of militant activities in coastal countries, notably Benin. Insecurity in the Central Sahel countries and in border areas to the south has worsened the humanitarian situation, limiting access to social services, especially health and education.

4. Countries undergoing transitions have either launched or pursued efforts to undertake internal dialogue processes. Guinea and Mali have taken preliminary steps towards a return to constitutional order. Elsewhere in the region, general elections were successfully held on 7 December in Ghana. In Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau, political and civil society actors called for consensus on electoral frameworks ahead of the planned elections to be held in 2025. National stakeholders continued to participate in political dialogue mechanisms in Sierra Leone, while disagreement continued to mark the constitutional reform process in the Gambia. In challenging socioeconomic contexts, new governments in Ghana and Senegal have announced ambitious reform programmes.



## A. Politics and governance

5. During its sixty-sixth ordinary summit, held on 15 December 2024, the Authority of Heads of State and Government acknowledged the impending formal withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from ECOWAS and directed the Council of Ministers to convene an extraordinary session during the second quarter of 2025. The goal is to adopt separation modalities and a contingency plan covering political and economic relations between ECOWAS and the three countries. To facilitate the disengagement process, the Authority set out a transitional period until 29 July 2025 and extended the mandates of the President of Senegal, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, and the President of Togo, Faure Gnassingbé, to facilitate dialogue between ECOWAS and the three Central Sahel States. While publicly committing to freedom of movement and residency of ECOWAS citizens in the three countries on the eve of the ECOWAS summit, the three Central Sahel States issued a joint communiqué rejecting the transitional period and reiterating their decision to withdraw from the community. They also accused some States members of ECOWAS of taking actions to destabilize their countries. The countries concerned denied these allegations and reiterated calls for regional dialogue. On 29 January, the President of the ECOWAS Commission declared that the citizens of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger would continue to enjoy free movement of persons, goods and services within the ECOWAS space, until further notice. On 29 January, Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger jointly announced the launch of an Alliance of Sahel States passport.

6. Despite regional tensions in public, quiet diplomatic engagement across the region continued. The transitional Head of State of Burkina Faso attended the inauguration on 7 January of the newly elected President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, alongside the transitional President of Guinea and the transitional Prime Minister of the Niger. The transitional Prime Minister of Mali visited Ghana on 16 January. Since his inauguration, the President of Ghana has repeatedly expressed the importance of cooperation with countries of the Central Sahel and appointed a former military officer and special representative of the African Union for counter-terrorism cooperation, Larry Gbevlo-Lartey, as the country's special envoy to the three Central Sahel States in support of regional efforts to tackle security challenges. After his inauguration, the President of Ghana visited Benin, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo for consultations on peace and regional cooperation, among other issues. Following a visit to Abidjan, he subsequently undertook a tour to Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from 7 to 9 March, during which he advocated reinforced cooperation, taking into consideration the common challenges and emerging realities.

7. Likewise, as Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, pursued efforts to promote regional cooperation, including through engagements with neighbouring countries in North and West Africa. From 21 to 23 January, he convened the fifth Forum of the African Conference for the Promotion of Peace, in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum. Moreover, he supported the work of subregional bodies, including the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River, which held its first forum dedicated to transboundary water management in the face of climate change in Dakar, on 17 December.

8. Transitional authorities in some countries took steps towards a return to constitutional order. In Mali, the budget for 2025, which was adopted on 19 December 2024, included a provision for elections to be held in 2025, while a revision of the voters' list was extended until the end of February 2025. In a joint statement published on 22 January, several Malian opposition political parties urged the transitional authorities to set a timetable for the elections before the end of the first quarter of

2025. In Guinea, while the transitional President, Mamadi Doumbouya, stated that general elections would be held in 2025, the Government spokesperson subsequently cautioned that the presidential election may not be held before the end of the year. In this context, the Forces vives de Guinée, comprising political parties and civil society organizations, declared that they would no longer recognize the transitional authorities beyond 31 December 2024, in line with the expiration of a deadline set by ECOWAS for a return to constitutional order. Security forces suppressed protests by the Forces vives on 6 January, which reportedly resulted in three deaths of civilians.

9. National authorities in the region also took steps towards dialogue initiatives. In Burkina Faso, the transitional Head of State, Ibrahim Traoré, launched a platform with religious leaders to promote dialogue and peace on 16 December 2024, following the appointment of Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo as the new Prime Minister on 7 December. In Mali, on 31 December, the transitional President, Assimi Goïta, emphasized the need for a greater involvement of religious leaders in addressing the terrorist threat. In the Niger, the national conference on institutional reforms was held from 15 to 20 February to define the principles, timeline and priorities of the political transition, as well as a road map for state reforms. The conclusions include a proposal for a 60-month transition period, subject to modifications depending on the security situation, the programme of state reforms and the agenda of the Alliance of Sahel States. The former President of the Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, remains in detention (see [S/2024/871](#)).

10. A national dialogue process was also announced in Mauritania, while the adoption by the National Assembly of a law amending the regulation and functioning of political parties on 27 January was criticized by some for insufficient consultation and as potentially restricting democratic space. Earlier, on 30 December, an opposition coalition led by a Member of Parliament, Biram Dah Abeid, who came second in the presidential election of June 2024, had denounced government interference in democratic processes.

