



Security Council

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Letter dated 16 December 2019 from the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission addressed to the President of the Security Council

The Peacebuilding Commission would like to bring to the attention of the Security Council the following peacebuilding priorities in West Africa and the Sahel. This draws from the Commission's engagement over recent years in the respective subregions and individual countries, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and in line with Security Council resolutions [1645 \(2005\)](#) and [2282 \(2016\)](#) and presidential statements [S/PRST/2017/2](#) and [S/PRST/2018/3](#).

These activities included a number of regional, thematic and country-specific Peacebuilding Commission discussions, as well as visits to the region by the Commission Chairs and Vice-Chairs and Chairs of Commission configurations since 2017. In all of these activities, the Commission's focus has been on supporting national ownership of peacebuilding and sustaining peace, with a particular focus on engaging the countries of the region and subregional actors, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the G5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Development Bank. On the basis of these activities, the Commission would offer the following observations:

There has been considerable progress in building and sustaining peace in the region, in particular with peaceful elections and transitions of power in Sierra Leone and Liberia, peaceful resolution of the crisis in the Gambia and successful transitions of peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. The Commission commends the important role that UNOWAS has played in supporting these efforts, in partnership with regional actors. During the Commission's recent visit to the countries of the Mano River Union, the Government of Sierra Leone expressed its readiness to exit from the formal agenda of the Commission in recognition of the progress its country has made in peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Serious challenges remain across the region, including deteriorating security and humanitarian situations in some parts of West Africa and the Sahel, rising levels of displacement, social and economic inequalities, environmental degradation and cross-border risks, including illegal armed and terrorist groups, trafficking in small arms and light weapons and drugs, rising tensions between pastoralists and farmers related to transhumance, high levels of youth unemployment, adverse effects of climate change and low levels of gender equality. These are complex challenges, which require a comprehensive approach to address the root causes of conflict in the Sahel and West Africa, prevent further escalation of conflict and build and sustain peace. Regional approaches need to be strengthened, with a particular focus on cross-



border challenges and the need to strengthen engagement with regional partners. Moreover, each country's unique context and challenges must be taken into account so that the international community can better support nationally led peacebuilding efforts.

Through its convening role, the Peacebuilding Commission has helped to mobilize support for implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, in collaboration with Sahelian countries, the G5 Sahel, the African Union, the European Union and other regional and international organizations. Through their engagement with the Commission, countries of the region have called for more help from international partners to address the challenges that they face, including the need for sustained funding for actions that directly benefit the concerned populations, and better coordination of international efforts.

Several Member States have called for strengthened coordination among the range of local, national, regional and international efforts, including alignment of an overarching regional strategy with country-specific peacebuilding priorities. It is important to note that no single entity has the authority and capacity to coordinate the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel through United Nations country teams and regional offices throughout the region. It is also important to bear in mind that, under the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Notwithstanding, UNOWAS does have a role in supporting cross-pillar peacebuilding efforts.

On the basis of these observations, the Peacebuilding Commission, in line with its advisory role to the Security Council, would like to offer the following advice on the role UNOWAS can play:

- UNOWAS could support a more integrated and system-wide collaboration on current and emerging threats, including by contributing to risk analysis, horizon scanning and strategy development, which could help support an integrated and cross-pillar approach with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in the region.
- UNOWAS could support strengthened coordination and partnerships with national and regional actors in the subregion, including ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Development Bank.
- The UNOWAS mandate could prioritize the support for meaningful participation of women and youth in political processes and peacebuilding efforts in the region.

The Peacebuilding Commission could assist UNOWAS in accordance with its mandate, in the following ways:

- Supporting a focus on cross-border and regional approaches, including sharing lessons learned from Peacebuilding Fund programming.
- Convening relevant discussions in New York with a focus on coordination, and bridging discussions among the relevant bodies.
- Serving as a platform for international partners and other stakeholders to exchange information and coordinate activities, mobilize international attention and marshal resources.
- Strengthening engagement with development partners and international financial institutions in support of peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

- Continuing engagement with relevant countries of West Africa and Sahel, including with Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia.
- Providing advice at the request of the Security Council in advance of upcoming mandate renewals in Mali and Guinea-Bissau.

Overall, the Peacebuilding Commission's engagement in West Africa and the Sahel has been a concrete illustration of the Security Council's call ([S/PRST/2017/2](#)) for close and effective cooperation between UNOWAS and the Commission. The Commission remains committed to continue supporting the UNOWAS central role in contributing to coordination and coherence of efforts to address the peacebuilding and sustaining peace priorities in the region, and to continue close cooperation with other key actors present in the region, including the G5 Sahel, the African Union, the European Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and other regional and international organizations.

(Signed) Guillermo **Fernández de Soto**
Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission
