



Security Council

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Letter dated 15 November 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to the statement by the President of the Security Council of 7 August 2019 ([S/PRST/2019/7](#)) on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), as well as my report to the Security Council of 28 December 2018 ([S/2018/1175](#)).

In response to the request of the Security Council, I appointed my former Special Representative for Central Africa, Abdoulaye Bathily, to conduct an independent strategic review of UNOWAS. Through the present letter, I am transmitting the report on the independent review (see annex). I also provide hereunder my observations and recommendations on the report, as well as on the work of UNOWAS.

Main findings of the strategic review

In the report on the independent strategic review, it is noted that, since the establishment of UNOWAS in 2016, following the merger of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel, the regions of West Africa and the Sahel have witnessed progress, challenges and setbacks.

Most of the countries of the West Africa and the Sahel regions have demonstrated considerable progress in the areas of democracy, justice, the rule of law and human rights. Since 2016, presidential elections, many resulting in the peaceful transfer of power, have been held in 12 out of the 16 countries of the region.

This progress notwithstanding, many electoral processes contested throughout the region were sources of tensions, including with regard to controversial constitutional or electoral amendments that were exacerbated by judiciaries not upholding constitutional provisions and human rights. The perceived or real lack of accountability of State and security institutions further fuelled such tensions. Furthermore, crises divert attention and resources from addressing such structural issues as inequality, corruption, violent extremism and transnational organized crime.

In the report, it is noted that the region is experiencing a dramatic worsening in the security situation. The spread of violent extremist networks, in particular Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Boko Haram and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, pose a major threat to stability in West Africa and the Sahel. Violent extremist groups are expanding their transnational reach, often exacerbating intercommunal tensions, including between farmers and herders. These groups are connecting with transnational organized crime syndicates that are engaged in human and drug trafficking, maritime piracy and the illegal exploitation of natural resources.



The impact of climate change is worsening intercommunal conflict. Diminishing arable land and water, caused by rising temperatures, soil erosion, deforestation, erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, ground water salinity, as well as the limited adaptability of human activity to climate change, is a characteristic of many parts of West Africa and the Sahel.

It is estimated that 65 per cent of the population of West Africa and the Sahel is under the age of 25. The youth population continues to expand, in contexts where unemployment, political and social exclusion and poor service delivery prevail.

Different stakeholders found UNOWAS activities to be useful, in particular, those conducted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General around good offices, mediation and preventive diplomacy. During the next three years, the good offices of UNOWAS and those of the Special Representative will be particularly necessary in the subregion, where nine presidential elections are anticipated to be held. In 2020 alone, there will be high-stakes elections in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, the Niger and Togo.

The partnerships between UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, as well as with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States to address the security threats in the Gulf of Guinea and the Lake Chad Basin were cited as examples of successful cross-regional and sectoral collaboration.

There were calls for stronger United Nations system-wide collaboration on current and emerging threats, including through joint planning and strategy development. In doing so, it would be important to build on the impressive array of normative and institutional frameworks developed by ECOWAS. Collaboration with other partners, including the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) secretariat, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Mano River Union secretariat should also be further enhanced.

United Nations actors highlighted many ways in which they contribute to the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the role of UNOWAS in that regard. Members of the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group noted that it would be vital for UNOWAS to exercise political leadership and coordinate on the implementation of the integrated strategy, including with external partners, through the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel in cooperation with the African Union. They requested UNOWAS to highlight the achievements in the implementation of the strategy as part of its advocacy and further enhance collaboration with States members of G5 Sahel and other partners. In addition, a new division of labour agreed upon by the United Nations system in September will help to strengthen a more coordinated and coherent cross-pillar approach for addressing the root causes of crises and to sustain peace in the region.

Observations and recommendations

I welcome the report on the strategic review, which validates the views of the United Nations Secretariat that United Nations regional offices constitute a vital forward platform for conflict prevention and for sustaining peace. They are suited for developing collective United Nations responses to threats with a regional dimension. I am encouraged by the findings of the strategic review, which indicate that UNOWAS is delivering effectively on its mandate.

At the same time, I take note of the dramatic political, security, humanitarian and development transformations taking place in the region, as outlined in the report. I also recognize the opportunity to take advantage of the forward-looking reforms of the United Nations system that I launched, and the recommendation that UNOWAS recalibrate its posture, tools and resources to meet the exigencies of these developments.

It is imperative that UNOWAS become more nimble, anticipatory and flexible in order to adapt to the rapidly changing environment, while operating in a more integrated and cohesive manner alongside other United Nations system entities in West Africa and the Sahel. A more integrated and cross-pillar approach by the United Nations should lead to enhanced engagement with Member States, regional and subregional organizations, civil society and partners across the spectrum of efforts related to horizon scanning, early warning, prevention, conflict management and resolution, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

In the spirit of the reforms that are under way, I recommend repositioning UNOWAS to foster an integrated approach with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in the region by better leveraging its analytical, good offices, mediation, coordination, facilitation, convening and advocacy roles. There is a need to continue to enhance the role of UNOWAS in conflict prevention, advocacy and coordination so as to enable it to provide political guidance to other United Nations actors. The United Nations system entities in the region will continue to coordinate, collaborate and mutually reinforce their operations towards collective outcomes.

Accordingly, UNOWAS will continue to strengthen its partnership and collaboration with key United Nations and regional partners, in particular, the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group, resident and humanitarian coordinators and United Nations country teams. It will do this by facilitating a joint regional analysis based on horizon scanning and conflict analysis and by promoting system-wide interactions with national entities, subregional organizations (ECOWAS, Mano River Union, G5 Sahel and Lake Chad Basin Commission) and other external partners, including international financial institutions. Such efforts will facilitate a more holistic approach that incorporates the rule of law, security, governance, environmental, humanitarian, human rights and development aspects when responding to key regional challenges.

Having reviewed the report and endorsed its main findings and recommendations, I would like to put forward the following recommendations regarding the mandate of and the resource implications for UNOWAS, for consideration by the Security Council:

(a) Mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

The mandate remains valid but will need to be strengthened in order for the Office to acquire the agility and capacity needed to allow it to better and more proactively respond to existing and emerging threats, to provide support to post-transition countries following the drawdown of United Nations peace operations, and to scale up cross-pillar coordination and cooperation so as to ensure greater coherence in United Nations interaction with national and subregional entities. All of those activities will require increased human and financial resources, as recognized in the report;

(b) Pursue a joined-up approach to produce a collective United Nations impact, while maintaining a clear division of labour between UNOWAS and other United Nations system entities. Given the importance of enhanced coordination between the United Nations and subregional bodies in West Africa and the Sahel, UNOWAS will need to be reconfigured to promote greater collaboration among United Nations system entities in the region, especially with the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group, and to enhance its collaboration with regional and subregional organizations. Such collaboration includes initiatives by my Special Representative to facilitate structured engagement with subregional bodies such as ECOWAS, the Mano River Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and G5 Sahel. The creation of standing platforms for structured engagement would provide the opportunity to discuss collectively the political, security, humanitarian, human rights, development and environmental dimensions of the regional challenges,

leading to a more holistic approach, with enhanced coordination and coherence, in addressing them.

In collaboration with the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group, resident and humanitarian coordinators and United Nations country teams, UNOWAS will continue to strengthen capacities to engage in regional research and analysis, partnering with think tanks, civil society and other United Nations system entities, particularly on transnational issues relevant to peace and security. Such efforts should inform common country analyses. In turn, regional analyses would support the elaboration of country-level United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and strengthen exchanges of information and lessons learned with United Nations regional presences, resident coordinators and country teams.

I have requested the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, in coordination with UNOWAS and other relevant United Nations system entities, to assess the appropriate resource requirements for UNOWAS in order to enable the Office to implement its enhanced mandate, as recommended in the review, and to ensure the establishment of achievable goals as well as the modalities for a United Nations system-wide approach to the challenges in the region.

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Bathily for the important work he conducted and for his pertinent observations and recommendations. I also take this opportunity to thank UNOWAS and all the entities of the United Nations system in West Africa and the Sahel for their continuing efforts to advance the cause of peace, security and development in the subregion.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated to the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António **Guterres**

Annex**Report on the strategic review of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, 10 September–17 October 2019****I. Introduction**

1. In the statement by the President of the Security Council of 7 August 2019 (S/PRST/2019/7), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to carry out an independent review of the scope of the mandate and activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). In particular, the Council emphasized the need to focus on the potential areas of improvement or new or refocused priorities, including on issues relating to counter terrorism, the effects of climate change on security, and intercommunal violence, as part of a broad prevention and sustaining peace agenda. The Council noted the increased demands on UNOWAS, including in Guinea-Bissau, in post-transition countries and in respect of its joint work with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel and underlined the need for more support and adequate resources to UNOWAS. The Council requested the Secretary-General to present the findings of the strategic review and his observations by 15 November 2019, in order to usefully inform the Council's discussions on the renewal of the mandate of UNOWAS.

2. The objectives of the strategic review were to: (a) assess the strategic context in the countries in which UNOWAS operates, in particular with respect to transition and post-transition contexts, as well as current and future regional peace and security challenges and trends in West Africa and the Sahel, taking into account their root causes, as well as sustainable development trends in the region; (b) assess whether or not UNOWAS has effectively discharged its mandate, including reporting on challenges to the successful implementation of its mandate; (c) examine the impact of UNOWAS activities, its comparative advantages in relation to other United Nations system entities operating in countries under the purview of the Office, as well as the level of coherence and synergies among them; (d) taking into account the additional mandates given to UNOWAS by the Security Council since 2016, as well as other foreseen additional tasks, analyse the size, structure, staffing, technical capacity, financing or other managerial or operational aspects of UNOWAS and the impact thereof on mandate implementation, at the strategic level; (e) on the basis of the above, make recommendations on the appropriate mandate, structure and strength of UNOWAS for consideration by the Secretary-General and submission to the Security Council, ahead of the renewal of the mandate of the Office.

3. The review was conducted by the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa, Abdoulaye Bathily. The purpose of the consultations was to seek feedback on the status of implementation of the mandate of UNOWAS, the challenges faced and the priorities of the regional office moving forward, as well as the capacities required to implement the mandate. They were conducted either in-person, during field visits, or through videoconferences and conference calls. A senior representative of, and subject experts from, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations, as well as representatives of the Department of Operational Support, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights were also deployed to support the independent expert.

4. From 10 to 15 September, Mr. Bathily held consultations with the leadership of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) and of ECOWAS on the margins of the extraordinary summit of the Economic Community of West African States on counter-terrorism, held in Ouagadougou. Between 16 and 21 September, he met with UNOWAS leadership and staff, with United Nations system entities based in Dakar and in West and Central Africa that work with UNOWAS, and with civil society organizations, women and youth groups. From 1 to 17 October, he visited a number of countries in West and Central Africa to meet with national authorities, regional and subregional organizations, including representatives of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, G5 Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Multinational Joint Task Force headquarters and the Mano River Union secretariat, as well as meetings at United Nations Headquarters, where he met with representatives of Member States, including those represented in the Security Council and in the Peacebuilding Commission.

II. Regional context

5. The review also consisted of an analysis of the strategic context in West Africa and the Sahel, including the challenges and regional trends in the political, security, rule of law and human rights and humanitarian spheres. Analytical papers produced by UNOWAS and other relevant United Nations system entities and consultations with various actors engaged in peace and security in the region enriched the contextual understanding of the situation in the region.

6. West Africa has long been regarded as a region full of potential owing to its relative political stability, strong economic growth and steady progress towards regional integration. Notwithstanding the positive developments driven by the economic engine of Nigeria and by other thriving economies, the region's economic, political and development prospects are increasingly under threat, as a result of a number of political and security challenges affecting the region.

A. Political trends

7. Between the merger of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel leading to the establishment of UNOWAS, in 2016, and the conduct of the present strategic review, in 2019, the region has registered appreciable progress in terms of democratic consolidation. Peaceful presidential elections, many resulting in alternation of power, have taken place in more than a dozen countries, including Benin, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. One exception was the presidential election in the Gambia in December 2017, which set off a regional peace and security crisis. It nevertheless opened a new window for democratization in the country, with the removal of the former President, Yahya Jammeh, after 22 years in power and the swearing-in of Adama Barrow as President. Peaceful parliamentary and local elections have also been held in several countries.

8. Such relative progress notwithstanding, many elections in the region were, and continue to be, characterized by tension and contestation, including around non-consensual constitutional and electoral amendments which often permeate the environment before, during and after elections, as well as the instrumentalization of the judiciary against political opponents. The tensions often divert attention from other pressing needs, including underdevelopment, inequality, corruption, violent extremism, transnational organized crime, the lack of access to justice, human rights violations, marginalization, in particular of minorities, women and youth, and ineffective or politicized governance, administrative, rule of law and security institutions.

9. The developments in the region, in terms of both progress and setbacks, come at a time when, over the past three years, two United Nations peacekeeping missions have closed down: the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, on 30 June 2017, and the United Nations Mission in Liberia, on 30 March 2018. The hard-won peace in those post-transition countries requires continued international support in order to consolidate transitional justice, national reconciliation and cohesion, and to promote institutional reforms, economic development, rule of law and gender parity, among other issues. Similar support will be required in Guinea-Bissau, as presence of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau is scheduled to end in December 2020.

B. Security context

10. Since UNOWAS was established in 2016, there has been a dramatic degradation in the security environment in West Africa and the Sahel. The spread of terrorist networks, particularly Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Boko Haram and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara poses a major threat to stability in West Africa and the Sahel, causing death, the destruction or abandonment of civilian infrastructure, insecurity and population displacements in a number of countries, including those in neighbouring North and Central Africa.

11. Terrorists and violent extremists are expanding and refining their transnational reach, often manipulating and exacerbating intercommunal violence, including between farmers and herders, and consolidating their networks with other transnational organized crime syndicates engaged in human and drug trafficking, maritime piracy and the illegal exploitation of natural resources. The border zone straddling Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger (Liptako-Gourma Region) and the Lake Chad Basin have been the most severely affected by violent extremist and terrorist attacks. There are reports of attacks in the Liptako-Gourma area on an almost daily basis.

