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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 July to 31 December 2019 and provides an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel. It also outlines the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In addition, it provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin region, pursuant to Security Council resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#).

II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

2. Since my previous report ([S/2019/549](#)), the political and security environment has deteriorated in the Sahel. Burkina Faso and Mali have particularly been affected. Recurring attacks on civilian and military targets triggered population displacements, led to the prolonged closure of health and education facilities, and, in certain areas, reinforced the role of militias and self-defence groups in providing security.

3. Preparations for presidential elections continued in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, the Niger and Togo. In some of those countries, those preparations were marred by tensions. Consultations about constitutional and other reforms moved forward in the Gambia but were contested by opposition and civil society actors in Guinea.

A. Political and governance trends

4. In Benin, President Patrice Talon took steps towards resolving the political tensions that resulted from the legislative elections of 28 April, which were boycotted by the opposition. From 10 to 12 October, the Government convened a national dialogue with political parties. The resulting recommendations included a number of conciliatory measures, such as a review of the legal framework governing political parties and elections. The recommendations are currently being implemented. Sixty-three people have been granted amnesty under a law promulgated by the President on 8 November and have been released from detention.



5. In Burkina Faso, preparations for the general elections, scheduled to be held in November 2020, continued. Several political parties designated their presidential candidates, among them President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, for the ruling majority. The party Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès of former President Blaise Compaoré has yet to designate its candidate. During the reporting period, demonstrations organized by the opposition and civil society actors were violently dispersed by security forces, which resulted in several casualties.

6. In Côte d'Ivoire, on 2 August, Parliament adopted a law that amended the composition of the Independent Electoral Commission, a decision that was contested by the parliamentary opposition. On 25 September, in accordance with the new law, the Government appointed the 15 members of the Commission: one representative each of the Office of the President, the Ministry of Interior and the Council of Magistrates, three representatives of the ruling party, three representatives of opposition political parties and six representatives of civil society organizations. Three opposition parliamentary groups have since denounced the process and brought a case before the African Court on Human and People's Rights challenging the conformity of the process with the Court's earlier ruling of 18 November 2016. On 23 December, authorities in Côte d'Ivoire issued an international arrest warrant for the former President of the National Assembly, Guillaume Soro, on charges of having attempted to undermine state authority and security, of embezzlement of funds and of money-laundering.

7. In the Gambia, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission continued to hold hearings. The report of a commission of inquiry into financial misappropriations under the former President, Yahya Jammeh, was released on 13 September. This led to criticism of the Government by opposition and civil society organizations and allegations that the recommendations contained in the report were being implemented only partially. Several civil society groups and political parties urged President Adama Barrow to honour his campaign pledge that his was a three-year transitional mandate, while others appeared to be settling for the five-year constitutional term of office. Consultations regarding a revision of the criminal code and a code of criminal procedure continued.

8. In Ghana, on 22 July, Parliament unanimously voted into law the 2019 Vigilantism and Related Offences Bill, by which it proscribed vigilante groups affiliated to political parties. On 23 September, the Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of three individuals who purportedly intended to destabilize the country and seize arms, ammunition and explosive devices in several locations around Accra. To strengthen law and order, authorities announced the recruitment of 4,500 police personnel.

9. In Guinea, the political environment remained polarized over the organization of the delayed legislative elections which had initially been scheduled for 16 February 2019, and the Government's plans to promote constitutional reform. Consultations on the reform, launched by President Alpha Condé, were rejected by Front national pour la défense de la Constitution (FNDC), a coalition of opposition parties, trade unions and civil society organizations, over speculation that a new Constitution could enable the President to run for a third term. On 14 and 15 October, FNDC supporters held demonstrations across the country that were marred by confrontations between security forces and demonstrators and reportedly left ten people dead and many wounded. FNDC held more protests on 23 and 24 October, which remained peaceful. However, on 4 November, two people were killed in clashes relating to the funerals of the victims of the demonstrations held in October.

10. On 24 November, Guinea-Bissau held the first round of its presidential elections, which have reportedly been peaceful, well-run and free from serious

security incidents. There were twelve candidates, two of whom, Domingos Simões Pereira (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde – PAIGC) and Umaro Sissoco Embaló (Movimento para Alternância Democrática (MADEM) G-15), have qualified for the second round, to be held on 29 December.

11. In Liberia, on 4 September, President George Manneh Weah launched a three-day economic dialogue organized in cooperation with the United Nations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union and other partners. Among other things, the participants in the dialogue called for the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be implemented, one of which was to establish a court for economic and war crimes.

12. In Mali, the thirty-seventh meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, which had been scheduled to take place in Kidal in early September, was postponed at the request of the Government, prompting strong criticism from the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA), a key signatory party to the peace agreement of 2015. The Committee has not convened since then. Sessions of the inclusive national dialogue were launched in September and held at the local and regional levels in October. On 14 December, a final session at the national level was held in Bamako. CMA participated in that final session, having suspended its participation in the dialogue late in September. Most opposition parties did not participate in the consultations. On 2 September, 1,006 former combatants of armed groups concluded their initial training and were formally integrated into the Malian army as part of the accelerated disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process. The redeployment plan of the reconstituted units to northern Mali is under discussion between the Government and the signatory movements within the framework the Technical Commission on Security. The Haut conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad, member of CMA, held its second congress in Kidal from 26 to 28 October. It called on all actors sharing its objectives to rally under one umbrella to form a common platform to represent northern Mali. The Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad, the other key member of the coalition, held its congress from 30 November to 3 December, during which it criticized the Government for the delays in the implementation of the agreement, unlike the Haut conseil, which reaffirmed its political and military orientation. The Kidal Head of Office of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) delivered remarks at the congress, which were interpreted by the Government as a challenge to the country's sovereignty. On 11 December, the Government issued a communiqué declaring him *persona non grata*. MINUSMA regretted the interpretation of the remarks in a context of uncertainty and reaffirmed that the United Nations respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mali.