11. As part of ongoing dialogue efforts in Sierra Leone, on 11 January, the President, Julius Maada Bio, received a report from the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion covering a three-year period from July 2021 to July 2024, highlighting the Commission's key activities, accomplishments and challenges in promoting peace and unity across the nation. In the report, the Commission recommended, inter alia, enhancing stakeholder engagement and building partnerships, and developing policies and procedures, while strengthening the Commission's institutional capacities and maintaining its neutrality. The President commended the Commission, which is also coordinating the implementation of the Agreement for National Unity of October 2023, and assured the Commission of his Government's continuing support to building peace as a prerequisite for development.

12. In Ghana, national and international observer missions lauded the conduct of the general elections held on 7 December 2024, which saw Mr. Mahama of the National Democratic Congress, the country's President from 2012 to 2017, return to power with 56.4 per cent of the vote, defeating the Vice-President, Mahamudu Bawumia, of the incumbent New Patriotic Party. The National Democratic Congress won in 13 of Ghana's 16 regions, including in strongholds of the New Patriotic Party. The National Democratic Congress also secured a majority of 183 seats in Parliament, compared with 88 held by the New Patriotic Party, in addition to four independents. The election result of one constituency is still outstanding. When he took office on 7 January, the President outlined 26 key policies and vowed to promote good governance, restore economic stability, address inflation and create employment. On 19 January, he appointed a constitutional review committee with the goal of enhancing democratic governance in the country. On 26 January, he appointed a

planning committee to lead a national economic dialogue to build consensus around an agenda of transformation, while combating corruption and impunity. Meanwhile, in municipal elections held in Cabo Verde on 1 December, the opposition African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde won 15 of the 22 municipal councils.

13. Elsewhere, political and election-related tensions persisted. In Benin, opposition parties continued to call for a review of the electoral code to ensure greater inclusivity and address other contentious issues prior to the holding of general elections in 2026. A steering committee was appointed on 24 February to review the electoral list. Ahead of presidential elections scheduled to be held in October 2025 in Côte d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, Guillaume Soro and Charles Blé Goudé continue to challenge their ineligibility to run on account of earlier convictions and called upon the President, Alassane Ouattara, to put forward an amnesty law. Responding to queries on his intention to participate in the upcoming elections, on 9 January, Mr. Ouattara declared that he was "eager to continue serving" at the helm of Côte d'Ivoire. On 10 March, 15 opposition parties, including the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire, the Mouvement des générations capables of the former first lady, Simone Ehivet Gbagbo, and the Conseil de la jeunesse pluriculturelle, of Charles Blé Goudé, launched the Coalition pour l'alternance pacifique. The new coalition demands, inter alia, a revision of the electoral list before the election. The party of Laurent Gbagbo, Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire, is not part of the coalition.

14. In Guinea-Bissau, several rounds of consultations held by the President, Úmaro Sissoco Embaló, did not result in an agreement on the timing and parameters for legislative and presidential polls. Political differences also emerged over divergent interpretations concerning the end of the President's five-year term. His assertion that his tenure would end in September 2025 was validated by the Supreme Court of Justice on 3 February, in an opinion stating that the President's mandate runs from 4 September 2020 to 4 September 2025. Against this background, an ECOWAS high-level mission, with UNOWAS participation, held consultations in Bissau from 23 to 28 February with relevant authorities, political actors and elections management bodies with the aim of forging consensus among stakeholders on an electoral calendar. While no agreement was reached, on 7 March the President announced that he had signed a decree for presidential and legislative elections to be held on 23 November 2025.

15. In Liberia, the emergence of a reformist splinter group within the House of Representatives, comprising members from the majority and minority who oppose the Speaker, Jonathan Fonati Koffa, resulted in parallel parliamentary sessions that disrupted the legislative process and delayed the approval of the national budget. Moreover, government efforts aimed at combating corruption led to allegations of an instrumentalization of the judiciary. Against this background, a suspected arson attack on the Capitol building on 18 December heightened political tensions. In his State of the Union address on 27 January, the President of Liberia, Joseph Boakai, outlined achievements, including efforts to enhance budget execution. The Government also resumed remitting county development and social development funds to empower local authorities.

16. Institutional, constitutional and governance reform processes continued in some countries. In Senegal, following the legislative elections held on 17 November, the Prime Minister, Ousmane Sonko, in his general policy statement delivered on 27 December, outlined his Government's objectives, which include boosting agricultural and industrial production, promoting good governance and combating impunity. On 28 December, the National Assembly established a High Court of Justice to prosecute cases of corruption and high treason. In addition to other reform

announcements, such as civil service reform, the President of Senegal, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, announced the implementation of recommendations from the national dialogue, held in May 2024, on reforms to the justice sector. In Togo, the transition to a parliamentary system saw the indirect election of 41 senators on 15 February (including 5 women), while an additional 20 senators (including 10 women) were appointed by the President, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, on 5 March. Opposition parties, including Alliance nationale pour le changement, Forces démocratiques pour la République and Dynamique pour la majorité du peuple, boycotted the elections in protest at the ongoing constitutional shift. In the Gambia, constitutional reform advanced with a first reading of the draft Constitution Bill by the National Assembly on 23 December. However, several opposition parties and civil society groups criticized the process for a lack of consultation and inclusivity after the Cabinet, in August 2024, had made changes to the draft Constitution that were seen as strengthening executive prerogatives. Ahead of a second reading scheduled for late March, on behalf of the Government, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance conducted a series of consultations with national stakeholders, parliamentarians and political leaders. As part of this engagement, a long-awaited personal encounter between the President of the Gambia, Adama Barrow, and the United Democratic Party opposition leader, Ousainou Darboe, took place on 25 February, during which both leaders committed to further advance the process.

17. In Nigeria, as part of the constitutional review process, 129 bills are undergoing public hearings in March in all six geopolitical zones. The third reading and vote on a consolidated bill by the National Assembly, are expected to conclude the review by December 2025. Key discussions have focused on the creation of state police, which requires constitutional amendments and further deliberations with stakeholders.

## **B. Security situation**

18. The security situation in the region remained volatile, with high levels of violence, especially in the Sahelian states. The Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) conducted operations in the central Sahel, using improvised explosive devices and attacking security installations, military personnel, civilians and convoys. The period also witnessed increased activities by the Lakurawa group, which is affiliated with ISGS, on the north-western border of Nigeria with the Niger. Violence from the Sahel increasingly threatens southern coastal States, especially Benin and Togo.

19. In Burkina Faso, which remained the epicentre of militant and extremist violence in the region, the transitional authorities established three rapid response battalions to strengthen national security. Amid efforts to reclaim territory, particularly in the north of the country and along the southern border, the Burkinabé authorities announced on 27 December that they controlled about 70 per cent of the national territory. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project recorded 570 fatalities in December 2024 and January 2025, figures that are comparable to those reported for October and November 2024. Major incidents recorded included an attack by JNIM on a military base at Sebba (Yagha Province) on 22 January, with media reports alleging that at least 20 soldiers were killed; an attack in Kawara (Sourou Province) on 17 December, which killed 11 people; and coordinated attacks on military personnel and volunteer fighters (Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie) at Bomborokui (Kossi Province) on 1 December, which resulted in 10 fatalities. Generally, incidents of attacks were increasingly directed at Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie, especially in the south.

20. In Mali, transitional authorities continued operations against non-State armed groups in the north. On 1 December, drone strikes in Tin Zaouatène near the Algerian border resulted in the deaths of some leaders of Front de libération de l'Azawad (FLA), which had been established on 30 November. The casualties caused by the drone strikes demonstrated the response capacity of the security forces. In support of enhancing response capacities, on 20 January the transitional President, Assimi Goïta, announced the launch of a military armament industry in the country. Notwithstanding these efforts, a significant number of attacks were claimed by JNIM, against a decrease in ISGS activities. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, the Mopti Region was the focus of the highest number of attacks, with 274 civilian and military fatalities in December against 208 in November. On 20 December, 20 people were reportedly killed in a series of coordinated terrorist attacks by JNIM against six villages, and 31 security personnel were killed on 6 January during an attack on three border positions at Nioro du Sahel (Kayes Region) close to the border with Mauritania. On 7 February 2025, at least 25 civilians were killed and 13 injured in a suspected terrorist attack in Kobé village, located approximately 30 km from the town of Gao on the Gao-Ansongo road. The period also saw high-profile abductions in the region, including those of a well-known religious leader at nearby Diabidiala, Mali, on 16 December, and a Spanish tourist in Algeria on 15 January, who was later transported to Mali. On 21 January 2025, FLA issued a statement indicating that the group had contributed to the liberation of the Spanish hostage and handed him over to Algerian authorities.

21. Against the background of an increase in the number of abductions and continuing violent attacks reported in the Niger, an army reshuffle took place on 8 January. Major attacks by JNIM in December, notably in Tillabéri Region, included an assault on a convoy that reportedly killed 21 civilians on 5 December, as well as attacks on the villages of Libiri and Kokorou on 12 and 14 December respectively, which reportedly killed 39 persons. A total of 16 villagers were killed between 22 and 25 February in attacks on villages in the Dosso Region near the border with Nigeria and Benin. Also on 1 March, 11 soldiers were reportedly killed in an ambush in Agadez Region near the border with Algeria. The Niger-Benin oil pipeline was also attacked on 13 December at Gaya (Dosso Region), leading to accusations levied by the transitional Head of State of the Niger, General Abdourahamane Tiani, against Nigeria for, reportedly, serving as a “rear base” for terrorists.

22. In the Lake Chad basin, the use of improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks by armed groups continued to pose significant threats to civilians and security forces. The period witnessed numerous incidents, including intercommunal clashes, abductions and other criminal, militant and extremist activities. Based on data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, militant activities, which were initially concentrated in the north-east, have increasingly shifted to north-western and some southern parts of Nigeria. The attack on 13 December on the oil pipeline in the Niger highlighted the re-emergence of the Lakurawa group which, on 23 January, was officially designated by Nigeria as a terrorist entity. According to Nigerian security forces, 32 militants were neutralized in Dogon Chikun in Borno State by an air strike carried out on 25 December. The Federal High Court of Nigeria convicted over 200 individuals between 9 and 13 December on charges of violent extremism.