12. The number of internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso alone ballooned from 47,000 in December 2017 to almost 500,000 in October 2019. As of October 2019, in Mali, 170,000 people were internally displaced, an almost threefold increase since 2016. Across the Lake Chad Basin, population displacement is fluid and complex, with returns of internally displaced people and refugees occurring at the same time as new displacements. There are 2.5 million people displaced in the most affected areas of the region, including 240,000 Nigerian refugees, 1.8 million internally displaced persons in north-east Nigeria, and 110,000 internally displaced persons in the Niger. While the Sahel has for many years been plagued by violence, insecurity has never spread so quickly and over such vast areas, nor affected so many people.

13. Kidal, in northern Mali, is increasingly falling under the control of armed groups, while the social fabric of Central Mali is being torn apart by waves of intercommunal violence. Of major concern is the progressive retreat of the States from dangerous and peripheral zones within their national territory, leaving the fate of helpless populations in the hands of terrorist and criminal networks. For years now, Kidal and other northern regions of Mali have been without central state presence. In September, the gendarmerie was ordered to retreat from the Soum Province in northern Burkina Faso, following mounting casualties in their ranks, while in Nigeria, far-flung counter-terrorism outposts are being withdrawn and consolidated into so-called "super camps" in order to minimize losses in personnel and material.

14. Terrorism, intercommunal violence and illicit trafficking persist, despite the leadership and determination demonstrated by countries in West Africa and the Sahel to urgently eradicate those scourges through regional security cooperation frameworks, including the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin and

the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. Over the course of the strategic review, countries in the region highlighted their commitment to scale up joint efforts to address the threats by convening an extraordinary summit of ECOWAS on the fight against terrorism, in Ouagadougou, on 14 September. Mr. Bathily participated in the meeting and heard, first-hand, from Heads of State of ECOWAS as well as those of Chad and Mauritania, who were invited to participate in the summit, about the dimensions of the challenges and the renewed commitment of member States to reinforce cooperation and coordination to prevent and fight terrorism, and, notably to draw up a plan covering the period 2020 to 2024, at a cost of \$1 billion, to be funded by States members of ECOWAS.

15. During the summit, Heads of State also called upon the Security Council to urgently help resolve the crisis in Libya, which they viewed as the true source of terrorism in the Sahel and, to this end, urged the Council to appoint a joint representative of the African Union and the United Nations for Libya and to give MINUSMA a more robust mandate to fight terrorism in Mali. The Heads of State also requested the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union and bilateral and multilateral partners, and the international community as a whole, to provide technical and financial support for ECOWAS counter-terrorism efforts.

16. Conflicts between pastoralists and farmers constitute a central and exacerbating element of intercommunal violence in the subregion and epitomize the multifaceted nature of the crisis. Such conflicts are particularly worrisome given the practice of cross-border transhumance, which spans the whole of West Africa. There is also a growing link between weakening adaptability to climate change and security across the Sahel and in the Lake Chad Basin. Increasingly, populations are being forced to compete over diminishing land, water and livelihoods as a result of rising temperatures, soil erosion, deforestation, erratic rainfall patterns and ground water salinity, leading to disputes and conflict.

17. A large and growing youthful population compounds an already volatile situation, as unemployed young people compete for scarce opportunities. Approximately 65 per cent of the population in the Sahel is under the age of 25. Unemployment, political and social exclusion and poor service delivery, due in part to a lack of effective governance structures and the weak capacity of States to meet local and national needs, have also presented challenges. The circumstances have also created openings for violent extremist groups and other illicit actors to lure young and able-bodied people into terrorism and human and drug trafficking, as well as associated criminal ventures, through the propagation of radical ideologies and promises of wealth and better opportunities.

18. West Africa and the Sahel have witnessed a striking increase in recruitment and violence linked to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaida. National borders in the region are porous and national authorities ill-prepared to address the threat. The “W Regional Park”, which includes areas in Benin, Burkina Faso and the Niger, is increasingly being used as a base by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and other terrorist groups. Some of these groups are aligned with Al-Qaida but are willing to cooperate with ISIL affiliates and collectively encroach across the borders into coastal States. So-called “Islamic State’s West African Province” has also continued at an intense operational tempo, with a high level of violence and attrition against local security forces. It is believed to have some 4,000 fighters, making it one of the strongest ISIL regional affiliates, alongside Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan. It is also seeking to attract foreign terrorist fighters. Boko Haram groups have continued to carry out atrocities. Of particular concern regarding Boko Haram are the indiscriminate killing and kidnapping of civilians, and the indiscriminate use of girls and boys as suicide bombers.

19. West Africa and the Sahel have also seen a resurgence in transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking, with the largest cocaine seizure ever recorded in Guinea-Bissau, 1.8 tons, in September. Ghana reported the largest confiscation of drugs in its history, with the seizure of suspected cannabis worth an estimated \$40 million in March. Senegal reported the seizure of more than 1,000 kg of cocaine at its seaports in June. Almost 10 tons of cocaine have been seized this year between Cabo Verde, the Gambia and Senegal. There have also been reports of wildlife poaching across West Africa. Meanwhile, the Gulf of Guinea has seen a steady rise in piracy, armed robbery against vessels and other maritime crimes. Banditry and criminality are also of growing concern in some countries, restricting access to certain areas and regions.

20. Effective and accountable rule of law and security institutions are critical in preventing violent conflicts and combating human trafficking and the flow of drugs in West Africa and the Sahel. Security vacuums created by weak institutions in some parts of the region invite spoilers, extremist groups and organized crime syndicates to further destabilize fragile security situations. Unsecured stockpiles of arms and ammunition, as well as unexploded ordnance, are being harvested for use as improvised explosive devices. Ineffective border management allows for trafficking in human beings, weapons and other illicit goods, which generate resources for violent extremist and organized crime networks. In the absence of effective, transparent and fair dispute resolution mechanisms to address grievances, communities and individuals resort to violence and justice without due process.

21. Security sector reform and governance remain at the core of conflict prevention and resolution strategies of the African Union, ECOWAS and G5 Sahel. UNOWAS must scale up its partnership with ECOWAS and Member States in this area. The Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance, adopted by ECOWAS in December 2017, offers a framework for such collaboration, as it provides for the contributions of the Commission of ECOWAS, Member States and other stakeholders in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of security sector reform and governance processes that contribute to democratic consolidation.

22. Worsening insecurity in West Africa and the Sahel has compelled States members of ECOWAS to continually increase budgetary spending on security. Estimates from the international financial institutions show that, for example, G5 Sahel countries spent between 18 per cent and 35 per cent of their annual budgets on security in 2018. Not only is such expenditure unsustainable, but it is also taking away resources from social and development spending, including in such critical areas as health care and education.

C. Rule of law and human rights

23. Despite the opening of democratic space in a number of countries, including Burkina Faso and the Gambia, countries in the region continue to face significant challenges in achieving the global targets and indicators on peace, justice and strong institutions, as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 16. Overall, and on the basis of data from the World Bank, most of the countries of the region fall well below the international ranking average in terms of judicial independence, as a result of the instrumentalization of the criminal justice system for political gain and corruption. Almost all the countries in the region faced major challenges with regard to accountability, the fairness of existing legislation, the openness of Government and access to independent and impartial dispute resolution mechanisms.

24. Overcrowding in prisons and lengthy pretrial detention for involvement in terrorism-related cases are also major concerns in G5 Sahel countries. While only a few terrorism-related cases have been brought to trial or successfully prosecuted in

Mali, and none in Burkina Faso, the Niger has been proactive in processing such cases, with national efforts having been facilitated by missions to Diffa Region to collect evidence and by the organization of hearings that dealt with a large number of cases.

25. The lack of adequate judicial processes and detention capacities also hampers military and law enforcement operations, which increases the risk of those who are apprehended or arrested being released owing to a lack of evidence, being illegally or unsafely detained, or escaping, because of a lack of prison security. Deficits in the administration of justice fuel grievances, leave community violence and serious human rights violations unaddressed and contribute to cycles of impunity and retaliation, as well as to the mobilization and radicalization of young people by violent extremist groups and to their recruitment by non-State armed groups and criminal organizations.

26. The subregion has seen improvements in gender equality and the equal participation of men and women in policy-, decision- and law-making bodies, as well as in key government positions. In February 2017, ECOWAS ministers adopted four guiding documents to advance gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of women in political, peace and security processes. However, women continue to face discrimination and gender-based violence. Moreover, the situation of children in the region continues to be worrisome, as early and forced marriages and other forms of exploitation, such as forced begging and child labour, as well as traditional practices affecting their health, continue to take place.

27. Several countries in the region continue to grapple with human rights challenges, including the instrumentalization of the judiciary for political purposes. Judicial effectiveness in many countries is also hampered by poor salaries and a lack of human and financial resources. There is also a growing sentiment in the region that impunity for violent crimes is often not addressed by Governments, thereby undermining respect for the rule of law. In that context, the establishment of a Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission and a National Human Rights Commission in the Gambia sets a positive example.

28. A number of countries have initiated political dialogues to negotiate agreements on issues of contention. In addition to the ongoing inter-Togolese dialogue, the past six months have seen the opening of political dialogues between the ruling parties and the opposition in Burkina Faso and in Benin, while in Ghana, political stakeholders convened to address the increasingly destabilizing actions of political vigilante groups. In Liberia, in July 2019, the Government respected the people's right to peaceful protests and agreed to begin dialogue on how to strengthen the economy and promote social cohesion.

29. Nevertheless, civil society groups in some countries in the region note that political intimidation and assault by Governments have increased, which stifle the rights to freedom of assembly and to freedom of speech. Some groups have reported the increased use of phone tapping and surveillance, as well as other efforts, including infiltration, co-option and bribery, that are aimed at creating division within their ranks. UNOWAS reports that, since 2016, an overall decline has been observed in West Africa and the Sahel with regard to Member States respect for the rule of law and compliance with the Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance. In this context, the role of the Office in promoting inclusive political dialogue and freedom of speech across the region remains crucial.

D. Humanitarian context

30. Recurrent humanitarian crises continue to take a heavy toll in what is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world. Climate change, extreme poverty, armed

conflict and insecurity, population growth and rapid and unplanned urbanization are driving increasingly high levels of vulnerability and risk for millions of West Africans. The region accounts for around a fifth of people requiring assistance in the world.

31. Countries in the Sahel continue to grapple with some of the world's most protracted and severe emergencies. Conflict and insecurity are among the main drivers of humanitarian needs, compounding the impact of climate change, underdevelopment and poverty. In 2019, some 15 million people needed humanitarian assistance in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. Violence and insecurity are driving new waves of displacement and dramatically worsening existing vulnerabilities. Around 3.3 million people had been uprooted from their homes by October 2019, 25 per cent more than in 2016.

32. For children, worsening food security creates additional hurdles, such as learning difficulties, as well as reducing the rates of school retention, as parents are unable to afford fees and need their children to stay at home to work. Around 6.3 million people are currently severely food insecure in the Sahel, representing a 12 per cent rise compared with 2016, while 1.1 million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. Sustained relief efforts and long-term measures, including for the prevention of malnutrition, are required to improve food security, restore livelihoods and improve resilience to the recurrent shocks in the Sahel.

33. For the past decade, coastal States in West Africa has been spared the ravages of conflict, with the exception of northern Nigeria. Natural disasters, epidemics, extreme poverty and under-development nevertheless affect millions of people, as does poor governance and electoral turmoil. Epidemics, natural disasters (including seasonal flooding), transhumance and political unrest are the main triggers of humanitarian needs.

34. Humanitarian funding has not kept up with the rising level of need. Financing of the humanitarian response has barely met 50 per cent of the requirements in the affected Sahel countries, declining steadily since 2017. In 2019, except in the case of Nigeria, the humanitarian response plans in the region had received less than half of the requested funds as of October 2019. In 2019, aid organizations appealed for \$1.7 billion to assist 15 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria.

35. As a result of rising insecurity, humanitarian access has become more difficult. Aid workers have been targeted by armed groups, thereby jeopardizing assistance to the people affected by humanitarian need. With a view to meeting existing needs and helping communities recover and rebuild from recurrent shocks, humanitarian organizations across the region are increasingly adopting new strategies to provide urgent relief and strengthening their collaboration with Governments, development and security actors in order to build long-term solutions and address the causes of the region's crises.

III. Consultations in the field and in New York

36. In Ouagadougou, the independent expert took advantage of the meeting of G5 Sahel at the ministerial level, and the extraordinary summit of ECOWAS Heads of State, to engage member States, regional and subregional entities on the evolving political and security dynamics in West Africa and the role of UNOWAS in addressing the challenges emanating therefrom. Heads of State and Government, including the President of Niger and current Chair of ECOWAS, Mahamadou Issoufou, spoke highly of UNOWAS and expressed full support for the work of the Office and its indispensable role within the peace and security architecture of the region, in particular through its

complementarity with ECOWAS and other subregional entities. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and the President of the Commission of ECOWAS, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, echoed those sentiments.

37. Regional and subregional entities highlighted the need to enhance collaboration and cooperation with UNOWAS based on the principles of complementarity, comparative advantage and collective responsibility to respond early to prevent conflict. Many felt that UNOWAS holds a strategic position to convene and advocate on issues in West Africa and the broader Sahel, including neighbouring countries where UNOWAS works in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Central Africa (UNOCA).

38. In Dakar, Mr. Bathily met with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and Head of UNOWAS, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, and the management and staff of the Office. Discussions centred on the status of implementation of the mandate of the Office, the challenges faced, the priorities moving forward and the capacity requirements to meet increasing demands. The independent expert also met with the different mission components, as well as with the UNOWAS liaison cell for G5 Sahel, based in Nouakchott, to discuss their areas of work, achievements and challenges, and their views on reprioritizing UNOWAS areas of engagement.