13. In Mauritania, President Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani took office on 1 August. He has since held consultations with all presidential candidates and several opposition leaders. On 5 September, the Government outlined plans to prevent violent extremism, promote social cohesion and dialogue, and modernize the security forces. It also shared plans to create a large national agency tasked with eradicating poverty and addressing marginalization.

14. In the Niger, on 15 October, the Independent National Electoral Commission began the biometric registration of voters for the regional and municipal elections scheduled to be held on 1 November 2020. The registration also applied to the parliamentary elections and the first round of the presidential elections scheduled to be held on 27 December 2020, and a possible second round of the presidential elections scheduled to be held on 20 February 2021. On 1 November, the Prime Minister announced that a dialogue would be held between the leaders of the political parties about contentious issues relating to the elections. The aim of the dialogue,

which was to last one month, was to secure the opposition's participation to the Commission.

15. In Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari swore in the 43 members of his new cabinet on 21 August. As in the previous cabinet, women make up 16 percent. One of them is the Minister of Finance. Among the priorities the President set for the new cabinet were the internal security challenges, the promotion of inclusive economic growth and fighting corruption. Meanwhile, on 30 October, the Supreme Court of Nigeria dismissed an appeal by the main opposition People's Democratic Party and its presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, to overturn the results of the presidential election held on 23 February.

16. In Senegal, President Macky Sall launched a national dialogue on 28 May, following his re-election. The participants reached agreement on several issues, in particular an audit of the lists of voters, the postponement of the local elections initially scheduled for June, and an independent evaluation of the presidential election held on 24 February. Events that contributed to alleviating tensions in the country were a rapprochement between the President and his predecessor, Abdoulaye Wade, and the release from prison of Khalifa Sall, former Mayor of Dakar, on 29 September, following a presidential pardon.

17. In Sierra Leone, tensions between the Government and the opposition All People's Congress (APC) persisted. On 25 August, the independent National Electoral Commission annulled a legislative by-election, triggering protests from opposition leaders and civil society organizations. On 12 September, President Julius Maada Bio and the leader of APC, former President Ernest Bai Koroma, committed to pursuing dialogue, strengthening cooperation and preventing electoral violence. However, an inter-party meeting, called by the President and scheduled to take place on 15 October, was cancelled due to disagreements about the agenda and about the arrest of an APC member on the morning of the same day.

18. In Togo, preparations for the presidential election scheduled for 22 February 2020 continued amid disagreements over whether President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé could run as a candidate, following the constitutional reform adopted by the National Assembly on 9 May. The reform limited the presidential term of office to five years, renewable once.

B. Security trends

19. Violent extremism and criminal activity have further spread, partially as a result of the increased mobility and reach of terrorist and organized criminal groups that use multiple modes of transportation. The security environment further deteriorated, especially in the Liptako-Gourma triangle between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, and in the Lake Chad basin. In addition, attacks on civilians as well as on defence and security forces have been reported in the coastal States of Benin, Ghana and Togo. Security and defence forces in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger suffered heavy casualties following coordinated attacks against their positions and patrols. Humanitarian actors continued to be targeted by terrorist elements in parts of Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria. Violent extremist and terrorist groups have gradually strengthened their influence over local communities in central and northern Mali, northern Burkina Faso and parts of the Lake Chad basin, exploiting the limited presence of State authorities in those areas. Communities in Burkina Faso and central Mali have in some cases resorted to self-defence militias as security providers. Furthermore, the cross-border region straddling Benin, Burkina Faso and the Niger has increasingly been used as a base by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and other terrorist groups.

20. Burkina Faso witnessed an increase in terrorist activities compared with the previous reporting period, especially in the Sahel and Centre-Nord regions. There have been indications of increased cooperation between militants affiliated to Ansar al-Islam, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, as well as of a rise of unidentified armed groups. About 123 deaths of military personnel attributable to terrorist attacks were recorded from June to September, compared with an estimated 76 deaths from January to April. On 19 August, in an attack claimed by Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin in Koutougou, Soum Province, more than 24 soldiers were killed. Civilians were also the target of repeated assaults, some of which occurred in places of worship and at a mining site, resulting in dozens of casualties. On 24 December, unidentified gunmen conducted a deadly attack in Arbinda, Soum Province, in which 35 civilians were killed, including 31 women, and 7 soldiers. It was one of the deadliest attacks in Burkina Faso over the past five years. In addition, violent extremist groups targeted roads leading to the north of the country and destroyed bridges in Boukouma, Arbinda and Dori. Security forces withdrew from their posts or reduced their presence in several areas of the Sahel and Centre-Nord regions, triggering the displacement of civilians to larger towns and other areas. Meanwhile, the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) continued to conduct joint cross-border operations.

