



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

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New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Ms. Juul . . . . . (Norway)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Souza Monteiro
China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
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Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Mills

## Agenda

Peace consolidation in West Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2021/1091)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Peace consolidation in West Africa**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2021/1091)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Khatir Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel; Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Ms. Cécile Thiombiano Yougbaré, lawyer and public policy analyst with Médecins du Monde, on behalf of the People's Coalition for the Sahel.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of members of the Council to document S/2021/1091, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

Before we begin with our speakers list today — recalling the Security Council's latest note by the President (S/2017/507) on its working methods — I wish to encourage all speakers, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and focus on key issues. In that spirit, briefers are further encouraged to limit their initial remarks to seven to 10 minutes. Everyone is also encouraged to wear a mask at all times, including while delivering remarks.

I now give the floor to Ms. Waly.

**Ms. Waly:** It is an honour to join members of the Security Council at this briefing. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is proud to support the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and regional efforts for peace, and I welcome this opportunity to brief the Council on our work in that regard. I thank the presidency of Norway for inviting me to speak today. I am also grateful for

the continued attention of the Council to threats posed by crime, drugs, corruption and terrorism to peace and security in West Africa, the Sahel and beyond.

I had the privilege of briefing the Council at the high-level open debate on maritime security (see S/2021/722), held under the presidency of India in August 2021. As the Council has repeatedly recognized, piracy and armed robbery at sea, together with other forms of transnational organized crime, are posing a threat to international security and the global economy. The Gulf of Guinea region continues to be a priority concern. Incidents in the Gulf account for the majority of kidnappings of seafarers for ransom around the world. According to a UNODC study conducted last year, those kidnappings are being carried out by pirate groups that are gaining in sophistication and increasingly able to conduct attacks against international vessels in deeper waters.

As noted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1091), the overall number of incidents in the Gulf of Guinea decreased last year thanks to national anti-piracy efforts, including the adoption by many States of relevant legislation and maritime strategies. Nonetheless, progress has stalled in operationalizing the Gulf of Guinea maritime security architecture, and the repercussions of piracy and maritime insecurity on regional peace, stability and development remain profound.

A new study by Stable Seas conducted in partnership with UNODC and funded by Norway estimates that piracy and armed robbery at sea are costing the Gulf of Guinea States a total of approximately \$1.94 billion annually. Port fees and import tariffs lost due to decreased shipping activity are estimated at \$1.4 billion a year. Those billions of dollars represent lost potential and funds that could otherwise be invested in licit economies and developing coastal communities — funds that are needed now more than ever in the continuing coronavirus disease crisis in the region.

More broadly, across West Africa and the Sahel, we see that organized crime facilitated by corruption is perpetuating instability, violence and poverty. The lack of opportunities and frustration are driving more youth to piracy and crime and leaving them more receptive to radicalization narratives. Desperate conditions render more people vulnerable to human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and more women and girls at greater risk of exploitation and sexual violence.

According to the 2020 UNODC *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, about 59 per cent of detected trafficking victims in West and Central Africa are children, and 27 per cent are women. Member States in the region have also sounded the alarm about a marked increase in drug trafficking and related insecurity in recent years. The increase in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids and in drug-use disorders are harming health and public safety in West Africa, as the region continues to be heavily affected by illegal tramadol imports. At the same time, West Africa has emerged as a manufacturer of methamphetamine, mainly destined for markets in East and South-East Asia. The greater security threats are posed by cocaine trafficking, with West Africa serving as a major transit area for onward shipments to Western and Central Europe, as well as cannabis resin trafficking.

Individual drug seizure data suggests cocaine trafficking through countries including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal has increased over the past two years. Very large cocaine seizures are being registered in West Africa since 2019. The seizure of 214 kilograms of cocaine reported in the Niger at the start of this year illustrates the size of the problem. The Sahel is also a major route for cannabis resin trafficking, with the reported involvement of individuals affiliated with Sahelian armed groups. The value of those illicit flows exceeds the national budgets of some transit countries, which is highly destabilizing in the context of the complex security situation.

Moreover, drug trafficking, as well as illicit trade in firearms and other goods, is contributing to terrorist financing and operations. Terrorist groups are reported to be engaged in small arms trafficking; the taxing and protection of illicit drug shipments passing through areas under their control; kidnapping for ransom; cattle rustling; and illegal gold mining.

It is clear that maritime insecurity, illicit flows and the linkages between transnational organized crime and terrorism all represent major obstacles to achieving peace, security and development in West Africa and the Sahel. Alongside efforts to provide humanitarian and emergency assistance — and to prevent conflict and promote dialogue, including among local communities — we must encourage political will and increased international support to strengthen comprehensive and cooperative crime responses. Such effective responses must build on international legal

and institutional frameworks, regional partnerships and national capabilities.

UNODC has been supporting the countries of the region to advance such action, including through our Global Maritime Crime Programme and the Strategic Vision for Africa 2030, which we launched last year.

To confront crime at sea, we are assisting in the review of legislation and regulatory frameworks in 16 coastal countries in West and Central Africa. We have also trained almost 2,000 judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers. UNODC technical assistance activities supported Togo and Nigeria in achieving the first-ever successful prosecutions of piracy in the region last year — a landmark step towards achieving maritime security in West Africa.

We are also promoting more effective regional cooperation, including through work with the Economic Community of West African States Commission. Moreover, UNODC is supporting Governments in the Gulf of Guinea and across West Africa to strengthen criminal justice capacities and cooperation through the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Organized Crime and Corruption, as well as global counter-terrorism instruments.

This year, UNODC will develop a new regional programme to provide integrated support across UNODC mandate areas. The programme will be guided by our Strategic Vision for Africa 2030, which reinforces the role of women and youth and prioritizes innovation and prevention. We will also continue to strengthen our partnerships with regional organizations and our collaboration with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, including as co-leader of the peace and security pillar of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and as co-Chair of the UNODC Sahel Programme Steering Committee.

A peaceful West Africa and Sahel region can be attained only if the international community comes together with Member States in the region to support local and cross-border efforts to address interconnected drug, crime, corruption and terrorism threats. We cannot allow pirates, criminals and terrorists to take advantage of poverty and instability or gain impunity by exploiting vulnerabilities.

UNODC remains fully engaged with our partners in advancing holistic crime prevention as part of broader peacebuilding and development interventions

that promote responsive State institutions, improve accountability and provide opportunities for education and work, including for youth and women. Together, we can strive for justice as an essential building block for the sustainable prosperity and security that the people of West Africa and the Sahel deserve.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Waly for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré.

**Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré** (*spoke in French*): I thank the Security Council, and the Norwegian presidency in particular, for the invitation extended to the People's Coalition for the Sahel and the opportunity to speak about the impact of the crisis in the Sahel.

I speak here today as a citizen of Burkina Faso, a country unfortunately at the heart of an unprecedented escalation of violence, and also as a member of the association Médecins du Monde. The People's Coalition for the Sahel was born out of the realization that the strategy pursued since 2013 to try to bring about an end to the violence has not led to stability in our region. On the contrary, the Sahel sinks a little deeper into crisis, the first victims of which are its populations.

More than 800 civilians were killed in Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger in 2021 in attacks attributed to non-State armed groups. Other civilians have died in abuses attributed to defence and security forces. Violence is also fuelled by the proliferation of self-defence groups. Populations are exhausted, and the consequences are disastrous. It is estimated that, by 2022, 8 million people in Burkina Faso will be directly affected by the closure or reduction of basic social services, while 1.5 million people have already fled their homes in search of safety.

As a humanitarian, I observe on a daily basis the devastating effects of a lack of access to health care; food insecurity, which will be four times higher in 2021 than in 2020; no access to schooling for 500,000 children; and, above all, the explosion of violence against women and girls.

Fifty-three per cent of internally displaced persons are women. Three out of four of them say that they are survivors of violence. Our medical teams are seeing an upsurge in the number of rapes when they go out with mobile clinics. We saw one woman, who had been displaced three times due to violence, arrive at our medical teams mute, without control of her limbs, extremely malnourished and unable to stop crying. We

saw a 16-year-old girl who was raped when her village was attacked by armed men and had suffered without adequate medical and psychological care. We have seen so many cases of depression, suicidal ideation and insomnia that our colleagues have stopped counting them, but those are typical signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. The majority of those patients are women and girls.