23. The reporting period saw an increase in militant activities in the northern border region of Benin. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 89 conflict-related deaths were recorded between December 2024 and January 2025 in Benin, compared with 17 recorded over the same period between 2023 and 2024. Incidents included an attack with the use of improvised explosive devices at Tanguiéta in the Department of Atacora, in the Pendjari National Park area on 8 December, which reportedly killed three soldiers. A subsequent attack by JNIM on a military

base at Triple Point in Banikoara on 8 January resulted in significant casualties within the ranks of the security forces. A counter-offensive by the security forces in response to the attack on 8 January reportedly killed 40 extremist elements. In reaction to this series of attacks, Benin has expressed concerns over the suspension of security cooperation with neighbouring Burkina Faso and the Niger, which is hampering counter-terrorism efforts.

24. On 21 January, the Minister of Defence of the Niger announced the creation of a 5,000-strong joint force of the Alliance of Sahel States to fight terrorism in the three countries, which they declared to be a common operational area. In the Lake Chad basin area, on 5 December, the Multinational Joint Task Force arrested 174 suspected Lakurawa elements at the Nigeria-Niger border. Despite the successes of the Joint Task Force, Chadian authorities have raised concerns about a lack of solidarity from other countries, after an attack that killed at least 40 Chadian soldiers in western Chad.

25. Intelligence-sharing, training and joint kinetic and non-kinetic operations envisioned through the Accra Initiative have been affected by the lack of regional cohesion, the departure of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from ECOWAS and reduced activities at the executive secretariat of the Initiative during the electoral period in Ghana. Nevertheless, the restructuring of the executive secretariat is proceeding, including through the transfer of its headquarters from Accra to Tamale. Meanwhile, Senegal and Mali have launched joint cross-border patrols to enhance security along their shared border. Similarly, on 18 February, the Minister of Defence of Côte d'Ivoire expressed readiness to strengthen military cooperation with Burkina Faso and to establish joint patrols while restarting bilateral mechanisms to demarcate the border between the two countries. A response from the Burkinabé authorities was pending at the time of writing.

26. Law enforcement agencies in West Africa conducted several drug seizures. For example, on 2 December, Portuguese authorities and the judicial police of Cabo Verde intercepted a fishing vessel carrying over 1.6 tonnes of cocaine in the western part of Cabo Verde. All six crew members were detained by Cabo Verdean authorities and investigations into the smuggling network are ongoing. In Guinea-Bissau, on 5 January, five drug traffickers of different nationalities were convicted and sentenced to 17 years of imprisonment for possession of 2.6 tons of cocaine seized on 7 September 2024. In another development, the Ambassador of Sierra Leone to Guinea was recalled after Guinean authorities impounded a vehicle belonging to the embassy of Sierra Leone, on 16 January, that allegedly carried suspicious substances.

27. The Gulf of Guinea remained relatively calm, with the International Maritime Organization reporting one incident of armed robbery and no incident of piracy.

### C. Socioeconomic context

28. Economic growth in West Africa is expected to slightly improve from an average of 3.6 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024 to 4.1 per cent in 2025, according to the *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025* report, released on 9 January. Ghana and Nigeria are partially rebounding from depressed growth but recorded comparatively low growth rates at 3.5 and 4.2 per cent, respectively. While Burkina Faso and Mali are also hovering at about 4 per cent, the economy of the Niger is projected to grow by about 8 per cent, buttressed by oil exports. Overall, the extractive industry remains an important driver of growth. This includes the commencement of commercial oil and gas exploitation in Mauritania and Senegal, preparations for exploitation of the Simandou iron ore mine in Guinea, and increased mining activities in Sierra Leone and other countries. In Mali, disagreements between the transitional authorities and international companies have escalated since the

adoption of a new mining code in 2023, leading to the seizure of three tons of gold by the transitional authorities from the Barrick Gold mining site and the temporary detention of its executives.

29. Despite the decision of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger to withdraw from ECOWAS, the free movement of people, goods and capital between the three countries and the regional body continues. However, significant risks of economic disruption remain, as final withdrawal modalities are yet to be agreed. Key issues, such as the common external tariff, banking, transport, insurance, livestock transhumance and regional electricity interconnectivity, remain to be addressed. In addition, the fate of joint projects – many of which were funded by external partners – and financial liabilities held by the three countries, including those owed to the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development, remains uncertain. Separately and outside the ECOWAS framework, the Ministers of Finance of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger convened a meeting of the Alliance of Sahel States on 16 January to discuss the establishment of a joint investment and development bank, against the backdrop of earlier discussions to establish a joint currency.

30. During the reporting period, inflation declined within the West African Economic and Monetary Union, but remained in double digits in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The implementation of circular migration agreements, notably between Spain and some countries of the region, has begun, offering temporary job opportunities predominantly in the Spanish agricultural sector. Meanwhile rising debt levels – such as the fiscal deficit in Senegal reaching 11.6 per cent of GDP in 2024, according to the amended Finance Act 2024 – underscore macroeconomic risks. These challenges, compounded by persistent conflict and instability, continue to undermine economic prospects, hinder job creation and weaken investor confidence.

#### **D. Humanitarian context**

31. Multidimensional and interconnected crises in West Africa and the Sahel contributed to a persistently precarious humanitarian situation. Across the region, the protection of vulnerable people and communities remains a pressing concern, as violence exacerbates instability and puts lives and livelihoods of civilians at risk. Children and youth are particularly at risk of forced recruitment, notably by armed groups, and gender-based violence is widespread, with severe consequences for survivors' physical and mental health.