21. In Mali, the period under review was characterized by continued activity by violent extremist groups and violence along community lines in the centre of the country, as well as by an increase in the number of attacks by terrorist groups against the country's defence and security forces. According to official sources, from July to November, at least 153 soldiers were killed, while 84 were either missing, presumed dead or captured. The attacks against security forces in Boulikessi and Mondoro, on 30 September and 1 October, respectively, reportedly resulted in 25 soldiers killed and more than 60 missing. The attacks were later claimed by Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, respectively. On 1 November, an attack on an army camp in Indelimane, Gao Region, left 55 killed, three injured and several others missing. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara again claimed responsibility. Following that attack, government troops withdrew from three camps in rural areas of Ménaka and Gao regions. Demonstrations were held in Bamako and in central Mali in support of the defence and security forces, with some protestors chanting slogans hostile to international forces.

22. The security environment in the Niger also continued to be affected by the activities of non-State armed groups against government forces through the use of improvised explosive devices, mortars and rockets. On 11 December, militants attacked a military camp in Inatès in the South-Western region of Tillabéri near the border with Mali, killing at least 71 soldiers. Civilians have been victims of assassinations, kidnappings, theft of cattle and looting of property by mobile armed groups. In Maradi Region, along the border with Nigeria, about 56 incidents of armed robbery, mostly attributed to armed elements coming from Nigeria, were registered from July to October. In Tillabéri Region, terrorists frequently attacked government forces and sporadically perpetrated violence against civilians.

23. Nigeria continued to face multiple security challenges. Boko Haram carried out 55 attacks resulting in 312 deaths between July and October. On 9 September, the "Islamic State's West African Province" faction ambushed a convoy of the Multinational Joint Task Force near Gudumbali and simultaneously attacked another military position in Garunda, both in Borno State. In addition, clashes between farmers and herders, communal violence and banditry attacks resulting in the loss of human life and in material losses were reported in many federal states, particularly in the Middle Belt and the north-west of Nigeria. On 8 September, the governors of

Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina states signed an agreement on cross-border security cooperation with the Governor of Maradi Region in the Niger.

24. According to the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, the Gulf of Guinea remains the maritime space with the highest number of kidnappings in the world. From July to October, 14 incidents were recorded, against 22 in the first half of the year. According to the International Maritime Bureau, pirates are venturing out farther, often beyond territorial waters, and are attacking a wider range of vessels.

25. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the amounts of drugs seized in West Africa continued to rise during the reporting period. Several large shipments were intercepted, including three cocaine shipments impounded in Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, totalling 5.3 tons. According to UNODC, this illustrates that police and law enforcement agencies have enhanced their capacity and their commitment to fighting drug trafficking. The Governments of Cabo Verde and Côte d'Ivoire launched their national integrated anti-narcotic programmes in July and October, respectively.

C. Sustainable development trends

26. On 18 October, the International Monetary Fund released new economic growth projections. For 2019 and 2020, the Fund indicates an approximate growth rate of 6 per cent for the countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union against a background of persistently low human development indices. Overall, the growth outlook for ECOWAS remained mixed, with an overall estimate of 3.8 per cent per year.

27. On 20 August, Nigeria closed its borders with Benin and the Niger. The closure has had significant ramifications across the subregion. It was initially put in place for two weeks to curb smuggling and trafficking, but was subsequently extended, which triggered a significant slowdown of the economy of Benin, which heavily depends on exports and trans-shipment. On 16 September, in Monrovia, at the opening of the second extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Parliament, the Speaker called on Nigeria to reopen its borders. Similarly, on 16 October, during a visit to Abuja, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Ghana, called on Nigeria to urgently review the decision to close its border with Benin because, according to her, it could lead to political tensions in Ghana. On 4 November, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria announced that a tripartite ministerial committee consisting of Benin, the Niger and Nigeria would be established to come to an agreement about reopening the borders.

28. On 4 July 2019, the Group of Seven (G-7) ministers responsible for development cooperation and the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development of the European Union met with their G-5 Sahel counterparts to call for strong partnerships and coordinated action to address the root causes of fragility, inequality and poverty in the Sahel region. They agreed to adopt and deepen comprehensive approaches to advancing human development in the region. At the end of August, the G-7 summit held in Biarritz, France, was focused on the situation in the Sahel. In his capacity as the President of the G-5 Sahel secretariat, the President of Burkina Faso called on the States members of G-7 to provide greater development support to the region because of the acute risks of destabilization and the many factors contributing to security incidents in the Sahel.

D. Humanitarian trends

29. The deteriorating security situation in the Sahel compounded the dire humanitarian circumstances. Attacks in Burkina Faso displaced nearly 500,000 people, a sharp rise from around 80,000 in January. In the regions hit by the violence, at least 68 health centres and more than 2,000 schools were closed. Overall, in about a third of the country, affected populations struggled to gain access to food, water and other necessities. Consequently, in June, the humanitarian response plan was revised and \$187 million was requested to assist 1.3 million people, up from \$100 million for 900,000 people at the start of 2019. As at October, around a third of the funds had been received, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

30. In Mali, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance increased from 3.2 million to 3.9 million as at September, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The number of internally displaced persons rose from around 100,000 (in March) to 187,139.