As a humanitarian health-care association, we are particularly concerned about the attacks on health care. In 2020 alone, 25 health-care workers were killed in Burkina Faso and six were kidnapped or injured. What worries me above all is that, after the fear and disarray among the communities, I am also seeing an increase in anger directed at the national authorities and the countries with a military presence in the region, such as France. So I asked myself: how did we get here? The reason is that our priorities were out of order. The security response as it has been conducted has not sufficiently taken into account people's needs, and it did not rely sufficiently on the expertise and experience of civil society.

To ensure that those voices are heard, we have come together with 55 other diverse organizations to establish the People's Coalition for the Sahel. Our organizations are mainly from Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger, but there are also regional groups and international non-governmental organizations. What unites us is the realization that the entire security strategy has failed and that we must radically change our approach. And we must do so immediately.

What is this new approach that we want and that we are calling on the Council to implement? It is based on what we call the "four citizen pillars". We presented them last April in the report entitled *The Sahel: What Needs to Change*. The entire international community, beginning with the members of the Security Council, must seize the opportunity and act. That is why I am speaking directly to the Security Council today with the following recommendations.

First of all, the Sahelian States and the international community must put civilians at the heart of their response to the crisis. That is the first citizen pillar. Political decisions and military operations must prioritize the protection of civilians. To that end, Sahelian and international defence and security forces must demonstrate greater transparency and accountability in conducting their military operations.

Secondly, the international community must ensure the implementation of a truly holistic approach that addresses the root causes of the crisis. That is the second citizen pillar, which is based on the shared observation today that the counter-terrorist response alone is doomed to failure if our priorities are not taken into account. To that end, Council members, such as France, will have to allow Sahelian societies to decide what they want. Sahelian societies must be able to decide whether they want to make the dialogue between the parties an essential part of the resolution to the current crisis.

Thirdly, the humanitarian emergency must be addressed. That is the third citizen pillar. It is essential to ensure that the funding is commensurate with the needs, and that humanitarian access never be impeded. That is particularly crucial for women and girls, as we know that 60 per cent of maternal mortality in the context of a crisis is avoidable. The Minimum Initial Service Package for Reproductive Health must be funded and implemented for effective access to comprehensive health services. I would also like to remind everyone of the importance of respecting and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law and the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence for aid workers. Those principles are not just concepts; they save lives.

Finally, we must fight impunity — the fourth citizen pillar — because impunity fuels the cycle of violence and encourages recruitment by armed groups, as Council members know. As long as it prevails, it will be impossible to restore trust between people and Governments, and that trust is crucial to resolving the crises in the Sahel.

As a national of Burkina Faso, it is chilling to observe this escalation of violence, which is turning my country into an area that is mired in crises and continually grieving. And I hope that Council members also find it chilling, because they understand the facts, realities and experiences of the people in the countries of the Sahel and they can do something and can act. It is time to act. We therefore ask that future communications from the Security Council reflect that reality, and emphasize that the fight against terrorism must not be at the expense of the protection of civilians. The people of the Sahel need the Security Council to heed the voices of Sahelian civil society and put them at the heart of its response to the crisis.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif.

**Mr. Annadif** (*spoke in French*): Madam President, allow me first of all to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. At the same time, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to congratulate the new members of the Council, namely, Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates, as well as to welcome the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to today's meeting.

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to present the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel (S/2021/1091) to the Security Council today. Since our meeting last July (see S/PV.8814), the subregion has experienced developments that require the attention of the Council. It is certain that West Africa and the Sahel continue to make progress in many areas. However, the subregion is struggling with a generalized insecurity, which risks reversing hard-won advances.

Last November, I had the privilege of chairing a session of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in charge of the implementation of the International Court of Justice ruling on the border dispute between the two countries, after a seven-year hiatus. This was an opportunity to take stock of the progress made since the Commission was created 19 years ago.

As of today, the two countries have agreed on nearly 2,050 kilometres of the estimated 2,100-kilometre border, leaving very few points of disagreement. The construction of boundary pillars, physical symbols of the demarcation, has also continued despite the prevailing insecurity. To date, 1,673 boundary pillars have been built, which represents more than 60 per cent of the project.

