



# Security Council

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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 April to 31 July 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. As the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) marked its fiftieth anniversary, both the regional bloc and members of the Confederation of Sahel States, comprising Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, signalled a renewed willingness to cooperate to preserve the gains of subregional integration. The three members of the Confederation appear to have aligned their timelines for their political transitions in recent months. Political activities remain suspended in Burkina Faso, and the dissolution by Mali of political parties followed a similar move by the Niger in late March. Meanwhile, the transitional authorities in Guinea reaffirmed their commitment to holding elections in 2025. Human rights organizations continue to raise concerns over growing restrictions on civic space, human rights and fundamental freedoms in all four countries.

3. Elsewhere in the region, political tensions intensified around upcoming elections in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau. In the Gambia, progress on the reform of the Constitution was stalled by persistent disagreements. In a more positive development, the national dialogue in Senegal produced consensus on key recommendations for political reforms.

4. Despite reported counter-terrorism gains in the Central Sahel, the overall security situation in the broader region remains extremely fragile. In north-eastern Nigeria, terrorist groups are deploying more sophisticated weaponry, including unmanned aerial systems and anti-aircraft capabilities, and are executing coordinated attacks on military targets, humanitarian convoys and critical civilian infrastructure such as schools, medical facilities, telephone masts, airports and roads. The terrorist



threat persists in northern parts of Benin and Togo, and there are signs of increased terrorist infiltration in western Mali and border areas between Mali and Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal. While regional leaders continue to emphasize the need for collective action, regional cooperation against transnational threats remains fragmented.

5. The Gambia, Ghana and Liberia, among other countries, remained burdened by debt and constrained fiscal space, which hinder public spending in essential services. Young people, who comprise about 65 per cent of the region's population, remain particularly vulnerable as unemployment, the lack of opportunities and perceived marginalization increase the risk of their recruitment by criminal and terrorist groups.

## **A. Politics and governance**

6. The ECOWAS Council of Ministers held an extraordinary session in Accra on 22 and 23 April in the aftermath of the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from the Community, and adopted negotiation guidelines and a contingency plan to limit disruptions to the free movement of people, goods and services. On 22 May, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the countries of the Confederation of Sahel States and the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Omar Alieu Touray, met in Bamako to prepare for negotiations on future relations. The parties reaffirmed their commitment to protecting the interests of the populations of West Africa and preserving the gains of subregional integration.

7. Separately, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, invited the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the countries of the Confederation of Sahel States to Addis Ababa for consultations on the political situation in the three countries and the avenues for renewed engagement to restore constitutional order. Similarly, in follow-up visits to the three countries on 17 and 18 June, the Minister of External Relations of Angola and special envoy to the transitional leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, Tété António, conveyed messages from the President of Angola and current Chairperson of the African Union, João Lourenço. Mr. António reaffirmed the commitment of the African Union to the stability and security of the Sahel, to support for the fight against terrorism and to promoting development in the region. In July, the successive appointments of the African Union Special Representative for Mali and the Sahel and its Special Envoy for the Sahel further demonstrated the renewed commitment of the Union leadership to strengthening cooperation with the countries of the Central Sahel.

8. Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger advanced the operationalization of Confederation of Sahel States structures in three domains: defence, diplomacy and development. At a meeting in Bamako on 29 and 30 May, the ministers of justice and human rights agreed, among other measures, to establish confederal judicial and arbitration bodies to address grave offences, including crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, aggression, terrorism and its financing, and grave human rights violations.

9. On 28 May, ECOWAS marked its fiftieth anniversary with an event in Lagos on the theme "Stronger together for a brighter future". At the sixty-seventh ordinary summit of ECOWAS, held in Abuja on 22 June, the Authority of Heads of State and Government instructed the President of the Commission to continue constructive dialogue with the countries of the Confederation of Sahel States. The Authority also approved the relocation of three ECOWAS institutions from Burkina Faso and Mali to Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia and called for an urgent meeting to define arrangements for enhanced regional cooperation against terrorism. In addition, it endorsed the recommendation made by the Council of Ministers at its extraordinary

session to appoint a chief negotiator to lead discussions with Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger to ensure an orderly withdrawal process. The chief negotiator, who is to be supported by a ministerial troika, the President of the ECOWAS Commission and a technical team, has, however, not been named yet. With respect to other country situations, the Authority granted final extensions to the ECOWAS missions in the Gambia (by 24 months) and Guinea-Bissau (by 18 months) and readjusted their mandates to further strengthen their effectiveness.

10. Bilateral diplomatic outreach between coastal and Central Sahel countries continued. On 16 April, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, Yusuf Tuggar, led a high-level delegation to Niamey, which resulted in the issuance of a joint communiqué on the need to reinforce bilateral ties between the Niger and Nigeria. In response to rising tensions between Côte d'Ivoire and the countries of the Confederation of Sahel States, the President of Côte d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara, received the transitional Prime Minister of the Niger, Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine, in Abidjan on 27 May. On 16 and 17 May, the Prime Minister of Senegal, Ousmane Sonko, visited Burkina Faso and pledged full support for counter-terrorism efforts. On 17 June, the transitional President of Guinea, Mamadi Doumbouya, visited Côte d'Ivoire, where both sides reaffirmed their commitment to enhance cooperation.