31. Across the Niger, about 1.2 million people are considered food-insecure, according to OCHA. The regions of Diffa, Tillabéri, Maradi and Tahoua, which lie along the borders with Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria, are the most affected. In the Tahoua and Tillabéri regions, around 80,000 people are displaced, according to IOM, while armed attacks in Diffa triggered new secondary displacements. In the conflict-affected areas, food insecurity remained high despite a favourable agricultural outlook. Rainfall is expected to boost food production, but floods had affected more than 259,000 people and had killed 57 persons as at September. Meanwhile, more than 41,000 Nigerian nationals from the federal states of Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara have found refuge in the region of Maradi.

32. In Nigeria, the humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate. In the states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, 150,000 people had been newly displaced since the beginning of the year, putting a strain on already congested camps and limited basic services. Recent months have also seen a 10 per cent increase in food insecurity, from 2.7 million to 3 million. The situation could further escalate as millions of people affected by conflict have little or no access to their land. The environment in which humanitarian organizations are operating remains restrictive and insecure, owing to the highly militarized context. In September, restrictions imposed by the military culminated in the suspension of two international non-governmental organizations in Borno and Yobe states for more than five weeks, leaving nearly 400,000 people without food and other essential help. The suspension was lifted on 30 October. From 6 to 8 November, the Government of Nigeria held a workshop in Maiduguri to strengthen coordination between the Government, the military and the humanitarian community. Meanwhile, in November, during the rainy season, over 300,000 people were affected by torrential rains and flash floods and 19,000 were displaced in Adamawa State.

33. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, insecurity across the Lake Chad basin region has left 10 million people in need of assistance. About 3.6 million are food-insecure and 400,000 children risk severe acute malnutrition, according to OCHA. Currently there are more than 2.53 million internally displaced persons across Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, according to IOM.

34. Of the \$1.74 billion requested by the humanitarian community to assist 11 million people across the region in 2019, 55 per cent had been received as at November.

E. Human rights trends

35. The prevailing insecurity in parts of the Sahel, notably in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, reinforced the feeling that gross human rights abuses could be committed with impunity. In some countries, the disproportionate use of force by security agencies during demonstrations and allegations that the judiciary was being instrumentalized for political purposes undermined respect for the rule of law and the enjoyment of fundamental rights. Human rights abuses by terrorists and violent extremists, as well as measures taken in the context of counter-terrorism operations, remained a concern.

36. During the period under review, human rights actors raised the alarm over restrictions to the freedoms of assembly and expression. In doing so, they cited bans on demonstrations and arrests of journalists and activists in Guinea, Nigeria and Senegal. In Guinea, in October and November, at least 10 people were reported killed and many injured in anti-Government protests. On 22 July, in Abuja, at least six people were reported killed during a demonstration organized by the Islamic Movement in Nigeria. Tensions continued to escalate when, on 29 July, the Government banned the Movement. In Togo, new legislation on demonstrations was met with disapproval on the part of human rights actors. They feared that the new legislation would limit the right to peaceful protest because of restrictions on the times and places at which demonstrations could be held and because of the power given to local authorities to authorize them. Similarly, in Burkina Faso, civil society organizations raised concerns over the adoption, on 21 June, of a new penal code that, among other things, criminalizes the dissemination of information about military operations with prison terms of up to 10 years. In all cases, the Governments concerned cited security reasons as justification.

37. In Benin, allegations that the judiciary was being instrumentalized were fuelled by the conviction, on 4 August, of Lionel Zinsou, former Prime Minister and candidate for the 2016 presidential election, on charges of forgery. In Côte d'Ivoire, on 3 October, the deputy leader of the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement démocratique africain, Jacques Mangoua, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for illegal arms possession. In a positive development, on 29 July, authorities in Mauritania released the blogger Cheikh Ould Mohamed Mkhaitir, who, in 2014, had been arrested and charged with blasphemy for a post on a social media platform.

38. Burkina Faso and the Gambia pursued efforts to address impunity for past crimes and promote transitional justice. In Burkina Faso, General Gilbert Diendéré and General Djibril Bassolé were sentenced to prison terms of, respectively, 10 and 20 years for their roles in the attempted coup d'état of 16 September 2015. In the Gambia, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission continued its hearings concerning, among others, former Vice-President Isatou Njie-Saidy. On the other hand, the release of three members of paramilitary forces who had admitted to dozens of assassinations under former President Yahya Jammeh drew criticism from victims groups.

F. Trends on gender issues

39. Women's political participation and representation in security services in the subregion remained low. According to the findings of a joint comparative study by UNOWAS and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) covering 10 West African countries, the political role of

women in West Africa and the Sahel region are often confined to mobilization and supporting functions.

40. In the Gambia, several women testified before the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission on abuses involving sexual violence that occurred during the regime of the former President, Yahya Jammeh.

41. In Liberia, on 14 August, the President signed into law the Domestic Violence Act. Under the Act, domestic violence is treated as a serious crime. The sections intended to criminalize female genital mutilation had been removed from the draft in July during deliberations in the legislature.

42. In the Niger, on 18 October, the Government adopted a bill to raise the minimum quota of women's representation from 15 to 25 per cent for elective offices and from 25 to 30 per cent for senior positions in the Government.

43. In Nigeria, more than 75 women's groups protested against the structural causes of marginalization. The protest was held in Port Harcourt on 18 September and had been triggered by a series of murders of young women in Rivers State, of which Port Harcourt is the capital.

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

A. Good offices and special assignments of my Special Representative

44. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, continued to support efforts to sustain peace in the region in collaboration with regional and international partners, including through advocacy and support for inclusive processes in national dialogues and a holistic approach to security challenges affecting the region.

45. In Nairobi, my Special Representative attended the African Regional High-level Conference on Counter-Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism held on 10 and 11 July. He co-chaired a session with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kenya and shared lessons learned in West Africa and the Sahel. On 14 September, he attended the extraordinary summit meeting of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government on terrorism held in Ouagadougou. At the summit meeting, States members of ECOWAS, as well as Chad and Mauritania, committed to enhancing their mutual engagement and cooperation to respond to terrorism in the region. My Special Representative reiterated the unwavering support of the United Nations to regional efforts in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. The summit meeting was preceded by a preparatory event held in Niamey on 26 and 27 August that had been organized by ECOWAS with the support of UNOWAS. That event, attended by my Deputy Special Representative, brought together civil society organizations, youth and women's groups, and religious and traditional leaders from all States members of ECOWAS as well as from Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania. In Accra, on 4 and 5 September, my Special Representative chaired the Kofi Annan Peace and Security Forum organized by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre. During the forum, which had as its theme "Peace operations in the context of violent extremism in Africa", my Special Representative emphasized that there was a need to establish partnerships to address the multi-pronged causes and effects of violent extremism.

46. On 7 October, ahead of the high-stakes presidential election in Guinea-Bissau, my Special Representative led a joint mission to Bissau with the participation of ECOWAS, the African Union and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries.

In exchanges with a wide range of national stakeholders, among them the President, the Prime Minister and the leaders of opposition parties, the joint mission underscored the importance of holding the presidential election in strict compliance with the electoral calendar. On 8 November, my Special Representative also participated in the extraordinary summit meeting of the ECOWAS Authority held in Niamey at which the participants addressed the institutional and political crisis in Guinea-Bissau that followed the dismissal on 28 October by the President, José Mário Vaz, of Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister. My Special Representative visited Guinea-Bissau again from 23 to 25 November and visited Bissau on 28 December, on the eve of the second round of the election, in support of the good offices of my Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau, Rosine Sori-Coulibaly. At the time of submission of the report to the Security Council, two candidates were working on their political alliances. Despite some isolated incidents, the overall political atmosphere remained generally peaceful.

47. From 8 to 10 October, my Special Representative undertook a good offices mission to Banjul, where he met with national stakeholders, including the President, the Vice-President and the Minister of Justice of the Gambia, as well as with representatives of political parties and civil society organizations. In the discussions, my Special Representative urged stakeholders to pursue the ongoing reform efforts based on clear timetables, encouraged the pursuit of dialogue and consensus-building, and reiterated that the United Nations fully supported the consolidation of peace and development in the Gambia.

48. My Special Representative visited Togo from 9 to 11 November against a backdrop of mounting political tensions ahead of presidential elections to be held in 2020. From 11 to 14 November, he visited Guinea, where he encouraged national stakeholders to resolve their grievances through inclusive political dialogue.

49. My Special Representative remained engaged in Nigeria. On 5 August, he attended a post-electoral assessment meeting in Abuja, following which UNOWAS co-hosted consultations in the federal states of Kaduna and Benue with the National Peace Committee and the state-level peace commissions. During the consultations, stakeholders, including representatives of the Government, the security agencies, civil society organizations, the media, and traditional leaders, reviewed instances of electoral and communal violence and proposed solutions.

50. On 17 and 18 October, my Special Representative attended the seventh informal meeting of special envoys for the Sahel, which was hosted by Spain and the European Commission. During the meeting, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding to deepen their cooperation on security and development issues.

51. On 21 December, my Special Representative attended the fifty-sixth ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, which instructed the Ministerial Committee of ECOWAS to take the steps required to hasten the implementation of the roadmap for the creation of a monetary union. On the same day, the President of Côte d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara, in his capacity as President of the Conference of the Heads of State and Government of the West African Monetary Union, and the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, announced that the CFA franc currently used by Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, the Niger, Senegal and Togo, would be replaced in 2020 by a new currency named "eco". They also announced that the States that will use the new currency will no longer have to keep half of their foreign reserves in France.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

52. The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission continued to make progress towards the implementation of the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 10 October 2002 on the land and maritime boundary between the two countries.

53. The parties met in Lagos, Nigeria, from 19 to 23 August. They requested the United Nations to finalize arrangements for the construction and emplacement of the remaining 1,352 border pillars. To that end, Cameroon and Nigeria contributed \$6 million to the demarcation trust fund. The security assessment and sensitization of populations to the placement of the first 322 pillars in Taraba State in Nigeria and Adamawa Region in Cameroon started on 24 October.

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

54. During the period under review, UNOWAS continued its close collaboration with regional partners and United Nations country teams in the region on issues of common interest, notably women and young people, climate change, human rights, security and conflict prevention. UNOWAS also worked with the Peacebuilding Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund to promote the inclusion of young people in the promotion of peace and security, and other peacebuilding initiatives.

55. UNOWAS pursued its close collaboration with the G-5 Sahel secretariat while drawing on its convening power and advocacy to build synergies with United Nations system entities and other actors operating in the Sahel region. Addressing the third meeting of G-5 Sahel ministers of interior in Ouagadougou on 11 September, my Special Representative reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to support the G-5 Sahel. The participants in the meeting made recommendations to strengthen the operationalization of the G-5 Sahel security coordination platform, among other things through a joint project of the G-5 Sahel and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

56. UNOWAS provided technical assistance to the G-5 Sahel secretariat, in support of various subregional programmes, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, IOM, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of Counter-Terrorism, UNODC and the World Food Programme. On 6 September, the Permanent Secretary of the G-5 Sahel met in Dakar with the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group. The participants agreed to reinforce joint advocacy and communication efforts using a common platform, collaborate on resource mobilization and enhance technical support in line with the road map for cooperation between the G-5 Sahel and the United Nations.