Those achievements are examples of successful conflict resolution, demonstrating in concrete terms how the peaceful resolution of border disputes can build trust and bilateral cooperation between two neighbouring countries. We commend Nigeria and Cameroon and proudly acknowledge that our common determination has brought us closer to fulfilling our mandate.

On 4 December, together with five former African Heads of State leading election observation missions, I witnessed first-hand the enthusiasm and discipline with which a record 89 per cent of Gambian voters cast their ballots freely in the presidential elections, overseen by an electoral commission that built trust with political parties, candidates and voters, making the elections a resounding success. A few weeks earlier, in an exemplary presidential election in Cabo Verde, Cabo Verdeans chose an opposition candidate who pledged to cooperate constructively with the Government majority in Parliament.

Despite all the justified concerns about the current turbulence in democratic governance, these examples confirm the appeal of democracy as the most reliable vehicle for shaping the future of communities within a republic. The forthcoming local elections in Senegal in some 10 days are of great interest, as mayors will be elected by direct universal suffrage for the first time, as a result of the consensual amendment of the electoral code after a broad political dialogue.

Dialogue is also productive in the Niger, where the opposition and the majority continue to discuss issues, thereby contributing to political calm in a very volatile context. In Guinea-Bissau, in coordination with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), we are in constant contact with the political actors in order to facilitate agreement on much-needed reforms. In Sierra Leone and elsewhere, I am engaged with stakeholders in order to help them bridge differences and move forward on issues of national interest.

While there is reason to celebrate this political progress, the security environment has also become more concerning. In Burkina Faso, incessant attacks by terrorist groups have led to growing public disenchantment with the State's difficulty in reversing the deadly trend and have undermined the country's legendary consensus. Large-scale attacks on military and civilian targets continued in Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger.

In Nigeria, increased criminality and farmer-herder conflicts diverted attention from the extremist violence in the north-east, which has not subsided. Other incidents, albeit small, in northern Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo demonstrate that the much-publicized threat of terrorist acts moving from the Sahel towards the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea is a reality.

One of the major consequences of these security developments is that our region is experiencing a multifaceted humanitarian crisis, characterized by rising food prices, increased poverty due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and crop losses due to drought. More than 38 million people are at risk of food shortages by the next lean season, an increase of 23 per cent compared to last year. Growing insecurity has led to massive population displacement and abandonment of agricultural land by millions of displaced people. By November 2021, there were more than 8 million refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees and stateless people in West Africa, and 4.1 million in the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) countries. The result is that millions of children are growing up in difficult conditions, traumatized, malnourished, poorly cared for and uneducated. I urge the international community to recognize the urgency of this situation, which undermines the future of the populations and whose consequences could be felt well beyond the subregion.

We welcome the latest joint operations between Burkina Faso and the Niger, on the one hand, and among Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin, on the other, as well as the work of the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad basin and of the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel. We also commend the courage and determination of the uniformed men and women facing this complex situation, characterized by an asymmetric war that has not yet revealed all its secrets and whose main victims are the civilian populations, who must be part of the solution.

Discussion platforms such as the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development and the Governors' Forum of the Liptako-Gourma border regions have proven effective in bringing together directly affected stakeholders at Government, civil society and community levels in order to exchange views and find solutions to their specific needs.

Four weeks ago in Dakar, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) organized a conference of traditional and religious leaders from across the region, including women elders from Liptako-Gourma and north-eastern Nigeria. During two days of exchanges, in-depth discussions examined how best to leverage their influence at local, national and regional levels in order to enhance the contribution

of communities to the resolution of these crises, which hamper their development.

The operationalization of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel continues in collaboration with Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, and his Office. Emphasis is now being placed on the centrality of the Strategy and its Support Plan as a common chapter of the United Nations system to guide the various strategic frameworks.

In that regard, the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators of the United Nations system should commit to making the Strategy a guiding strategic platform for United Nations cooperation frameworks and humanitarian response programmes in the Sahel, integrating the Nexus Plus approach into all their interventions.

Efforts to align Strategy with national and regional policies in the Sahel will be pursued in close collaboration with our partners in the G-5 Sahel, the Liptako-Gourma Authority and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, while making greater use of prospective analyses.