39. The independent expert also held a number of videoconferences, including with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali and Head of MINUSMA, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, to discuss collaboration between MINUSMA and UNOWAS with respect to the Sahel, how to clarify roles and responsibilities and how to enhance inter-mission cooperation. The independent expert also heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau and Head of UNIOGBIS, Rosine Sori-Coulibaly, regarding the particular challenges facing the mission in the pre-transition period and how UNOWAS could play a role in support of Guinea-Bissau following the proposed drawdown of UNIOGBIS. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA, François Louncény Fall, also briefed the independent expert on the collaboration, comparative advantages and synergies between the two United Nations regional offices.

40. In Dakar, the independent expert met with the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group to discuss areas of convergence between the work of UNOWAS and of the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group, in particular on the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and how to strengthen and sustain collaboration for a more effective implementation of the strategy across the United Nations system. Other videoconferences were held with UNOWAS regional partners, including the Mano River Union secretariat and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, to obtain their views on the role of UNOWAS and the implementation of its mandate. The expert also met with women's groups and with broader civil society, based in Senegal, to hear their perspectives on the strengths and challenges of UNOWAS and areas for strengthened collaboration.

41. The independent expert also travelled to Abuja, N'Djamena and Nouakchott for consultations. In Abuja, he met with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Zubairu Dada, as well as officials at ECOWAS, the resident coordinator and representatives of the United Nations country team. In N'Djamena, he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, African Integration and International Cooperation, Mahamat Zène Cherif, the leadership of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force, a representative of the African Union, the resident coordinator and representatives of the country team. In Nouakchott, he met with the President,

Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and the Diaspora, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the Permanent Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel, Maman Sidikou, the resident coordinator and representatives of the country team and the UNOWAS liaison cell.

42. It is notable that during the independent expert's meeting with the President of Mauritania, Mr. El Ghazouani, the latter stressed repeatedly that the security situation in West Africa and the Sahel is far more serious than the response or attention that is being accorded it. He noted that unless a major response is launched, with sufficient resources and capacities, the region will be overwhelmed by the crisis, threatening the very existence and viability of many States, including those that appear to have been spared the worst consequences, such as Mauritania.

43. In New York, the independent expert met with the ambassadors of Member States represented in the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, and of States members of ECOWAS and G5 Sahel and heads of United Nations offices working on the Sahel. During those meetings, the independent expert briefed his interlocutors on the conduct of the review, its findings and the preliminary recommendations. He also sought the views of his interlocutors on the implementation of the mandate of the Office and how they saw the evolution of its mandate, given the evolving context and growing threats in West Africa and the Sahel.

IV. Findings and observations

44. UNOWAS interventions, in line with its mandate, include efforts related to horizon scanning, early warning, prevention, conflict resolution, peace consolidation and sustaining peace. Overall, there was unanimity among those consulted that UNOWAS had effectively carried out its mandate during the period under review, playing a unique and critical role in preventing conflict, defusing tensions and consolidating peace in West Africa and the Sahel. More specifically, in his assessment of the work of UNOWAS, the independent expert noted a number of achievements and challenges corresponding to the four areas of the UNOWAS mandate.

A. Good offices to assist in peacebuilding, sustaining peace and enhancing subregional capacities for conflict prevention and monitoring political developments

45. The activities of UNOWAS, in particular those of the Special Representative, with respect to good offices, mediation and preventive diplomacy were found to be the most visible and impactful component of its work. Such activities, undertaken in the context of electoral processes or to support political processes, or as part of shuttle diplomacy in partnership with ECOWAS and the African Union, were considered critical in helping to defuse tensions and achieve non-violent outcomes. They have also helped to create enabling environments to address sensitive issues at the highest levels. The independent expert noted increasing demand for UNOWAS mediation and good offices interventions in connection with constitutional and electoral reform, during high-stakes elections, when political actors try to manipulate constitutional or electoral norms and instrumentalize the justice system for political gain or to help to defuse electoral disputes and community tensions in the electoral process.

46. In addition, as part of UNOWAS efforts to sustain peace in Burkina Faso and the Gambia and to provide follow-on support to Guinea-Bissau in the event of the closure of UNIOGBIS in December 2020, expectations are high that UNOWAS will go beyond the provision of good offices to cover such additional areas as security

sector reform, transitional justice and the strengthening of rule of law institutions. It is important for UNOWAS to engage meaningfully following the closure of peace missions to support the efforts of Governments and United Nations country teams to ensure that nationally led efforts to consolidate and sustain peace remain on track. There is also an expectation, in particular among civil society groups, that UNOWAS should provide capacity-building support to enable local actors to lead grass-roots mediation initiatives and promote democratic practices around elections.

47. Among various actors, the regional research and analysis work conducted by UNOWAS is seen as crucial in informing the Special Representative's good offices and in setting the agenda on emerging peace and security issues, as well as related processes at Headquarters. Issue papers produced by the Office, in collaboration with respected national independent analysts, are well received and perceived as serving an important advocacy role and helping to rally the United Nations system and regional partners around common themes and initiatives. Reference was made to recent work on transhumance, with some interlocutors urging the Office to provide such products on a more systematic basis as part of a broader prevention and sustaining peace agenda. Others questioned whether UNOWAS has the requisite capacities to undertake independent research, arguing that the Office should rather aggregate and analyse available research with a view to recommending actionable policy options.

B. Enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel

48. Interlocutors assessed their collaboration with UNOWAS on a range of cross-border and cross-cutting issues as generally positive. The role of UNOWAS in providing political support and advice to United Nations entities in the region, its political analysis on increasingly complex and interrelated peace and security dynamics, and its facilitation of integrated and holistic approaches to address peace and security challenges were highlighted. United Nations partners underscored the comparative advantage of UNOWAS through its convening power and its legitimacy and authority to raise politically sensitive issues. The partnership between UNOWAS, UNOCA, ECOWAS and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to address security threats in the Gulf of Guinea and the Lake Chad basin was mentioned as an example of successful cross-regional and sectoral collaboration. There were calls to enhance United Nations system-wide collaboration on current and emerging threats, including through systematic coordination mechanisms at the technical and senior levels for improved joint planning and strategy development. Some interlocutors identified a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities following the reform of the United Nations development system, in particular the delinking of the resident representative and resident coordinator roles, which had complicated their collaboration with UNOWAS and created operational challenges at the programmatic level on sustaining peace frameworks.

49. UNOWAS continues to work to enhance its partnerships with regional organizations. Its collaboration with ECOWAS, its primary partner, is guided by a joint work plan and manifested in regular joint preventive diplomacy and mediation engagements. Several interlocutors pointed out that ECOWAS is endowed with appreciable normative and institutional frameworks that, while consistent with United Nations values and principles, are better adapted to regional realities and allow for greater peer pressure. They could serve as the basis for the partnership between ECOWAS and UNOWAS, alongside United Nations norms and values. For instance, civil society interlocutors pointed to the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework,

adopted in 2008 and currently being operationalized, which could serve as a document for partnership-building in responding to the multifaceted issues facing the subregion today. In that regard, a need to strengthen the partnership between ECOWAS and UNOWAS at both the leadership level and the working level was noted. The establishment of a UNOWAS liaison office in Abuja, at the headquarters of the ECOWAS Commission, was strongly advocated to foster the organic development of the partnership and to reinforce the links between early warning and early action.

50. Collaboration with other partners, including the G5 Sahel secretariat, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Mano River Union secretariat, could also be further enhanced. These regional partners commended UNOWAS for its support in building capacities on cross-border and cross-cutting threats through joint planning, assistance on strategy development, joint field assessments and overall coordination to maximize impact and leverage comparative advantages. Some entities called for enhanced UNOWAS support, including in connection with high-stakes presidential elections, joint border security, confidence-building measures and combating organized crime in the Gulf of Guinea and the Lake Chad basin. Others noted that UNOWAS could extend its good offices support to more complex challenges affecting the region, such as addressing intercommunal violence and facilitating negotiations between Governments and armed groups to resolve conflict.

51. Interlocutors also noted the need to strengthen cooperation and partnership between UNOWAS and the United Nations system, ECOWAS, the African Union, including the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel, G5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other partners to tackle challenges in the region, as well as to work with entities in neighbouring regions, such as UNOCA, ECCAS and the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force. Areas of possible collaboration and greater synergy include maritime security, organized crime and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and conflict related to the impact of climate change in the Lake Chad basin. The Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum, supported by UNOWAS in cooperation with other partners, serves as a good example of a multi-stakeholder cross-border peacebuilding effort that should be further supported and replicated elsewhere. The same applies for the Liptako-Gourma Governors' Forum, which UNOWAS is also supporting.

52. The partnership between UNOWAS and G5 Sahel was prioritized through the establishment, in 2016, of the UNOWAS liaison cell in Nouakchott, where the G5 Sahel secretariat is headquartered. However, interlocutors, including within the G5 Sahel secretariat and among Member States in the Sahel, highlighted the need to enhance the UNOWAS presence in Nouakchott. The liaison cell is currently staffed by an officer and an assistant. Given the increasing collaboration and partnership between the United Nations system and G5 Sahel, there was an interest expressed in seeing the cell serve as a single point of contact between United Nations system entities and the G5 Sahel secretariat and as a hub for monitoring developments and enhancing the UNOWAS interface with actors in the Sahel. To date, the achievements of the UNOWAS liaison cell, which is heavily under-resourced, include supporting G5 Sahel in establishing its early warning cell and the regional counter-radicalization cell and its national antennae, with the support of the Office of Counter-Terrorism. Interlocutors agreed that further clarifying the role of the liaison cell and providing it with the requisite resources would allow for more strategic use of its presence, with regard to both its liaison function and coordinating United Nations system-wide collaboration with the G5 Sahel secretariat.

53. Collaboration between UNOWAS and civil society continues to grow. Interlocutors commended UNOWAS on its high-level and technical support on electoral processes and governance issues, while proposing systematic mechanisms

for civil society-led analysis to regularly inform UNOWAS interventions on cross-border and cross-cutting issues.

54. Overall, in the review, the need to shift UNOWAS engagement with regional organizations from capacity-building to partnership-based collaboration was noted. Such a shift would recognize and better leverage existing regional institutional capacities for peace and security. Moreover, the shift would take into account that, at times, the United Nations has limited ability to thwart threats to democratic principles and practices and that, often, a unified African Union-ECOWAS-United Nations partnership can provide a more effective response owing to superior normative and institutional frameworks at the regional level.

C. Support for the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the coordination of international and regional engagements in the Sahel

55. United Nations interlocutors highlighted the many ways in which they contribute to the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, including the role of UNOWAS in its implementation. Offices represented in the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group noted that, while they were fully invested in and committed to the full implementation of the strategy, lack of clarity with regard to roles and responsibilities had hampered their efforts in recent years. Since the merger of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel, there have been a number of changes in the United Nations leadership on the strategy, including the appointment in 2018 of a Special Adviser for a one-year period. Changes in United Nations leadership on the strategy were seen to have had a negative impact on the partnership between the United Nations and the G5 Sahel secretariat and on ensuring a single point of contact for partners. Other challenges relating to the work of the United Nations in the Sahel related to the need for better coordination of the United Nations system entities. However, it was expected that a new division of labour, as agreed upon by the United Nations system in September, would help to address institutional gaps and spur implementation.

56. The co-chairing of the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel and its technical secretariat by UNOWAS and the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel should also be seen as an important step to help to scale up United Nations collaboration with counterparts. The platform remains a strategic framework that brings together all the United Nations entities, partners and countries in the greater Sahel region, emphasizing that the current crisis goes beyond the borders of the epicentre countries. However, interlocutors noted that more needs to be done to translate its work into concrete action on the ground. As highlighted by a series of studies, coordination of various strategic frameworks in the Sahel remains one of the key constraints on efficiency of action on the ground and contributes to the creation of confusion and the dispersion of synergies.

57. Another area of consensus was that UNOWAS should maintain its political convening and advocacy roles in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In view of the large number of actors and initiatives involved in the implementation of the strategy, the role played by UNOWAS was seen as constructive. In September, the Secretary-General endorsed a new approach to reinforce United Nations coordination in the Sahel through a new governance structure for the implementation of the strategy. It was also noted that the United Nations needed to do a better job in communicating its work on the strategy. While much was being done, one gap identified was the lack of visibility and public

awareness in connection with United Nations programmatic interventions for the implementation of the strategy.

D. Promotion of good governance and respect for the rule of law, human rights and the mainstreaming of gender into conflict prevention and management initiatives in West Africa and the Sahel

58. The independent expert learned about several ways in which UNOWAS, working closely with regional partners, has helped to address governance challenges and promote respect for human rights, gender equality and the rule of law during the period under review. The Office has leveraged its good offices role, legitimacy and access to decision makers to advocate against the recent trend of democratic reforms (constitutional reviews and electoral and political party reforms) being used as a means to consolidate political and economic power or extend terms in office. UNOWAS has also played a role in mobilizing political will in the region to address the growing trend of instrumentalizing the justice system for political gain, as well as in helping to galvanize political actors in the region to confront challenges such as impunity and lack of access to justice.

59. Efforts to implement the women and peace and security agenda in all UNOWAS interventions range from advocating for the political empowerment of women in high-level good offices of the Special Representative to supporting action plans on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) at the national level. Additional activities include supporting regional efforts to integrate gender perspectives into the design and implementation of strategies to address the root causes of crises and campaigning against gender-based violence and promoting the women and peace and security agenda in electoral processes and in regional counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism strategies.

60. Recognizing the crucial work of UNOWAS in operational prevention, it was noted in the review that UNOWAS had invested less in the good governance and rule of law aspect of its mandate that supported structural prevention. A number of challenges require UNOWAS to reorient its efforts towards structural issues and roots causes. Those challenges include: (a) emerging threats, such as terrorism, transnational organized crime, intercommunal violence, shrinking space for democratic principles, contested constitutional and electoral reforms, insufficient oversight and accountability mechanisms, especially in the security sector, and interference in the judiciary; and (b) the demands placed on UNOWAS to support the sustaining peace agenda in Burkina Faso and the Gambia and the introduction of a United Nations country team presence in Guinea-Bissau. Practically, to date, these shifts have seen UNOWAS try to scale up its preventive diplomacy, political analysis, and advisory support, including in-country deployments, however, human resource constraints have hampered impact.