11. Border tensions between Guinea and Sierra Leone over the Yenga region re-emerged in April, following the deployment of Guinean soldiers to the area. Sierra Leone responded by sending additional troops. On 3 May, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Sierra Leone led a high-level delegation from the secretariat of the Mano River Union to the disputed area, urging a diplomatic solution.

12. The countries of the Confederation of Sahel States and Guinea continued to advance their respective transition agendas, albeit with further restrictions on political activity. In Burkina Faso, on 30 April, supporters of the transitional authorities staged rallies in support of the transitional President, Ibrahim Traoré, following the announcement of an alleged coup plot on 21 April. In the Niger, the publication of a reform charter on 31 March led to the consolidation of executive power under the President, Abdourahamane Tiani. New institutions were created, including the Conseil consultatif de la refondation, an advisory body with no legislative functions.

13. In Mali, as a result of national consultations held from 16 to 29 April, it was recommended that political parties be dissolved, the electoral process be suspended until stability is restored and the transition charter. Political parties were subsequently dissolved on 8 July, triggering unauthorized protests in Bamako. The transition charter was promulgated on 8 July, notably granting the transitional President, General Assimi Goïta, a five-year mandate starting from 2025, renewable "until the pacification of the country". Leading opposition figures rejected the decision, considering it a violation of the Constitution and a "threat to national cohesion". They reiterated the call to set an end date for the transition, along with a clear electoral timeline. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Reconciliation reportedly facilitated the signing of a unification pact with certain Tuareg leaders from the Idnan, Imghad and Daoussahak communities on 27 April. However, divergence between Tuareg and other communities on their cooperation with the Malian transitional authorities persist, with the Front de libération de l'Azawad not having signed the pact and still opposing the transitional authorities.

14. In Guinea, on 1 April, the transitional President announced that a constitutional referendum would be held on 21 September. A national administrative census programme for civil status was launched on 15 April and will be used as a basis for the establishment of the voter registry. In support of the transition, an ECOWAS technical assessment mission visited Conakry on 10 and 11 April. On 14 June, the transitional President dissolved the Independent National Electoral Commission,

replacing it with the General Directorate for Elections under the Ministry of Territorial Administration, which is now responsible for organizing all elections and referendums nationwide.

15. Progress was made with respect to constitutional reforms in several countries of the region. In Togo, the parliament elected Jean-Lucien Savi de Tové as President, and the former President, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, was sworn in as President of the Council of Ministers on 3 May. This concluded the country's transition to a parliamentary system, despite opposition dissent. The newly established Senate held its first ordinary session on 3 April. Municipal elections were held on 17 July with a turnout of 55 per cent. On 21 July, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced the provisional results, indicating that the ruling party, the Union pour la république, had won 1,150 seats (75 per cent). On 6 and 26–28 June, civil society and opposition parties staged protests against the constitutional reform, the rising cost of living and the crackdown on dissent, reportedly resulting in seven fatalities. In Ghana, a constitutional review committee conducted nationwide consultations on such issues as land and natural resource management, decentralization, public services and human rights. In Nigeria, the constitutional review process produced a consolidated document of 51 bills that was under discussion at zonal public hearings until July. Completion is expected by December 2025. In the Gambia, a parliamentary reading of the draft constitution on 7 July failed to advance the process to the committee stage. While the Government affirmed its commitment to explore alternative avenues to advance constitutional reform, the main United Democratic Party cited a lack of transparency and goodwill by the majority for its rejection of the draft constitution bill.

16. In Senegal, a national dialogue was held from 28 May to 4 June. Despite a partial boycott by some opposition parties, participants reached consensus on reforms to the electoral system, including new regulations governing political parties and national institutions. In Mauritania, preparations for the national dialogue continued, with opposition leaders demanding safeguards to avoid past failures and the Government calling on all stakeholders to seize the opportunity for national reconciliation. In Sierra Leone, the implementation of the Agreement for National Unity continued.

17. In Liberia, a prolonged leadership crisis in the House of Representatives ended on 12 May with the resignation of the Speaker, Jonathan Fonati Koffa. On the same day, Richard Nagbe Koon was elected as his replacement, following months of legislative paralysis and institutional tension.

18. Political divisions widened in countries preparing for elections. In Côte d'Ivoire, where the presidential election is scheduled for 25 October 2025, tensions rose. Key political figures, notably Laurent Gbagbo, Charles Blé Goudé and Guillaume Soro, were excluded from the electoral list by a decision of the National Electoral Commission on 4 June. On 22 April, a court had ruled that the presidential contender and leader of the major opposition party, the Parti démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire, Tidjane Thiam, should be removed from the electoral list on the grounds that he had lost his Ivorian citizenship upon acquiring French citizenship in 1987.