Furthermore, in order to strengthen coherence and coordination, UNOWAS is supporting efforts to revitalize the Ministerial Coordination Platform of the Sahel Strategy to improve participation by Member States, regional institutions and civil society organizations. In addition, the 2022-2023 road map of the Strategy, which is in the process of being finalized, should encompass actions adapting our interventions in the Sahel in the post-COVID-19 era.

A few weeks ago, in collaboration with UNODC — whose participation here I commend — UNOWAS brought together the defence attachés and ambassadors based in Dakar to further explore the operational links between the crime hotbeds in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea coast.

The resurgence of coups d'état, particularly in West Africa, is frequently due to political practices that are completely out of step with the aspirations of the people. In that context, ECOWAS is to be commended for its active engagement in the crises in Mali and Guinea. UNOWAS firmly supports those efforts to enable a return to constitutional order as soon as possible. We also welcome the decision by the ECOWAS Heads of State to revise Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol

relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in order to arrive at constitutional modifications that address term limits and other governance matters.

The United Nations-initiated social cohesion projects to facilitate peaceful and inclusive transitions in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and the Niger are in keeping with that goal. The projects are geared towards promoting reconciliation processes at the national and community levels, based on points of view and strengthening local infrastructure to foster peace, human rights and coexistence.

Another example of the initiatives that UNOWAS intends to pursue with resolve in 2022 is our collaboration with regional partners to facilitate the establishment of a forum of Ministers of Justice and judicial experts in West Africa as the appropriate mechanism to address the perennial challenges that have so far undermined the rule of law and respect for human rights in the region. Once it is put in place and operational, the regional ministerial platform should contribute significantly to garnering the needed political will to, inter alia, strengthen the capacity of judicial systems.

Nowhere is the need for a long-term approach more evident than with regard to climate change. Let me commend the leadership of the Secretary-General concerning what is an issue of the utmost importance. At UNOWAS, we have established a regional inter-agency working group that has produced a joint analysis in response to the recommendations of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. In addition, in a few weeks' time, together with the Government of Ireland, we will hold a major conference to launch concrete initiatives, with the participation of experts and institutions actively engaged in this increasingly crucial area.

As part of our new vision for UNOWAS, I intend to work much more closely with the United Nations system country teams in the 16 countries covered by UNOWAS to align our respective actions with the key priorities on which the United Nations interests are centred. Together by applying our comparative advantages, while at the same time being guided by the same goal, we must act to strengthen the virtuous circle of good governance, security, peace and development. In that regard, I commend the vital work of the Peacebuilding

Commission, which is effectively helping many countries in post-conflict situations in the subregion.

We must be even more determined in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda and the youth, peace and security agenda. Although more than 50 per cent of voters in the subregion are women, their meaningful presence in decision-making bodies has been slow to materialize, while, however, it must be acknowledged that several countries have adopted anti-discrimination legislation for elected positions, including through quota and parity laws.

In the same regard, most countries in the region currently have national action plans for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). However, members will agree with me that, 21 years after the Council's adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), greater political will, reflected among other things in the financing of those action plans from national budgets, is needed more than ever.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Annadif for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): It is my honour to deliver this statement behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Gabon, Kenya and my own country, Ghana.

Let me begin by thanking Mr. Annadif Khatir Mahamat Saleh, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, for his briefing to the Council. I welcome his continuing commitment to utilize the good offices of the Secretary-General in helping to consolidate peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel region.

We also welcome the participation in this meeting of Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as Ms. Cécile Thiombiano Yougbaré, who spoke on behalf of the People's Coalition for the Sahel, and commend them for their unique perspectives.

While welcoming the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel (S/2021/1091), we want to underscore the importance of preventive diplomacy in the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and believe that enhanced preventive

diplomacy engagement in the region would help achieve even broader outcomes. In that context, we acknowledge the progress made since the previous report to the Council (S/2021/612) in the consolidation of democracy in Cabo Verde and the Gambia through the recent successful holding of their periodic general elections. We nonetheless note the persisting political, security and humanitarian challenges in some parts of West Africa and the Sahel and welcome the conciliatory gestures by the Presidents of Benin and Côte d'Ivoire, which contributed to the lowering of political tensions in those two countries. We also welcome the ongoing dialogue in Burkina Faso, Senegal and Togo aimed at building consensus on political and security matters.