32. According to the Harmonized Framework, approximately 32.4 million people throughout the region were projected to experience food insecurity during the period from September to December 2024, marking an increase from 29.7 million during the same period in 2023, mainly due to insecurity, economic challenges and climate shocks. These figures may underestimate the full extent of food insecurity in the region, as Harmonized Framework data were unavailable for three countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana and Liberia).

33. Moreover, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as at 31 December, there were more than 6.5 million internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, similar to the previous reporting period. In addition, the four countries hosted approximately 726,000 refugees and asylum-seekers (compared with 690,000 in the previous reporting period), along with approximately 155,000 in Mauritania (an increase of 5,000) and about 181,500 in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo (an increase of 15,500).



34. Owing to insecurity across Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, more than 8,200 schools remained closed, similar to the previous reporting period. Ensuring access to basic services, especially for the most vulnerable, remained a priority, as nearly 500 health centres remained non-operational in many insecure areas.

35. Climatic shocks, notably flooding, continued to disrupt agriculture, damage infrastructure and threaten livelihoods. Rising water levels, particularly in the Lake Chad basin and the Niger River caused significant damage, including in the Diffa Region in the Niger and the Gao Region in Mali.

36. Humanitarian access remained a major challenge across parts of the region, inter alia, as a result of insecurity and restrictions imposed on humanitarian aid workers. Of the \$3.2 billion needed for humanitarian response plans in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, which are aimed at reaching 15 million people, approximately \$1.58 billion (49 per cent) had been received as at 12 February.

## **E. Human rights**

37. During the reporting period, progress was made in the fight against impunity. At its summit on 15 December, the Authority of Heads of State and Government endorsed the establishment of a special tribunal to prosecute gross human rights violations committed in the Gambia under the tenure of the former President, Yahya Jammeh. On 19 December, the National Assembly of the Gambia approved the appointment of members of the Reparations Commission mandated to devise modalities, select beneficiaries and pay out reparations to victims. The Gambia underwent its universal periodic review in January 2025, during which it indicated support for many recommendations made by the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. In Liberia, following the appointment on 1 November of Jallah Barbu as the Executive Director of the War and Economic Crimes Court of Liberia, office facilities were set up and key personnel hired. However, a reported lack of resources has delayed the adoption of the Court's legal framework.

38. Meanwhile, the region continued to face serious human rights challenges marked by persistent restrictions of civic space and reports of enforced disappearances and killings during demonstrations. In countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and the Niger, media outlets remained closed or suspended, while journalists and activists have been detained or prosecuted for allegedly political reasons.

39. In Guinea, civil society activists Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah have been missing since 9 July 2024, with no information to date as to their whereabouts. Similarly, investigative journalist Habib Marouane Camara was arrested by men in gendarme uniforms on 3 December and does not have access to family members or legal support. On 20 February, Abdoul Sacko, leader of the civil society group Forum des forces sociales and member of Forces vives de Guinée was kidnapped, mistreated and subsequently abandoned in an isolated area. That incident and other such incidents have triggered multiple expressions of indignation. In Mauritania, anti-slavery activist Ahmed Samba Abdelahhi was arrested on 22 January after criticizing, in social media posts, the marginalization of descendants of slaves and discrimination against them in the context of recruitment to the civil service.

40. In Mali, on 28 December in Bamako, the president of the opposition party Nouvelle vision pour le Mali, Ibrahim Nabi Togola, was reportedly abducted by two armed men in civilian clothes, who introduced themselves as gendarmes. He was released on 10 February. On 30 December, a Malian opposition activist, Issa Kaou N'Djim, was sentenced to two years in prison, one of which was suspended, and

ordered to pay a fine after being found guilty by a Bamako court of publicly insulting the head of another State and insults broadcast through an information system following comments made during a television programme. On 2 January 2025, a member of the opposition party Alternative pour le Mali, Seydina Touré, was arrested by the anti-cybercrime judicial unit (Pôle national de lutte contre la cybercriminalité), on charges including undermining the credibility of the State, inciting public order disturbances and insults broadcast through an information system. On 5 February, Daouda Magassa, a close associate of the influential and exiled religious leader Imam Mahmoud Dicko, was reportedly abducted by unidentified individuals, and was released on 11 March.

## **F. Gender and youth**

41. Notwithstanding the election on 7 December of a woman as Vice-President of Ghana, for the first time, progress on women's political participation remained limited. Despite the promulgation of the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act in September 2024, women's representation remained low at 14.5 per cent in the country's newly elected Parliament and 16 per cent in the cabinet of the newly elected President, Mr. Mahama. In Senegal, although the parity law was respected during the legislative elections held on 17 November, only 2 of the new Assembly's 14 commissions established in early December applied the principle of parity and only 3 of the commissions are headed by women. Civil society groups in Ghana, Guinea and Liberia continue to call for greater participation of women in leadership, crisis resolution and governance. In Guinea, there was no progress on enacting the Law on Parity adopted in 2019.

42. Women and girls continued to face heightened vulnerabilities, especially in conflict-affected countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, including increased risks of gender-based violence, trafficking and displacement.

43. Ghana established a dedicated Ministry of Youth Development and Empowerment, which demonstrated increased recognition of the vital role of young people in peacebuilding.