19. In Guinea-Bissau, the main opposition coalitions, notably Plataforma da Aliança Inclusiva and Aliança Patriótica Inclusiva, continued to question the legitimacy of the National Electoral Commission and the elections of the new leadership of the Supreme Court of Justice, alleging procedural violations. Nevertheless, preparations continued for the presidential and parliamentary elections to be held on 23 November, including voter registration. While the Government had requested technical support for the elections from the United Nations in March, it later informed the Resident Coordinator that it would cover the full cost of the elections and would no longer avail itself of United Nations support at the present time. The President of the

ECOWAS Commission visited Bissau from 25 to 27 May and met with the President, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, and national stakeholders. An African Union pre-electoral mission also deployed to Bissau from 23 to 27 May. Neither mission, however, was allowed to engage with the full spectrum of political actors. On 18 July, Guinea-Bissau hosted the summit of Heads of State and Government of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, which focused on food security and development. At the event, Mr. Embaló was designated as the Community's Chair for the period 2025–2027.

20. In Benin, the Independent National Electoral Commission advanced preparations for municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections to be held in January and April 2026, respectively, amid the opposition's continued demand for the revision of the electoral code. The audit of the electoral list by four international experts began on 6 July and was set to conclude by 27 July. On 14 July, the Constitutional Court released the official timeline for the elections.

21. Some countries made strides in the fight against corruption. In Mauritania, on 14 May, an appeals court extended the prison sentence of the former President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who had been found guilty on corruption charges, from 5 to 15 years. In Senegal, five former ministers faced corruption charges before the High Court of Justice. In the Gambia, youth organizations protested the lack of transparency regarding the sale of assets of the former President, Yahya Jammeh.

22. In Cabo Verde, the authorities remained focused on development priorities. The country hosted several international events, including an Africa Health Summit on 25 April; a high-level meeting of small island developing States of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea on 15 and 16 May; and regional meetings on health and sustainable fisheries. The country also celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its independence on 5 July.

## **B. Security situation**

23. The transitional authorities of the three countries of the Confederation of Sahel States intensified efforts to strengthen security and regain control of territories through counter-terrorism operations, the upgrading of equipment and measures to increase troop strength. Several West African countries continued to undertake counter-insurgency operations in their border areas, while also working to improve their populations' access to social services in conflict areas, aiming to reinforce State authority and increase protection of civilians.

24. The regional security landscape, however, remained highly challenging and volatile, as terrorist activities increased in the Central Sahel and the Lake Chad basin countries. Attacks and campaigns by the Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, Islamic State Sahel Province and Boko Haram continued to extend towards coastal States. Northern Benin and northern Togo continued to be targeted. Terrorist groups demonstrated tactical sophistication, employing unmanned aerial systems and improvised explosive devices with increasing frequency, while also using children as combatants. Given that civilians were targeted in addition to military installations and personnel, these attacks triggered population displacement.

25. In Burkina Faso, the transitional authorities responded by reconfiguring command structures and deploying rapid response battalions. However, 100 people were reportedly killed in an attack by Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin against military installations in Djibo in the Sahel Region on 11 May. The incident was followed by a similar violent act in Diapaga in the Est Region on 12 May, which led to the escape of prison inmates. In response, on 20 May, the Commander of the

Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie announced that a total of 80,000 volunteers had been recruited for the fight against terrorism.

26. In Mali, the transitional authorities pursued national reconciliation while intensifying air and ground operations against terrorist armed groups, notably Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, which conducted drone strikes against the defence and security forces in the Ségou and Mopti Regions in April. Between 23 May and 4 June, several coordinated attacks were carried out against military bases in Dioura, Soumpi, Boulikessi and Timbuktu. On 1 July, there were coordinated simultaneous attacks on seven localities in western Mali, including Diboli, Gogui, Kayes, Molodo, Niono, Nioro and Sandare, which are close to the borders with Mauritania and Senegal. Security cooperation had already become more challenging owing to an incident on the night of 31 March to 1 April, when Algerian forces shot down a Malian drone at their common border, with the Algerian authorities insisting that the drone had penetrated Algerian airspace. The incident sparked diplomatic tensions involving Burkina Faso and the Niger as well. Mali subsequently withdrew from the Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region, a security coordination body based in Tamanrasset, Algeria, that had comprised Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.

27. In the Niger, the defence and security forces reported gains, including the rescue of eight abducted civilians in Kaji Jiwa in the Diffa Region on 21 April. Terrorist activities in the country remained mainly concentrated in the Dosso, Tillabéri, Agadez, Diffa and Tahoua Regions. The Niger-Benin oil pipeline continued to be a target and was attacked on 1, 4 and 6 April. Unidentified armed individuals also kidnapped a Swiss national in Agadez on 13 April.