In considering the report of the Secretary-General before us, there are three issues of concern that the members of the A3 want to highlight.

The first issue that is of paramount concern is the rollback of the democratic values and constitutional culture of West Africa and the Sahel through the unconstitutional change of Governments that first occurred in Mali, twice, and then in Guinea. The political situation in Mali and Guinea are contrary to the governance architecture of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as expressed in the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and constitutes a sources of division and instability in those two countries, with implications for the entire region. The prevailing situation does not reflect the political aspirations of the people in those two countries. Indeed, the people of West Africa and the Sahel, from their now distant history of coup d'états, have come to a clear conclusion that these unacceptable assaults on democratic governance have not served them well.

We therefore welcome the determination of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS to ensure an expedited transition to constitutional rule in those countries and to further reinforce democratic values and constitutional culture in West Africa and the Sahel. We are concerned by the delays in the transition processes in Mali and by the absence of a road map for an election and the failure to set up a National Transition Council in Guinea, which would enable the peoples of those two countries to determine who their leaders should be. In this regard, we call on the Council to extend its full support for the measures announced at the just-ended extraordinary meeting of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS held in Accra, Ghana, on Sunday 9 January 2022.

In the case of Mali, the Authority of ECOWAS finds unacceptable the proposal by the authorities in Mali to extend the transition to five years and has therefore applied new and additional diplomatic, economic and financial measures in conformity with Community protocols. These measures include closure of land and air borders between ECOWAS member countries and Mali; suspension of all commercial and financial transactions between ECOWAS member States and Mali, with the exception of essential listed products; freezing of assets of the Republic of Mali in ECOWAS Central Banks; freezing of assets of the Malian State and all State enterprises and parastatal institutions in commercial banks; and suspension of Mali from all financial assistance from and transactions with all ECOWAS financial institutions. As difficult as it is for the Authority of ECOWAS to impose them, these sanctions have been deemed necessary to facilitate the process of a return of constitutional order in Mali.

On Guinea, the A3 considers the word of the Guinean junta, in the face of a lack of transition road map, not to provide any assurance of a commitment to restoring constitutional order. We therefore call on the Guinean authorities to work with ECOWAS to establish the National Transition Council, which is a prerequisite for the development of a transition road map. We welcome the decision of ECOWAS to field a mission to Conakry to discuss the transition process with the transition authorities.

Secondly, the deteriorating security situation in the region, characterized by the recurrence of terrorist attacks in a number of countries there, including in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, and the expansion of attacks in the coastal countries, is worrying. We therefore reiterate the Security Council's call for the Secretary-General to leverage existing United Nations initiatives and mechanisms for integrated and cross-pillar actions, with a view to initiating projects specifically dedicated to stemming intercommunal violence, in close coordination with the African Union (AU), including its Mission for Mali and the Sahel.

In anticipation of the Libya elections, we support the AU's call for cooperation between key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the withdrawal plan for foreign forces, in order to ensure that their withdrawal does not adversely impact the stability in the region. We welcome the decision by the Authority to immediately activate the ECOWAS Standby Force,

to be prepared for any eventuality, on account of the challenges of the transition in Mali.

We remain concerned by the projected nexus between maritime criminal networks and land-based terrorist groups in the region. We therefore encourage urgent support for the full operationalization of the entire ECOWAS maritime security architecture. In this regard, we welcome the discussions that are being initiated in the Council on maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, which we believe will help strengthen multilateral efforts in addressing the menace in the region. We count on the support and cooperation of Council members in this process.

We urge for real action to be taken in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration that is designed to be responsive to the recruits of groups with extremist ideologies. It is required to address the threat posed by both signatory groups and non-signatory armed groups. We also call on all actors in the region, and globally, to take concerted action to undermine the criminal economies that incentivize and enable illegal armed groups to operate effectively. Taking deliberate, and aggressive actions against transnational crime is key to the stabilization of the region.