## **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**

44. During the reporting period, the Special Representative met with a wide range of leaders and other political stakeholders across the region as part of efforts to build consensus and promote dialogue in support of safeguarding the gains of regional integration and collaboration on shared peace and security challenges. He engaged international partners to secure support for the region's socioeconomic, humanitarian and security needs, while encouraging inclusive political dialogue within countries.

45. As part of the sustained partnership of UNOWAS with ECOWAS, the Special Representative participated in the fifty-third ordinary session of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council and the sixty-sixth ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja on 10 and 15 December, respectively, during which he engaged with leaders regarding the importance of maintaining dialogue ahead of the deadline for the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from the community. He continued to highlight the importance of

building trust through mediation and facilitation efforts, including those by Abdoulaye Bathily, the Special Envoy designated by the President of Senegal, to mitigate the socioeconomic, political and security repercussions of the formal withdrawal of the Central Sahel States from ECOWAS.

46. Furthermore, while accompanying the Deputy Secretary-General on her visit to Nigeria on 9 and 10 January, the Special Representative joined in consultations with national authorities to promote regional solidarity and foster dialogue between ECOWAS, its member States and the three central Sahel countries. The Special Representative subsequently visited Mauritania on 19 February, where he discussed regional issues with the President, Mr. El Ghazouani.

47. From 20 to 28 February, the Special Representative visited Mali and engaged with the authorities on the way forward for the transition and the dialogue with ECOWAS.

48. The Special Representative remained committed to supporting peaceful elections in Ghana through his good offices and the UNOWAS partnership with the National Peace Council. Following previous visits during the electoral process, he returned for the elections on 7 December and attended the inauguration of Mr. Mahama as President on 7 January. He subsequently pursued contacts with the new administration as part of regional efforts to foster dialogue between Burkina Faso, Mali the Niger and ECOWAS. In the context of promoting dialogue, the Deputy Special Representative participated in the high-level mission of ECOWAS to Guinea-Bissau from 23 to 28 February and advocated a consensual road map towards elections in 2025.

49. Continuing his collaboration with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to raise awareness of the humanitarian impact of terrorism on Lake Chad basin communities, the Special Representative visited northern Nigeria from 28 to 31 January, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA, Abdou Abarry. During their stay, the Special Representatives also visited Bama, assessing progress made towards stabilization and the return of displaced persons, and called for more sustained humanitarian assistance, more support for regional security initiatives and a long-term focus on development. During their visit, the Special Representatives engaged with partners and local authorities, advocating ongoing support for regional security efforts and urging the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance.

## **B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission**

50. The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission advanced the boundary demarcation process in accordance with the road map endorsed at its sixth extraordinary session, in June 2024. Meeting from 16 to 21 December in Lagos, the Commission's project steering committee agreed on preparations for the final lot of pillar construction. On 14 December, in Abuja, the Special Representative, in his role as Chair of the Commission, raised with the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, potential modalities for enhanced cooperation between the Mixed Commission and the African Union as the border demarcation process nears completion, to include the exchange of best practices on border management. The Special Representative met with the Resident Coordinators for Cameroon and Nigeria to highlight the importance of coordinated efforts to mobilize resources for development projects that build trust and benefit communities affected by the border demarcation process. On 30 January, on the margins of the fifth Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum in Maiduguri, Nigeria, the Special Representative co-hosted a side event on "Bridging borders: lessons from the Cameroon-Nigeria demarcation for

peace, development and regional cooperation”. Attendees included representatives from the National Boundary Commission of Nigeria, the European Union, Egypt, France, Germany, the Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United Nations entities, notably the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as the Resident Coordinators for Cameroon and Nigeria. International partners were presented with the needs assessment study on the post-demarcation phase and discussed resource mobilization requirements.

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

51. UNOWAS continued its collaboration with regional partners in various areas. As part of a mission aimed at providing support to the Resident Coordinator in Burkina Faso in the context of the transition process, UNOWAS exchanged views with national and international actors on the ongoing security sector reform process in the country so as to better balance the human rights, development and political agendas.

52. From 4 to 24 December 2024, UNODC, through its Global Firearms Programme, facilitated law enforcement operations focused on preventing illicit firearms trafficking and targeted border crossings in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Mauritania (Operation KAFO IV). The operation resulted in the seizure of firearms, thousands of rounds of ammunition, explosives and dual-use chemicals, as well as drugs, counterfeit medicine, contraband medical equipment and medicines, stolen vehicles and cash. Several cases were linked to firearms trafficking, including in relation to terrorist organizations, for which investigations are ongoing.

53. On 26 and 27 February, UNOWAS and UNOCA organized a workshop in Dakar on strengthening conflict resolution mechanisms relating to peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders and the management of transhumance. The event was attended by more than 30 participants from West and Central Africa, including representatives of civil society organizations, ECOWAS and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), as well as the United Nations and technical and financial partners, who advocated harmonization of the ECOWAS and ECCAS approaches and adopted a workplan for the community of practice on farmer-pastoralist dynamics in West and Central Africa.