28. In the Lake Chad basin, regional response capacities were affected by the announcement by the Niger in March that it would withdraw from the Multinational Joint Task Force. Overall, terrorist groups escalated their use of drones and improvised explosive devices, particularly in Nigeria. In Borno State, Islamic State West Africa Province elements reportedly attacked a Nigerian Army battalion in Marte on 12 May, killing several soldiers, and the rival Boko Haram splinter group Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad reportedly killed 57 people in Mallam Karamti and Kwatandashi on 15 May. In Benue State, coordinated attacks by suspected armed herders resulted in over 250 deaths between April and June. Nigerian senators and governors from the affected regions enhanced outreach to traditional leaders to address local conflict dynamics.

29. As part of efforts to address fragmented regional and subregional security cooperation, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the Mediation and Security Council held a joint consultative meeting in Addis Ababa on 16 May. They agreed to establish a joint threat fusion and analysis cell as part of the proposed African Union-ECOWAS counter-terrorism coordination platform and to expedite the operationalization of the African Standby Force and ECOWAS Standby Force. In a bid to strengthen the Accra Initiative, on 28 April, the President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, appointed a new commander of the Multinational Joint Task Force. The special envoy of Ghana to the Confederation of Sahel States has also been given additional coordination responsibilities relating to the Initiative.

30. On 15 April, the Chiefs of Defence Staff of the countries of the Confederation of Sahel States met in Ouagadougou to discuss defence and security cooperation, including operations and modalities for establishing a joint Confederation force. Their Air Force Chiefs held parallel consultations in Bamako. Between 15 May and 4 June, Chad and Togo took part in a joint military exercise of the Confederation called "Tarha Nakal 2". The first session of consultations between the Russian Federation and the Confederation was held in Moscow on 3 April, resulting in a commitment to establish a strategic defence and security partnership.

31. During the reporting period, cross-border risks for the broader subregion persisted. Northern Benin experienced an increase in terrorist attacks. On 17 April, Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin claimed responsibility for two coordinated attacks on military posts in Banikoara and Koudou in the Alibori Department, in which 54 soldiers were reportedly killed. In Togo, a drone attack on a military outpost near Dapaong in the northern Savanes Region injured six soldiers.

32. In contrast, the maritime security environment in the Gulf of Guinea remained relatively stable. On 25 April, Nigerian defence and security forces rescued three Chinese nationals who had been abducted by pirates on 27 March. To further enhance maritime safety in the region, Cabo Verde hosted a multinational maritime security exercise from 5 to 16 May, bringing together 22 members of the Yaoundé maritime security architecture and 8 international partner countries.

### **C. Socioeconomic context**

33. Overall, in 2025, countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union continued to demonstrate robust growth, driven by the strong performances of Côte d'Ivoire (6.4 per cent growth), the Niger (6.9 per cent) and Senegal (7.9 per cent). However, major economies, such as Ghana and Nigeria are expected to post moderate growth rates of 4.4 and 3.5 per cent, respectively, driven in part by tighter fiscal and monetary policies. Senegal discussed the resumption of its programme with the International Monetary Fund and initiated revisions to its tax code to boost domestic revenue collection. In April, Mauritania and Senegal benefited from their first joint commercial exports of liquified natural gas.

34. Extractive industries remained a key growth driver across the region, including in the countries of the Confederation of Sahel States, where agricultural output also increased as a result of favourable weather conditions. The gross domestic product of the Niger rose from 2.5 per cent in 2023 to 8.5 per cent in 2024. Following the adoption of a revised mining code in 2024, and amid ongoing judicial processes, the Malian authorities shut down the offices of the Barrick Mining Corporation, a Canadian company, in Bamako on 15 April and placed the company's gold mining complex under provisional administration by the State.

35. Despite improvements in economic performance in the region, high debt burdens (reaching more than 100 per cent of gross domestic product in Cabo Verde and Senegal) and budget deficits point to persistent structural weaknesses, which are being exacerbated by reductions in development assistance and rising borrowing costs. These have continued to restrict Governments' fiscal space to provide services. Low Human Development Index scores and high youth unemployment, which exceeds 30 per cent in Mali and the Niger, remain serious concerns because they can exacerbate socioeconomic grievances and increase vulnerability to recruitment by armed and criminal groups.

### **D. Humanitarian context**

36. Across the region, the protection of vulnerable populations remained a pressing concern, especially in areas where violence exacerbates instability and endangers civilians. In conflict zones, children and young people are particularly at risk of forced recruitment by armed groups. Sexual and gender-based violence is widespread, affecting mainly women and girls, and risks are heightened by displacement and economic hardship.

37. According to the Harmonized Framework, an estimated 47.9 million people across the region experienced food insecurity in June and July 2025. While this represents a decrease of 1.7 million compared with the same period in 2024, it is likely that the full extent of food insecurity is underestimated, because Harmonized Framework data were unavailable for two West African countries.

38. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as at 31 May, there were more than 6.5 million internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, similar to the previous reporting period. Those four countries also hosted 723,406 refugees and asylum-seekers (compared with approximately 726,000 in the previous reporting period). In addition, Mauritania hosted 169,730 refugees and asylum-seekers while Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo hosted 168,885.

39. Ensuring access to basic services, especially for the most vulnerable, remained a priority in the reporting period, as nearly 600 health centres (an increase from nearly 500 in the previous reporting period) remained non-operational in many insecure areas. Due to ongoing insecurity in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, more than 9,100 schools remained closed, a figure similar to that in the previous reporting period.

40. Humanitarian access continued to be hindered by insecurity and restrictions on aid workers, complicating efforts to reach those in need. Humanitarian funding also remained a major challenge. Of the \$3.1 billion in humanitarian aid required to assist 6.9 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, only approximately 14 per cent had been received as at 15 July, posing a serious threat to the delivery of life-saving assistance.

## **E. Human rights**

41. While progress has been made in some areas, including in the fight against impunity, there continue to be persistent and widespread concerns about human rights violations and abuses in the region. In the Central Sahel countries and in Guinea, human rights groups voiced concerns over widespread restrictions on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, restrictions and bans on political activities and allegations of arbitrary arrests, abductions and enforced disappearances. In Burkina Faso, on 2 April, three journalists appeared in a video wearing military uniforms, after reportedly having been arrested by armed men following their criticism of press restrictions. In Mali, following the dissolution of political parties, pro-democracy figures were reportedly arrested on 8 and 11 May, and the president of the Alternative pour le Mali party was condemned to a one-year prison sentence on 19 June. In the Niger, three radio journalists were reportedly arrested on 8 May. In Guinea, the whereabouts of Habib Marouane Camara, a journalist arrested in December 2024, and those of Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah, civil society activists who disappeared in July 2024, remain unknown. Likewise, the fate and whereabouts of the former Secretary-General of the Ministry of Mines and Geology, Sadou Nimaga, who was abducted in Conakry on 6 November 2024 together with his driver, remain unknown.

42. Counter-terrorism operations conducted in complex environments have also given rise to human rights concerns pertaining to military actions and reprisal attacks involving foreign support elements, terrorist groups exploiting local grievances, volunteer brigades and communities seeking protection. In Mali, on 22 April, 13 bodies were reportedly discovered on the outskirts of a military camp after security forces arrested around 100 individuals in Sebabougou, Kayes Region, on 12 April. Some 65 individuals were still missing at the time of writing. On 12 May, Human Rights Watch called upon the Government of Burkina Faso to impartially investigate the alleged killing of more than 130 civilians during an operation by Volontaires pour



la défense de la patrie and security forces on 10 March in Salanso, Boucle du Mouhoun Region. In turn, the transitional authorities of Burkina Faso denounced an alleged “disinformation campaign” intended to discredit its security forces. These cases have prompted allegations of an increasing ethnic dimension to the fight against terrorism, which were rebutted by the authorities.

43. There has been some progress in the fight against impunity in certain countries. On 23 April, the Constitutional Council of Senegal struck down a law adopted by the National Assembly on 2 April to “interpret” the amnesty law adopted under the former President, Macky Sall, shortly before the presidential election of 2024. The Council argued, *inter alia*, that the law passed on 2 April 2025, which had been denounced by the opposition as protecting supporters of the majority, violated the principle of non-retroactivity. In Guinea, on 13 May, the authorities announced that the 334 victims recognized by the Criminal Court of Dixinn, including victims of sexual violence during the stadium massacre of 28 September 2009, would begin to receive compensation payments. Following the granting of a presidential pardon to the former President of Guinea, Moussa Dadis Camara, on 29 March, the Deputy Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court visited Guinea from 19 to 21 May. Mr. Camara had been sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment in July 2024 for crimes against humanity related to the massacre on 28 September 2009. In the Gambia, seven members of the Reparations Commission were sworn into office on 11 April. The Government reiterated the need for financial and technical support for the special accountability mechanism, which comprises the Office of the Special Prosecutor, a special criminal division of the High Court and a special tribunal. In Liberia, on 30 April, the President, Joseph Boakai, extended the mandate of the Office for the Establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court for another year, demonstrating continued political will to promote accountability for serious human rights violations committed between 1989 and 2003. Despite the Government increasing funding for the establishment of the court to \$2 million, the process continues to face serious funding challenges.

## **F. Gender and youth**

44. Progress was recorded in promoting the participation of women and young people in decision-making in several countries despite persistent barriers across the region. In Côte d’Ivoire, on 21 May, the Council of Ministers adopted the national policy on equality, equity and gender for 2024–2030, establishing a comprehensive framework to promote gender equality. In a government reshuffle in the Niger on 17 April, a young Minister of Youth and Sports and a woman Minister of Population, Social Action and National Solidarity were appointed, and previously abolished mandates related to the promotion of women were reinstated. In addition, the national strategy for women’s economic empowerment was updated. Notwithstanding these developments, women occupy only 15 per cent of positions in the Cabinet, falling significantly short of the 30 per cent quota for appointed positions. In Nigeria, where only 4.3 per cent of federal lawmakers are women and all governors are men, advocacy continued for a bill on mandatory quotas for women in federal and state legislatures.