57. UNOWAS also supported the Burkina Faso in implementing its action plan as it held the presidency of the G-5 Sahel. In collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNOWAS assisted the G-5 Sahel in holding a regional forum from 18 to 20 November aimed at assessing and mitigating the effects of children's being deprived of education due to prevailing security concerns. Experts from all G-5 Sahel countries who participated in the forum also decried the targeting of teachers in certain areas and the sexual violence perpetrated on children in school.

58. From 22 to 24 July and from 2 to 4 October, UNOWAS participated in visits by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to Togo and Ghana, respectively, to assess the implementation of Security Council resolutions on counter-

terrorism and build national capacities with a view to curtailing and strengthening the response to a southward spread of the terrorist threat in the region.

59. UNOWAS continued to analyse the links between climate change and security in the subregion, by conducting, among other things, research field visits. On 11 and 12 December, my Special Representative hosted a workshop in Dakar for senior United Nations officials in the region organized in collaboration with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme and the climate security mechanism, on the linkages between the environment, climate change, and peace and security. During a joint meeting on climate change and security held on 4 November in Abuja, UNOWAS and ECOWAS agreed to further collaborate on this issue by integrating conflict-sensitive approaches into national adaptation plans.

Security sector reform

60. In Burkina Faso, the United Nations supported national authorities in fostering political consensus and ownership of the security sector reform by facilitating a dialogue between the parties of the majority and the opposition on the national security policy. The dialogue was held from 15 to 22 July. From June to August, the United Nations facilitated multiple consultations on that policy. In addition, the advisory team provided capacity-building support to the Parliament regarding the oversight of security sector expenditure.

61. In Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations, through UNDP and the Peacebuilding Fund, facilitated community-level dialogues in various regions of the country to promote confidence between communities and security forces.

62. In the Gambia, the United Nations continued to support the ongoing security sector reform. At the request of the Government, UNOWAS and the Secretariat conducted a mission to Banjul from 25 to 29 November during which they assessed the progress made in the reform of the security sector, defined priorities for future assistance and sought to achieve coordination between national and international partners in the reform of the security sector.

63. The United Nations also supported the Gambia in sending the heads of its security institutions and the members of its National Assembly select committee on defence and security on capacity-building visits to Sierra Leone, from 9 to 15 September, and to Ghana, from 7 to 13 October.

64. In Liberia, the national security strategy is pending endorsement. It was finalized in 2018 with the support of the United Nations Mission in Liberia. UN-Women continued to support the gender and security sector national taskforce, which is co-chaired by the ministers responsible for justice, defence and gender. The aim is to enhance women's meaningful participation in the security sector institutions.

65. In Mali, the National Council for Security Sector Reform adopted the country's action plan for the national strategy on security sector reform on 3 September. The action plan contains an outline of all the key results to be obtained and actions to be taken, as well as a timeline and the institutions responsible for the implementation of the defence and security measures included in the Agreement. Those measures include the integration of former combatants of the signatory armed movements in the defence and security forces of Mali, the adoption of the Law on the National Defence and Security Policy, the operationalization of the country's local consultative committees on security and the establishment of the territorial police.

66. In Sierra Leone, the United Nations supported the Office of the Vice-President in the organization of community dialogues with security institutions in hotspot areas. The Organization also assisted the office of the national security adviser and the Mano

River Union in developing a strategy on border security management and the delivery of trainings to security institutions. In addition, the World Food Programme and UNDP launched a programme with the support of the Peacebuilding Fund to strengthen the professionalism of the security forces and mitigate local resource-based conflicts in the Pujehun and Moyamba districts.

Conflicts between herders and farmers

67. My Special Representative continued his efforts, made in close collaboration with United Nations resident coordinators, relevant United Nations system entities, ECOWAS, civil society organizations and think tanks, to strengthen regional and cross-border initiatives to address conflicts between herders and farmers. The United Nations working group on the prevention and resolution of farmer-herder conflicts continued to be chaired by UNOWAS with the aim of strengthening United Nations system cooperation, contributing to unified messaging and building bridges between local, national and regional responses.

Lake Chad basin

68. During the reporting period, UNOWAS continued to engage stakeholders in improving the resilience of areas affected by Boko Haram. On 17 and 18 July, my Special Representative attended the second meeting of the Lake Chad basin governors' forum for regional cooperation on stabilization, peacebuilding and sustainable development. The meeting was held in Niamey. The aim of the forum was to support ongoing national, regional and multilateral efforts to stabilize the Lake Chad basin while promoting cross-border dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders in the Lake Chad basin region, including religious and civil society leaders. On 18 July, my Special Representative met with the President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, to pursue discussions focused on the impact of the activities of Boko Haram on the security and humanitarian situation in the Niger. From 1 to 8 September, also in the Niger, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNDP visited Goudoumaria Camp in Diffa to assess efforts aimed at the reintegration of Boko Haram ex-combatants, victims and released detainees in the Diffa region.

69. To complete their tour of countries affected by Boko Haram, my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa visited Nigeria from 20 to 24 November. They consulted with national authorities and with a range of humanitarian and other stakeholders in Abuja and Maiduguri.

Strategy for cross-border security in the Mano River Union

70. From 25 to 28 November, the Mano River Union held a workshop with the support of UNOWAS to review the Union's cross-border security strategy. The meeting, which was attended by members of the Mano River Union secretariat, government officials, members of the joint border security and confidence-building units, UNOWAS and the peace and development advisors of the four member countries, adopted a number of recommendations and established a schedule for holding regular exchanges between United Nations resident coordinators, UNOWAS and the secretariat of the Mano River Union.

71. My Special Representative, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission together travelled to Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone from 4 to 8 November to explore opportunities for enhanced cooperation in support of cross-border issues in the region, as well as challenges relating to peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Mano River Union.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

72. In close collaboration with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, UNOWAS supported regional efforts to enhance collaboration to counter maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. During a joint mission to Yaoundé of UNOWAS and the Regional Office to the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea conducted from 9 to 12 July, representatives assessed the progress made and the challenges that remained. My Special Representative continued to engage with stakeholders in the subregion in relation to the matter. His advocacy contributed to the operationalization of ECOWAS Maritime Zone E, which comprises Benin, the Niger, Nigeria and Togo, and Maritime Zone F, which consists of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Currently, only Maritime Zone G has yet to reach its full capacity. Maritime zone G comprises Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal.

Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

73. My Special Representative continued to advocate for efforts against drug trafficking and transnational organized crime in close cooperation with relevant partners in the region. For its part, UNODC supported the establishment of training modules on ethics and integrity for drug law enforcement units in Cabo Verde, Ghana and Guinea.

Terrorism and violent extremism

74. During the reporting period, the Office of Counter-Terrorism continued to promote the strengthening of border security and management in the region. From 30 July to 2 August, the Office, together with IOM and the World Customs Organization, held a regional capacity-building event in Niamey for border officials from Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, on combating terrorism and cross-border crime with a specific focus on Liptako-Gourma and the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex. The training was focused on strategies for integrated border management and cross-border cooperation. From 16 to 20 September, in Dakar, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNODC held a regional training event for capacity-building in countering terrorism and related threats in the Sahel region for the countries of the G-5 Sahel and Senegal. In addition, from 23 to 25 September, the Office completed a scoping mission to Côte d'Ivoire with a view to providing thematic expertise so as to include counter-terrorism elements in the country's national border management strategy.

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

75. On 21 October, my Special Representative chaired the ninth meeting of the steering committee of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Participants emphasized that United Nations programmes in the region had made progress under the three pillars of the strategy. Notably, cross-border and multi-agency initiatives, which have been supported by, among others, the Peacebuilding Fund, have increased integration, improved food security, enhanced access to education and health services and supported displaced communities in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad basin regions. Participants welcomed the establishment of the implementation support unit of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and stressed the need to improve communication and enhance the visibility of the efforts made and their impact.

76. On 11 and 12 September, my Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel participated in the regional dialogue on protection and solutions in the context of forced displacements in the Sahel region, organized by the Government of Mali and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The regional dialogue brought together delegations of the Governments of the G-5 Sahel countries, regional and international institutions, and civil society organizations. The participants reached a common understanding of the issue, built momentum for the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel and recommended, inter alia, that civil-military collaboration and coordination for humanitarian access be strengthened.

77. On 4 November, as part of the handover of the presidency of the ministerial coordination platform for Sahel strategies between Chad and the Niger, the High Representative of the African Union for Mali and the Sahel and my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel conducted a joint visit to Niamey. During the reporting period, UNOWAS continued to provide technical support to the ministerial coordination platform.

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

78. During the reporting period, UNOWAS continued to facilitate exchanges among stakeholders to promote human rights, the rule of law and good governance in the region. On 20 October, the Mission held consultations on human rights during elections for members of the West African Human Rights Defenders' Network on the margins of the sixty-fifth session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, held in Banjul. Discussions centred on strengthening the role of human rights actors in electoral processes and the implications of electoral violence for human rights.

79. From 10 to 12 September, the Secretariat held a workshop in Accra in partnership with ECOWAS and with the support of UNOWAS. The topic was "sharing experiences and good practices on the prevention and mitigation of election-related violence". The aim of the workshop was to contribute to the promotion of peaceful electoral environments in the subregion. Participants shared experiences related to violence against women in the context of elections. Approximately 60 participants (including 22 women) represented election management bodies and civil society organizations of States members of ECOWAS. Representatives of regional organizations, including the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, also participated in the event.

80. In July and September, UNDP and OHCHR undertook a technical review of a Peacebuilding Fund project to support the Government of the Niger in the socioeconomic reintegration of former Boko Haram combatants, victims and released detainees in the Diffa region. Also in the Niger, OHCHR assessed the human rights situation of migrants so as to build capacity within the Government to adopt a human rights-based approach to migration. On 16 and 17 September, OHCHR conducted an assessment and monitoring mission to Togo to enhance the implementation of the country's human rights programme.

81. My Special Representative continued to engage with women and young people in the region. On 8 October, he and the Vice-President of the Gambia co-chaired the inauguration in Banjul of the tenth regional open day on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women, peace and security. A total of 175 women and young leaders representing civil society organizations from 13 countries assessed the implementation of the resolution. They called on national authorities to accelerate the implementation of the women, youth, peace and security agenda.