#### **1. Engagements on the Lake Chad basin**

54. During his visit to northern Nigeria, the Special Representative, together with his counterpart in UNOCA, participated in the fifth Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum in Maiduguri. The Special Representative reiterated calls to sustain the positive outcomes of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, for example regarding the resettlement of displaced persons and refugees, the development of community-based action plans and the greater involvement of civil society organizations. During the Forum, the Lake Chad Basin Commission launched the Community-based Reconciliation and Reintegration Policy as well as the report of the regional study on transitional justice in the Lake Chad region, both of which serve as a reference for coherent, well-coordinated and complementary efforts in the region. Moreover, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom announced the establishment

two new funding mechanisms, the Special Multi-Partner Delivery Fund and the Nexus Funding Facility, to support the implementation of the revised Regional Stabilization Strategy.

55. On 12 February, the Deputy Special Representative of UNOWAS and the Special Representative for Central Africa attended the sixth meeting of the steering committee of the Regional Stabilization Strategy, at which the adjusted version of the Strategy was adopted ahead of its endorsement by the Council of Ministers of the Lake Chad Basin Commission on 27 February, in Niamey. Subsequently, the Council of Ministers requested the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission to adjust the territorial action plans.

## **2. Cross-border security strategy in the Mano River Union**

56. During the reporting period, UNOWAS continued to collaborate with the secretariat of the Mano River Union in the context of the upcoming elections in Côte d'Ivoire and the promotion of an inclusive transition in Guinea. UNOWAS and UNODC are preparing a project with the Mano River Union secretariat to revitalize and reinforce the Mano River Union's joint border security and confidence-building units.

## **3. Piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea**

57. In partnership with UNOCA and UNODC, UNOWAS facilitated a technical-level workshop in Abuja on 17 December to conclude the technical review process of the Yaoundé maritime security architecture and related code of conduct. Participants included representatives of ECOWAS and ECCAS, the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, the Regional Maritime Safety Centres for West Africa and for Central Africa and other partners, and stakeholders made a number of recommendations, including for the establishment of a stronger institutional and reporting framework at the Head of State level. As a next step, the recommendations will be validated by national and regional stakeholders.

## **4. Actions to mitigate the impact of climate change on peace and security**

58. The sustained effects of flooding in large areas of the region and the steady exploitation by armed groups of migration routes that are increasingly affected or disrupted by climate change underscore the urgency of addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change, displacement and security in West Africa and the Sahel. During the reporting period, UNOWAS used its good offices to convene and contribute to engagements on national and regional responses to address the impact of climate change on peace and security.

59. As part of a joint project by UNOWAS and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, a workshop on national approaches to respond to security risks and violent extremism linked to climate change was held in Nouakchott on 3 and 4 December. Bringing together government representatives, including the Ministry of Pastoralism of Mauritania and security forces, youth and women's organizations, as well as researchers and international partners, the event validated a risk assessment methodology that integrates interlocking perspectives on gender, climate security and violent extremism. As a member of the steering committee of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) climate security programme in the Sahel, UNOWAS contributed to a regional workshop held in Senegal from 11 to 13 December to harmonize data collection and analysis as a means of integrating climate security into early warning systems.

60. From 12 to 16 December, Climate Security Advisers from UNOWAS and UNOCA accompanied members of the Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security on a field visit to Nigeria. The joint mission assessed challenges faced by the Governments and communities in the Lake Chad basin region and highlighted the urgent need to address climate change as a driver of intercommunal violence, recruitment by terrorist groups and increased vulnerability of women, young people and children.

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

61. On 4 February, the steering committee of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel convened in Dakar to review developments in the region and advance the conceptualization of 10 integrated flagship programmes in four key areas (food systems; transforming education; youth employment; and energy transition/renewable energy). At the event, the Special Representative urged the United Nations system to use the strategy's platform as space for innovation in support of collaborative frameworks that enhance regional stability and sustainable development, including through cross-border initiatives that safeguard the gains of regional integration for the population.

62. In a bid to reduce conflicts emanating from the scarcity of water in the Sahel, UNOWAS continued to participate in the activities of the task force on water, comprising various agencies including the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, UNDP, the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, FAO, UNHCR, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and IOM. In January, the task force developed an action plan to conduct further research on gaining access to aquifers, promote the transfer of technologies and increase the use of solar energy to gain access to underground water, while strengthening water diplomacy and advocacy around the Fouta Djallon massif and enhancing cross-boundary cooperation on water.

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

63. UNOWAS strengthened its partnership with the West African Bar Association, which provides a vital forum for advocacy on the rule of law and human rights-related matters. Following the annual conference of the Bar Association in June 2024, UNOWAS supported the first meeting of the Association's Executive Committee, held in Dakar from 3 to 5 February, during which the Committee adopted an interim action plan and harmonized the English and French versions of the statute of the Association. As part of its regular "arbre à palabre" dialogue framework, in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission and the West Africa Regional Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, on 20 March, UNOWAS organized a session on the nexus between corruption and instability. Presentations by the regional network of national anti-corruption institutions featured in the event.

64. As part of efforts to advance the youth and peace and security agenda, UNOWAS hosted a hybrid event to mark the ninth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), on 9 December in Dakar. Over 100 participants from youth organizations and United Nations entities reviewed progress in the implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda while applying

youth perspectives regarding insecurity and political transitions in West Africa and the Sahel. UNOWAS also participated in a forum on youth and peace and security convened by the Folke Bernadotte Academy and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. Held from 2 to 5 December in Sweden, the forum served to share best practices from West Africa and facilitated discussions on the linkages between the youth and peace and security and women and peace and security agendas. Key recommendations included developing mission-wide strategies on youth and peace and security while leveraging civil society involvement and strengthening capacity-building for young persons.

65. In this context, UNOWAS supported ECOWAS in the preparation of a regional forum on the youth and peace and security agenda (to be held tentatively in the second quarter of 2025), as a follow-up to a national youth forum co-organized by ECOWAS and UNOWAS in Senegal, held on 26 and 27 November in Dakar.

#### **IV. Observations and recommendations**

66. The evolving challenges to regional security, integration and the unity of West Africa highlight the critical need for the region's leaders and stakeholders to continue their efforts to preserve and build on the gains of decades of cooperation, including within the framework of ECOWAS and other subregional mechanisms. I welcome efforts by ECOWAS and national leaders in the region to foster dialogue and seek opportunities to build trust and collaboration and consider new models for cooperation to the benefit of their peoples.

67. Regional security cooperation is the highest priority in a volatile environment marked by large-scale attacks by terrorist and other non-State armed groups. While addressing security challenges in the Sahel, the threat of a southward expansion of insecurity, as militant groups reportedly establish financial and logistical networks stretching to the Gulf of Guinea, must also be addressed through regional cooperation to combat both violent extremism and the interlinked spread of transnational organized crime. While the development of new mechanisms is the purview of the Member States in the West Africa region, I urge continued support for the Multinational Joint Task Force operating in the Lake Chad basin, the Accra Initiative and the ECOWAS Standby Force as critical components to combat terrorism and organized crime in the region.

68. I encourage countries of the region to further pursue holistic approaches to counter-terrorism that meaningfully integrate human rights, justice, reconciliation and socioeconomic development, and I call upon partners to provide support to such endeavours.

69. In order to address long-standing vulnerabilities across the region, I call for greater support for the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and for the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. It is equally imperative to uphold Security Council resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#) on protecting education in conflict, as the number of schools reportedly closed due to insecurity continues to rise, depriving greater numbers of children of their essential human right to education, increasing their vulnerability to radicalization and jeopardizing socioeconomic advances that can only be sustained through access to education.

70. I encourage efforts to build trust within and between the countries of the region and to restore and strengthen social contracts. Effective service delivery and opportunities for citizen participation in decision-making processes are at the core of social contracts and must be better supported. By strengthening institutions and

building trust in impartial and fair electoral and other governance processes, national authorities can create environments that are conducive to equitable economic growth and the generation of employment opportunities. Encouraged by the participatory elections held in Senegal and Ghana, I urge Governments to seize the momentum of their large legislative majorities to carry forward reforms that meet the needs of their populations, especially young people, and that can serve as a beacon for other countries.

71. I urge international partners, including international financial institutions, to support reform efforts that assist populations and their Governments in addressing pressing security threats while establishing frameworks for equitable and sustainable development. Such efforts include support for fiscal management, including the management of public debt through debt swaps and other instruments that can serve as enablers of development.

72. I reiterate my call for continuous, inclusive and meaningful dialogue in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and the Niger, which fosters consensus on the processes and timelines required for a swift and full return to constitutional order and the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and stability.

73. I encourage national stakeholders in Côte d'Ivoire to intensify efforts to build consensus around the upcoming elections, with a view to further strengthening democratic governance and reinforcing inclusion in the country's socioeconomic gains. I similarly call upon stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau to heed recommendations by the Authority of Heads of State and Government to prioritize dialogue in order to reach an agreement on the timing and modalities for the legislative and presidential elections, and to lay the groundwork for reforms that foster stability, participatory governance and the rule of law as preconditions for sustainable development.

74. Similarly, I am encouraged by national dialogue efforts in Sierra Leone and call upon national stakeholders and partners to remain seized of the full implementation of the Agreement for National Unity while pursuing key governance and electoral reforms. I also welcome the important milestone reached in the constitutional reform process in the Gambia. I call upon parliamentarians and national stakeholders to bring the process to conclusion, reflecting the aspirations of the Gambian people.

75. I remain deeply concerned by restrictions that limit political and civic space and reports of human rights violations, including allegations of abductions and enforced disappearances. The rule of law and respect for human rights are essential components of citizens' trust in public institutions. I welcome the approval by ECOWAS of the establishment of a special tribunal for the Gambia as an important step in the fight against impunity. I call upon Liberia to accelerate the full establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court as an essential element of accountability. I appeal to international partners to continue supporting transitional justice processes in the region.

76. I commend the election of the first woman to hold the office of Vice-President in Ghana but regret the continuing low level of women's participation in political decision-making across the region, including in dialogue and peace processes, where empirical evidence shows that women's engagement leads to better and more sustainable outcomes. I reiterate my call for the effective implementation of national action plans on women's empowerment across the region and for the full implementation of gender parity laws.

77. As I welcome the steady progress made by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, I call upon all parties to honour their commitments to resolve the few outstanding areas of disagreement, thereby enabling the fulfilment and completion of the Commission's mandate.



78. The United Nations remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing peace and democratic governance in West Africa and the Sahel. I wish to express my appreciation to ECOWAS, the African Union and all regional partners for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I extend my gratitude to the Special Representative and to the staff of UNOWAS and of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in the region.

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