V. Recommendations

61. On the basis of the above findings, and in accordance with the terms of reference of the review, recommendations were made on the scope of the mandate and activities of UNOWAS and areas for improvement, as well as on its relationship with other United Nations entities operating in the countries under its purview.

62. Against the backdrop of the rapidly deteriorating security environment in West Africa and the Sahel, the independent expert strongly recommends that the Security

Council support the work of UNOWAS and other United Nations entities in the subregion to ensure a common approach in United Nations efforts to help to resolve the challenges in the subregion.

63. UNOWAS continues to prove its relevance and indispensability in an increasingly complex and volatile subregion in need of concerted support from the international community. UNOWAS has made significant contributions to prevention through the good offices of the Special Representative. UNOWAS has been particularly effective in preventing or mitigating election-related crises and promoting inclusive political dialogue and reform processes in several countries of the subregion. The Office should increase its preventive diplomacy, good offices and mediation efforts to address election-related tensions and support political dialogue in the subregion.

64. In a context in which two peacekeeping operations, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), have drawn down and UNIOGBIS is expected to close in 2020, UNOWAS should provide in-depth political support and guidance, including in-country deployments to Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as to the other countries under its purview. In addition, increased expectations are placed on UNOWAS to provide both preventive diplomacy and overall technical and advisory support to Burkina Faso and the Gambia under the sustaining peace agenda, which requires substantial new human and financial resource commitments.

65. It was concluded in the review that the mandate of UNOWAS remains valid and should be strengthened in order to enable the Office to better respond to emerging threats and to provide support to post-transition countries following the drawdown of United Nations peace operations in the subregion. Therefore, UNOWAS should adjust its strategic vision, taking into account advances made in the region to strengthen the peace and security architecture, the shifting and increasingly complex challenges confronting the region and the importance of enhancing regional partnerships on the basis of the principles of complementarity, comparative advantage and collective responsibility to respond early to prevent conflict. However, despite the growing threats facing the region, UNOWAS is primarily a political office and should strive to maintain that role rather than being drawn in to perform roles and responsibilities that are beyond its capacities.

66. The increased expectations on UNOWAS will require substantial new human and financial resource commitments to: establish new capacities to deal with post-transition countries, enhance its partnerships with ECOWAS and G5 Sahel, strengthen collaboration in the Lake Chad basin area, increase coordination capacities and provide additional backstopping support for UNOWAS from United Nations Headquarters.

A. Mandate

1. Good offices to assist in peacebuilding, sustaining peace and enhancing subregional capacities for conflict prevention and monitoring political developments

67. UNOWAS should continue its good offices, mediation and preventive diplomacy engagements to assist in peacebuilding, sustaining peace and mediation. To the extent possible, in keeping with the strategic vision of UNOWAS, such activities should be undertaken in conjunction with, or in support of, regional actors. High-level engagements will require a shift beyond capitals to include political stakeholders at the provincial and community levels to address potential hotspots and

emerging threats, including mobilizing efforts to resolve and address tensions posed by intercommunal violence and terrorism.

68. The monitoring, analysis and awareness-raising activities of UNOWAS should focus on current and emerging threats, leveraging its role as a platform to set the agenda in the subregion, and on its convening authority to build support for effective responses. The Office should also seek to enhance visibility and close existing awareness gaps in connection with the work of the United Nations in implementing the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

69. During the next three years, the good offices of UNOWAS, with the direct involvement of the Special Representative, will be required in the subregion as it prepares for high-stakes national elections, including, in 2020, presidential elections in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Togo; in 2021 in the Niger; in 2022 in Liberia; and in 2023 in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Following elections in the region, UNOWAS should maintain strategic political engagement with the respective Governments and stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of recommendations made by observer or monitoring groups aimed at improving the quality and inclusiveness of subsequent electoral processes. This could include facilitating dialogue and following up on the implementation of agreed reforms. These efforts should be undertaken in coordination with the Electoral Assistance Division, on behalf of the United Nations Focal Point for Electoral Assistance Activities. Prospective United Nations electoral support in the implementation of election-related reforms should be subject to a formal request for electoral assistance from the respective Governments, followed by an electoral needs assessment to determine such details as the modalities and scope of potential United Nations electoral assistance.

2. Enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel

70. The Office's collaboration with regional organizations should shift from capacity-building to partnership-building to better recognize and leverage the strength of existing regional mechanisms for peace. UNOWAS should enhance its collaboration with ECOWAS, its primary regional interlocutor, at both the leadership level and the technical level to ensure the sustainability of joint efforts and to maximize impact with other partners in the region, including G5 Sahel.

71. UNOWAS should therefore establish a presence in Abuja, which would enable it to enhance its strategic and operational relationship with ECOWAS in a manner that reinforces the link between early warning and early action, contributes to building the capacity of emerging subregional entities such as the Mano River Union and addresses cross-border threats to peace and stability. The need for such a presence was brought up by a number of interlocutors and was a recommendation at the UNOWAS-ECOWAS desk-to-desk meeting, which took place in Dakar in September 2018. In the same vein, the independent expert recommends strengthening the UNOWAS liaison cell in Nouakchott to enhance its added value and effectiveness.

72. The United Nations has a presence in several locations in West Africa and the Sahel, including one peacekeeping operation. UNOWAS and MINUSMA have specific and distinct mandates but should continue to work together on issues of a regional nature. UNOWAS should continue to strengthen its capacity to engage in regional research and analysis, particularly on transnational issues that are relevant to peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel, and to promote the exchange of information and lessons learned with other United Nations entities in the region. In that connection, UNOWAS should work in partnership with regional think tanks and research institutions and also with United Nations resident coordinators and country teams to ensure integrated analysis with a view to: (a) tackling increasingly complex

and interrelated peace and security dynamics in the region; and (b) helping to create an enabling political environment for United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to effectively implement activities for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNOWAS should leverage United Nations partnerships with the African Union, the European Union, the World Bank and other institutions to harmonize strategic messaging and strengthen coordination with international partners.

73. The growing collaboration between UNOCA and UNOWAS at the leadership and working levels is commendable and should be encouraged, particularly in the implementation of the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism of July 2018 and in the exchange of good practices between ECCAS and ECOWAS. The efforts of UNOWAS to address the security challenges in north-east Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin region are a positive step, and UNOWAS should develop further proposals to increase the support provided to regional Governments to help to tackle the crisis, along with the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2349 (2017). Also worth commending are the Office's efforts to develop regional solutions to prevent and resolve disputes between farming and herding communities. Further UNOWAS engagement with regional Governments on the development of a road map to address the long-term drivers of the violence should be encouraged.

74. Given the expressed need for UNOWAS to enhance collaboration and cooperation with subregional and regional entities, such as ECOWAS, the African Union, including the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel, G5 Sahel, the Mano River Union and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, to tackle challenges in the region, as well as to deepen its work with entities in neighbouring regions, such as UNOCA, ECCAS and the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force, the independent expert recommends that UNOWAS explore the possibilities of enhancing such partnerships and promoting greater synergies, including in areas such as maritime security, organized crime and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, conflict related to the impact of climate change and efforts to counter terrorism. UNOWAS should play an advocacy, convening and coordination role in support of such engagements.

3. Support for the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the coordination of international and regional engagements in the Sahel

75. UNOWAS should continue to lead the United Nations system in its efforts to implement the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel through its convening and political advocacy roles, as well as its coordination of United Nations engagements in the Sahel. However, there is a need to clearly define roles and responsibilities on these engagements in order to enhance coordination. The division of labour for the governance and implementation of the strategy, as proposed by the relevant United Nations offices and endorsed by the Secretary-General in September, should be adopted and implemented as soon as possible.

76. Under the proposed division of labour, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General has overall leadership responsibility for high-level visibility, advocacy, resource mobilization and Member State engagement. The Executive Office would also establish a principals group and mobilize the international community to address the security and political environments in order to facilitate development interventions. The Special Representative would provide unified leadership at the regional level, including political leadership, political engagement with Member States and regional bodies, negotiating space to facilitate development and humanitarian access, and political analysis and guidance. United Nations agencies

would be charged with implementation, under the coordination of the regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group.

77. Pursuant to the strategic review, it is therefore recommended that the UNOWAS mandate be adjusted to reflect its role under the new governance structure for the implementation of the integrated strategy.

4. Promotion of good governance and respect for the rule of law, human rights and the mainstreaming of gender into conflict prevention and management initiatives in West Africa and the Sahel

78. UNOWAS should enhance the effectiveness of its operational prevention efforts by integrating United Nations norms and policies on the rule of law and security sector reform into the Special Representative's good offices and strengthening analysis on potential conflict drivers related to developments in the rule of law and security sectors. The Office should create political space conducive to the effective delivery of assistance by the United Nations and external partners with respect to justice and security sector reform. It should support the development and implementation of regional judicial and police cooperation arrangements, in close coordination with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, with a view to enhancing the accessibility, efficiency and accountability of criminal justice systems in countering drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism.

79. In addition, UNOWAS should increase its support for ECOWAS member States to implement the ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance and operationalize the ECOWAS Code of Conduct for the Armed Forces and Security Services with a view to strengthening the effectiveness and fostering the accountability of the security institutions.

80. UNOWAS should continue to advocate against policies and practices that undermine the rule of law and the good governance of the security sector, drawing upon strengthened analysis of risk factors and potential conflict drivers emanating from weak, non-inclusive or unaccountable rule of law and security institutions. UNOWAS should also advocate for progress in fighting corruption and impunity and upholding the independence of the judiciary.

81. UNOWAS has been carrying out good work on promoting and supporting the participation of women and young people in political processes. It is important for UNOWAS to continue to pursue practical ways of achieving its gender mainstreaming initiatives alongside good offices on these issues.

82. Strengthening UNOWAS collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism will be of critical importance, given the latter's mandate and pivotal role in enhancing the coordination and coherence of United Nations counter-terrorism efforts, as well as providing technical assistance and capacity-building support to Member States based on analyses and recommendations by entities such as the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. UNOWAS should continue to draw on expert assessments to strengthen the counter-terrorism efforts of Member States, as well as on the capacities of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to inform its analysis on rule of law, transnational organized crime, piracy, trafficking, terrorism and violent extremism.

83. UNOWAS should maintain the human rights dimension of its mandate given the need for support in this area in the region. It should continue to ensure close coordination with and leverage technical support from OHCHR through its West

Africa Regional Office. It should continue to incorporate human rights into its political analysis, early warning and good offices efforts. This should be done through enhanced analysis of human rights trends and developments in the region and through closer coordination with OHCHR with a view to ensuring enhanced early warning and preventive action. Furthermore, in the context of the many security challenges in the region, UNOWAS should develop, in cooperation with OHCHR, its capacity to provide advice on the integration of human rights into non-United Nations peace operations, as well on the human rights due diligence policy.

84. Finally, pursuant to the review, the independent expert recommends that the UNOWAS mandate be adjusted in line with the increased demands it is facing to sustain peace in Burkina Faso and the Gambia and accompany post-transition countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone to address structural prevention. Such changes will require more human resources within UNOWAS as well as reflections on UNOWAS strategic priorities in those areas that draw on the Office's comparative advantage.

85. On the basis of his findings and observations, the changing political and security environment across West Africa and the Sahel and the continued need across the region for support to consolidate democratic governance and address security challenges, the independent expert recommends a rearticulation of the strategic vision and mandate of UNOWAS in order to: (a) enhance its good offices role; (b) work to promote regional and subregional partnerships to address, in particular, election-related instability and challenges related to rule of law, security sector and governance reform, transnational organized crime, illicit trafficking, and terrorism and violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism; (c) support through political advocacy the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel; (d) pay particular attention to post-transition countries and provide support for them to build local and national capacities and nurture fragile peace, and support democratic consolidation and good governance; and (e) work to promote social cohesion and inclusive political dialogue, while ensuring the political participation of women and youth in the region, by supporting the capacity of States to establish infrastructure for peace.

B. Capacities of the Office

86. The need for a responsive, nimble and effective support platform is critical to successful mandate implementation. In that context, as the operating context in West Africa and the Sahel evolves, so must the mission support capacities of UNOWAS.

87. Since the adoption of the current UNOWAS mandate, there have been a number of significant developments that will have a material impact on the Office's operations from a support perspective, and more are expected between now and the end of 2020. Specifically, the closure of UNOCI, UNMIL and UNIOGBIS (expected in 2020), coupled with the need to provide support for Burkina Faso and the Gambia under the sustaining peace agenda, will increase demand for UNOWAS services. At the same time, the integration of the resident coordinator system into the Secretariat and the decentralization of administrative authority to heads of entities under the management reforms provide opportunities for strengthening partnerships and achieving synergies.

88. In terms of greater engagement with the development system, UNOWAS should look to maximize administrative support synergies within the context of the establishment of a regional service centre for the United Nations development system and the completion of the United Nations House in Senegal by the end of 2020. Immediate areas of opportunity include the full operationalization of mutual

recognition agreements in procurement so that they can be used by UNOWAS. Once the United Nations House has been completed, UNOWAS should examine how to take full advantage of the shared services that will become available.

89. In line with the Office providing greater programmatic support to Guinea-Bissau, the support component should assess whether it is in a position to provide administrative support for the drawdown and closure of UNIOGBIS in 2020.

90. The underlying operational assets and capacities currently available to UNOWAS will also need to be reassessed. Of particular note is the United Nations aircraft, the use of which is shared with UNIOGBIS (20 per cent). In the context of the proposed expansion in activities and the closure of UNIOGBIS, the future requirements to guarantee air asset support to UNOWAS will need to be determined. In the same vein, it is also understood that resources are needed to replace assets in a number of areas, including the vehicle fleet and information and communications technology equipment.

91. In addition to operational assets, the existing staffing levels, structures and arrangements will need to evolve to address the new mandate and the new demands of decentralized authority. A review of the staffing levels and structures of the Office will need to be undertaken, which should include a full review of mission support capacities. As part of its overall review, it is recommended that the Office closely examine the existing support platform to ensure that it continues to remain nimble, responsive and effective.