45. Benin and the Niger held national youth summits in support of the youth and peace and security agenda, on 14 and 15 April and 14 and 15 May, respectively. Benin subsequently validated the country’s action plan on youth and peace and security on 17 May.

### **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**

46. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel pursued engagements with leaders across the region to promote dialogue, with a view to improving relations between the countries of the Confederation of Sahel States and ECOWAS, safeguarding the gains of subregional integration and strengthening security cooperation. He advocated for pragmatic approaches and the alignment of United Nations support with national priorities. In response to the prevailing security threats and limited international attention given to the Sahel, he sought to mobilize support and bolster regional mechanisms through his good offices. At the national level, he continued to promote inclusive and peaceful political processes.

47. Advocating for continued regional cooperation, at the fiftieth anniversary celebrations for ECOWAS on 28 May, the Special Representative called for coordinated regional strategies to effectively meet the rapidly evolving security challenges. He welcomed the meeting between ECOWAS and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the countries of the Confederation of Sahel States on 22 May as an encouraging step towards preserving the gains of regional integration. The President of the ECOWAS Commission welcomed the support of United Nations entities and the strong partnership with UNOWAS. On 22 June, the Special Representative participated in the sixty-seventh ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government in Abuja, at which he welcomed the rapprochement between the countries of the Confederation and ECOWAS, reported on his visits to countries in the region and reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to deepen its cooperation with ECOWAS. Prior to that, on 11 June, he met with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa and, *inter alia*, agreed on the need for joint messaging around electoral processes in the subregion.

48. On 2 June, the Special Representative met with the President of Senegal, Diomaye Faye, to discuss ways to foster regional cooperation and dialogue. The meeting followed his visit to Ghana from 14 to 16 April, where he discussed the need for a revival of regional security mechanisms with Mr. Mahama. Meeting with national stakeholders in Ghana, he also commended the National Peace Council as a model of inclusive civic participation and encouraged steps to accelerate sustainable economic growth.

49. The Special Representative visited the Niger from 18 to 21 May, where he met with Messrs. Tiani and Zeine and other senior government officials. The Nigerien transitional authorities voiced concern over perceived external support for terrorism and called for enhanced United Nations support in the humanitarian, development and security fields. Pledging continued engagement, the Special Representative emphasized the importance of regional cooperation to strengthen counter-terrorism efforts. He conveyed similar messages during his visit to Burkina Faso from 21 to 24 May, where he met with the transitional Prime Minister, Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo, and other key interlocutors. Authorities in both countries expressed optimism regarding future collaboration between Confederation of Sahel States and ECOWAS countries, extended their appreciation for the encouraging role played by the United Nations and welcomed the Organization's support for national priorities. Furthermore, they called for greater international attention to be given to the challenging security and humanitarian situation in the Sahel.

50. Following the release of an electoral calendar foreseeing the holding of general elections by the end of 2025, the Special Representative visited Conakry from 3 to 5 June. Discussions with the transitional Prime Minister, the Speaker of the National Transition Council and other interlocutors centred around the transition process, the regional situation and United Nations support.

51. Amid rising political tensions ahead of the presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire in October 2025, the Special Representative visited Abidjan from 16 to 19 April. He met with Mr. Ouattara, candidates and opposition representatives and key stakeholders to promote dialogue geared towards peaceful elections. He maintained his engagement with the main political stakeholders to preserve peace, safeguard economic gains and prevent election-related violence.

52. During a pivotal stage in the constitutional reform process of the Gambia, the Special Representative visited the country from 5 to 7 May. He held consultations with the President, Adama Barrow, and other key stakeholders to foster dialogue and pave the way for renewed agreement on a consensual process.

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

53. In support of the Special Representative's high-level engagements, UNOWAS continued its collaboration with regional organizations and partners to advance joint workplans, including with ECOWAS, the Mano River Union, the United Nations Office to the African Union, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. On 1 May, UNOWAS participated in a consultative meeting of the ECOWAS Parliament joint committee on strengthening regional relations. From 2 to 4 June, it took part in an ECOWAS symposium on human security and early warning, in Lomé, which underscored the importance of coordination at the local, national and regional levels. UNOWAS also participated in the fifty-fourth ordinary session of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council at the ministerial level on 18 June, and in a technical meeting in Abuja on 26 and 27 June, which finalized the legal framework for establishing a social and economic council for West Africa.

54. UNOWAS completed its multi-stakeholder evaluation of 10 years of United Nations support for security sector reform processes in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia and Guinea. The study revealed that some processes were affected by political instability, lack of donor support and coordination and poorly defined objectives. UNOWAS also continued to provide specific strategic and technical support for security sector reform in several countries, notably Burkina Faso and the Gambia, where UNOWAS contributed to a project financed by the Peacebuilding Fund. UNOWAS also collaborated with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa on a study on conventional arms and ammunition management and the prevention of violent extremism.

55. In support of efforts to strengthen maritime security, UNOWAS participated in a training exercise sponsored by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Denmark and Senegal, held in Dakar from 7 to 16 April and attended by 30 maritime experts from the region. At the event, UNOWAS presented its findings on the evaluation of the Yaoundé maritime security architecture.

56. To address cross-border threats, a regional conference was held in Dakar on 9 and 10 July to validate the findings of joint baseline assessments of the Integrated Border Stability Mechanism for West Africa. UNOWAS was admitted to the joint

initiative by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Organization for Migration and the International Criminal Police Organization to enhance border governance and cross-border cooperation.

57. UNOWAS continued to collaborate with partners to advance the climate and peace and security agenda across West Africa and the Sahel. Among other things, it helped to ensure that climate and peace and security perspectives were embedded in the Africa urban resilience programme, which was presented at a meeting of the Regional Committee for Disaster Management in West Africa from 20 to 22 May. With assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the programme supports countries in the region to strengthen governance capacities regarding climate-related hazards. At the national level, UNOWAS, in collaboration with Senegalese authorities, initiated a climate security assessment of the Lake Retba area on 7 May.

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

58. UNOWAS strengthened partnerships with regional and national human rights institutions and civil society organizations on cross-cutting issues, including governance, human rights and the political participation of women and young people. On 2 May, the Deputy Special Representative virtually addressed the opening of the eighty-third ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in Banjul, calling for enhanced collaboration to advance human rights. Ahead of the session, UNOWAS supported the forum of non-governmental organizations from 28 to 30 April, which resulted in a series of resolutions submitted to the Commission. From 1 to 4 July, UNOWAS also supported the annual regional consultation of national human rights institutions in Abuja. As part of its regular "arbre à palabre" dialogue series, UNOWAS organized a session on civic space in the subregion, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar.

59. From 1 to 4 April, UNOWAS co-facilitated a workshop in Monrovia for the Office for the Establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court in Liberia, alongside the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, the Office of Legal Affairs and the United Nations country team. The workshop shared lessons from other accountability mechanisms and supported efforts to establish and operationalize the special war crimes court. On 5 and 6 May, UNOWAS participated in a high-level conference for parliamentarians from transitioning countries in Central and West Africa, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Libreville. The Office contributed to discussions on inclusive governance and women's participation in decision-making. Participants adopted the Libreville Declaration, which calls for stronger transitional parliamentary institutions, a dedicated commission on inclusion and guidance for restoring constitutional and democratic order.

60. UNOWAS pursued its advocacy for the women and peace and security and the youth and peace and security agendas. The Office also conducted, in partnership with UNDP, a training workshop on preventing gender-based violence for police officers and civil society organizations in Bula, Guinea-Bissau, from 7 to 11 April. On 10 April, UNOWAS co-hosted, with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Population Fund, a virtual knowledge-building session to promote the women and peace and security agenda. From 7 to 9 May, UNOWAS participated in a regional conference on the sustainable participation of young people in governance, organized by the ECOWAS

Commission. Key recommendations included establishing an ECOWAS youth parliament and appointing a youth envoy.

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

61. Under the framework of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, and working closely with transitional authorities in a spirit of co-creation, the United Nations system developed 10 comprehensive flagship programmes for Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. Based on national priorities and with a combined budget of \$6.9 billion, the programmes are estimated to benefit over 15 million people over a period of three to six years. They span a wide range of areas, including the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, stabilization and cross-border programming, food systems, energy transition, economic governance, education, health, social protection, youth employment and participation, and the promotion of human rights. In support of the launch of a financing drive for these programmes, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel enhanced overall resource mobilization efforts.

62. Moreover, to advance the implementation of the “Water as an Accelerator for Development in the Sahel” initiative, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel facilitated a series of meetings aimed at finalizing the Sahel regional action plan on water and promoting long-term investments on water in the region.

63. As part of the “Governance as an Accelerator for Development in the Sahel” initiative, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, UNDP and UNOWAS organized the Sahel governance forum in Banjul on 30 and 31 July. The first edition of the *Future of Governance in the Sahel* report, launched at the forum, provides a conceptual framework to address governance challenges in the region.