82. On 16 July, UNOWAS received a delegation from Togo led by the Ministry of Social Action and Women's Affairs to discuss strategies to promote women's participation in decision-making. From 5 to 6 August, UNOWAS supported a workshop organized by the Ministry of Women's Affairs of Senegal on the validation of the second five-year national action plan relating to the resolution.

83. From 9 to 11, October UNOWAS facilitated the annual consultations of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. The consultations were held in Banjul. The Working Group recommended, *inter alia*, that UNOWAS organize an annual regional forum for women and young people; that a high-level mission be sent to Chad to advocate for gender equality and the involvement of women and young people in preventing violent extremism; that funds be raised to give women and young people training about the implementation of the Ouagadougou Declaration of Youth for Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, adopted in 2018, and the Dakar Call for Action on women involvement in preventing violent extremism, also adopted in 2018. Through video conferences, UNOWAS also continued facilitating the thematic exchange sessions of the Working Group.

IV. Observations and recommendations

84. I welcome some of the positive developments in West Africa and the Sahel, such as the dialogue processes taking place in Liberia and Senegal, which have been strengthening national cohesion in political environments marked by increasing polarization. The meeting of the President of Sierra Leone with his predecessor equally helped to sustain political dialogue. I also salute the first transition of power from one democratically elected President to another in Mauritania and the efforts made to diffuse any tensions in that regard and ensure that the transition proceeded as smoothly as possible.

85. I applaud the people and the Government of the Gambia for making substantial progress in transitional justice and in reviewing the Constitution, and I encourage the Government to accelerate the reform of the security sector, which is critical for the consolidation of the democratic transition in the Gambia.

86. As preparations for elections to be held in 2020 are under way in six countries in the subregion, I note with concern tensions and disagreements surrounding electoral processes that have led to violent confrontations in several countries. In that regard I am concerned about tensions in Guinea and deeply saddened by the loss of life during recent demonstrations in that country. I urge all stakeholders in Guinea to resolve their differences through an inclusive political dialogue and reiterate that the freedoms of assembly and expression are fundamental human rights that are essential for a democratic process and contribute to the credibility of electoral processes.

87. I encourage Member States to continually review and enhance their institutional and operational frameworks for the promotion and protection of human rights so as to advance participation, inclusion and social cohesion. I also call on security forces to uphold international human rights standards whenever responding to demonstrations. Where necessary, I urge Governments to accelerate the reform of their security sectors in order to strengthen respect for human rights and enhance the capacity of national security services to protect civilians.

88. I reiterate that the apparent instrumentalization of rule of law institutions for political ends needs to be addressed, as it erodes confidence in State institutions and undercuts the rule of law.

89. I am deeply worried about increasing insecurity and widespread violence in parts of Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. The impunity with which violent extremists and armed groups are attacking both civilians and security and defence forces threatens to undermine the fabric of society and the foundations of these States. The exploitation of cleavages within communities, as well as of religious and sectarian differences, accelerates the cycle of violence. The spread of instability, despite the concerted efforts of national and international partners, to coastal States to the south must be prevented and peace and security restored across the Sahel region.

90. I commend the countries participating in the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel for their efforts to address the multifaceted security challenges in the subregion and I encourage partners to continue supporting these efforts. I urge the countries of the region to reinforce their actions aimed at promoting tolerance and social cohesion, reducing ungoverned spaces and building trust with all communities, thus reducing their need to rely on armed vigilante and militia groups as providers of security.

91. I welcome the ECOWAS extraordinary summit meeting on terrorism that was held in Ouagadougou and urge regional and subregional leaders to follow through on the pledges made on that occasion. I also commend the consultations in Niamey that have brought together civil society representatives, religious and traditional leaders, and other regional stakeholders ahead of the summit meeting and call on international partners to lend their full and timely support to these initiatives.

92. The humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel region remains a matter of grave concern as limitations on humanitarian access in the Lake Chad basin and the Liptako-Gourma regions result in avoidable human suffering. I call on the parties concerned to respect the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality and allow the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in need, especially children, the elderly, women and other vulnerable groups.

93. I am deeply concerned by the closure of thousands of schools and health facilities in the areas affected by instability. This not only reinforces the narrative of that States are unable to provide essential services – thus undercutting the critical collaboration between citizens and security services – but also deprives countless children of their right to education.

94. Given these developments, I reiterate my call on countries of the subregion and Member States to intensify their efforts to address the root causes of insecurity and instability, including poverty, inequality, exclusion and marginalization, and the lack of access to social services and economic opportunities.

95. Climate change has an increasing impact on conflict dynamics in the Lake Chad basin and parts of the Sahel. I encourage national, regional and international partners to redouble their efforts to prevent and respond to threats related to climate change.

96. I call on all partners to support holistic and integrated approaches to the above-mentioned challenges, such as contained in the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, the G-5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme, the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. Cognizant of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, I encourage national, regional and international actors to promote an integrated, coherent and well-coordinated approach to achieving the priorities of the United Nations prevention and sustaining peace agenda.

97. I congratulate the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission with the progress made in the demarcation of their common boundary and the placement of border

pillars amid ongoing challenges in the subregion. I also commend the two parties for their commitment and financial contributions, as well as for the security provided during the field work to place border pillars, and urge them to expedite the resolution of the remaining areas of disagreement with a view to completing the mandate of the Commission in compliance with the judgment of the International Court of Justice.

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