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

64. Following the good offices mission undertaken by the Special Representative and Chair of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in November 2024, the parties made significant progress in resolving the final three areas of disagreement. Planning is now under way for a field assessment mission to record the agreed coordinates. During a tripartite capacity-building session held in Dakar from 7 to 15 April, the parties reviewed and validated draft maps delineating specific boundary sections. This process enabled the production of 62 of the 131 map sheets required to complete the boundary demarcation. At the same time, procurement processes advanced for the construction of 410 boundary pillars, with contract awards expected by September 2025 to allow for the timely commencement of construction. To support a smooth transition and ensure the sustainability of its work, the Commission also developed an exit strategy aimed at consolidating achievements and promoting lasting peace and stability along the Cameroon-Nigeria border.

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

65. Despite enhanced efforts by countries of the subregion, the security environment, marked by large-scale attacks and increasingly sophisticated equipment employed by terrorist and other criminal groups, remains extremely concerning. The

increasing transnational interlinkages between terrorist groups and criminal networks are a further cause for alarm. Early warning alerts of terrorist infiltration in border areas with Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal are adding to the persistent threat of terrorism in littoral States. Left unchecked, a further expansion of insecurity risks exacerbating socioeconomic and governance challenges in coastal States.

66. The promotion of effective and comprehensive regional security cooperation is of paramount importance. I encourage regional leaders to cooperate on this critical challenge and call on partners to strengthen their efforts and provide support through regional mechanisms, including the Multinational Joint Task Force for the Lake Chad basin, the Accra Initiative and the ECOWAS Standby Force. In this regard, I welcome the engagement of the ECOWAS Authority to expedite the activation of its Standby Force, as well as the consultations between ECOWAS and the African Union, and urge them to accelerate the establishment of effective counter-terrorism mechanisms.

67. As ECOWAS celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, I applaud the strides made in regional integration since the Community's inception and welcome the commitment of all leaders across the region to preserve these gains in the interests of their citizens.

68. I am encouraged by the dialogue initiatives in the region and appeal to all actors to strengthen State institutions as guarantors of security, providers of essential services, protectors of human rights and facilitators of sustainable development, thereby reinforcing the social contract that links citizens to their Governments.

69. In line with commitments made in the Pact for the Future, I reiterate the urgent need to accelerate the reform of the international financial architecture to strengthen its capacity to support developing countries, including in West Africa and the Sahel, in accessing adequate and affordable financing for long-term development. Collective action and concrete commitments are therefore indispensable for lowering the cost of borrowing, improving debt restructuring and both preventing crises and strengthening resilience when they occur.

70. Ahead of important elections in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau, I call on all stakeholders to intensify efforts to build consensus and create conditions for peaceful and credible electoral processes.

71. I take note of the declared intention of the Guinean transitional authorities to organize elections and facilitate a return to constitutional order before the end of 2025 and call for inclusive processes towards a return to constitutional order in the countries of the Central Sahel. While recognizing the vital importance of fighting terrorism and restoring full State authority in contested areas, restrictions on civic and political space not only infringe on human rights and fundamental freedoms, but also risk being counterproductive in terms of national and regional stability.

72. I remain deeply concerned by reports of human rights violations and abuses, including allegations of abductions and enforced disappearances, as I am by the serious challenges of protecting civilians in countries affected by terrorism. The United Nations stands ready to accompany national authorities in addressing human rights-related challenges, supporting efforts to strengthen citizen trust in government and reinforcing social cohesion as key enablers in the fight against terrorism.

73. In this context, the fight against impunity in relation to human rights violations, corruption and other acts subverting the rule of law is critical. Addressing impunity strengthens the role of and trust in impartial judicial institutions in protecting democratic governance. In this regard, I urge the Gambia to expedite the operationalization of the country's special accountability mechanism. I reiterate my call for Liberia to accelerate the establishment of a war and economic crimes court as

an important element of national healing, and I appeal to international partners to continue their support for the region's transitional justice processes.

74. The humanitarian situation in the region, especially in the Sahel, is of extreme concern. It is our moral responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need, especially those faced with severe food insecurity. Sustainable outcomes require robust responses along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, involving communities, Governments and all partners, beyond political considerations.

75. I welcome the development of the 10 flagship programmes for the Central Sahel within the framework of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Aligned with national priorities, they demonstrate how coordinated United Nations support and partnerships with national Governments can drive innovative approaches to large-scale transformation and systemic change. It is essential that all partners ensure full funding for their timely delivery.

76. I note the progress in the political participation of women and young people in some countries. However, to live up to the commitments of the Pact for the Future and the women and peace and security agenda, greater efforts and commitment are required to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. For young people to fulfil their potential and contribute to prosperous and peaceful societies, significant investments in education and employment are necessary and urgent. In addition to a meaningful participation in the political life of their countries, the empowerment of women and young people to earn decent livelihoods is paramount. In zones of insecurity, continued school closures and a lack of economic opportunity increase young people's vulnerabilities to recruitment into criminal and terrorist groups and recourse to irregular migration. In this context, the implementation of Security Council resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#) on safeguarding the right to education in conflict settings is imperative.

77. I welcome the progress made by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission on resolving the final areas of disagreement and urge the parties to follow through on their commitments, 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.