We reiterate our support for the inclusion of climate-induced security threats in the UNOWAS mandate and believe that it will complement efforts aimed at implementing commitments in such regional initiatives as the recently adopted ECOWAS declaration on climate change and the other 15 initiatives and actions being undertaken in the region to strengthen climate governance. We believe that this will serve as a preventative mechanism to address potential conflicts, while reducing the risk of conflict relapse for countries in fragile situations. We also recognize the upcoming regional conference on climate change, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel, to be held in the first quarter of 2022, which we believe will push the process forward in addressing the issue in the region.

Thirdly, we are concerned by the humanitarian impact of the conflict situation in the region, including such factors as terrorism, armed banditry, farmer/herder clashes and natural disasters. The heightened impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on the socioeconomic conditions of the peoples in the region poses additional challenges to the stability of the region. We therefore urge vaccine equity and justice and note the funding support the ECOWAS Commission requires

from the international community and donor partners to strengthen humanitarian interventions focusing on building community resilience and recovery.

While welcoming investment in military capabilities and in such areas as border management and intelligence-sharing to help in early detection to better manage the instability in the region, we hold the view that these investments are only rudimentary in the fight against terrorism and the myriad challenges in the region. New and additional investment is required in the region to address the root causes of the persisting challenges, particularly in addressing governance and development deficits, with a prioritization of women and youth in decision-making processes. In this regard, we call for support for comprehensive approaches by States of the region and international partners, including through the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the priority investment plan of the Group of Five for the Sahel, all of which will help improve the situation in West Africa and the Sahel.

Finally, we also call for support for the draft presidential statement on UNOWAS that will soon be initiated in the Council.

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif for his truly comprehensive and frank assessment of developments over the past six months and for stewarding the vital work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in what are clearly very challenging times. I also want to thank both Ms. Waly and Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré for their powerful accounts of what are the considerable challenges faced regionally on the ground at present.

Despite the recent progress and welcome developments in Cabo Verde and the Gambia in particular, the fact is that the security and stability situation in the region remains out of reach for too many. It is not hard to come by inspirational actions and examples. Indeed, the perseverance of the citizens and civil society organizations of West Africa in such challenging circumstances is a clear sign of their overall commitment to progress. However, such progress can be achieved only through strong and inclusive democratic governance, effective State institutions, the promotion and protection of human rights and adherence to the principles of transparency and accountability.

Political will is fundamental to progress. In that regard, I want to say that Ireland fully supports the

conclusions concerning Mali that were reached at yesterday's Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit. As we meet, we know that the situation in Mali is frankly at a critical juncture, and we also know that Mali itself and its situation are critical to security and progress more broadly in the region. Ireland unequivocally supports ECOWAS actions and welcomes its leadership related to recent events, which places citizens at the heart of its decisions.

Ireland condemns the litany of horrific attacks against civilians and peacekeepers that have typified this reporting period, and we remain concerned about the continued pattern of violence in the region. The consequences of such violence are manifold and, as we know, impact disproportionately those who are vulnerable — often, women and girls. We are also concerned about the increasing socioeconomic inequality compounded by the coronavirus disease pandemic and the severe humanitarian situation, particularly in relation to rising levels of food insecurity, displacement and reduced access to essential health services.

Ongoing challenges around humanitarian access are hampering the delivery of much-needed assistance to the most vulnerable at a really critical time. We therefore call for unimpeded humanitarian access for all who need it. We heard Mr. Annadif's very strong message just now on the scale of humanitarian need right across the region.

We are also concerned by the continued incidents of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, as Ms. Waly has highlighted this morning. We encourage progress on the operationalization of the interregional maritime security architecture.

We know that the humanitarian situation and, indeed, the security threats that we observe cannot be addressed properly without an understanding of their causes. I want to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for articulating the links between climate and security just now, which we know are critical in that regard. It is vital that the Council's efforts and the work of the Mission not be constrained by ignoring that reality.

The passage to a more prosperous future for the people of West Africa and the Sahel, and for women and young people in particular, can be achieved only when we acknowledge the impact of climate change and infuse that knowledge throughout our efforts.

Those who are most vulnerable are relying on us to do so, and we welcome what Mr. Annadif said in that regard this morning.

We also know that we need to prioritize and harness the power and potential of women and young people in the region. Women should be fully integrated into democratic decision-making at all levels. We are concerned with ensuring that women find their place in the room and at the table. I was very encouraged by the Special Representative's determination and message in that regard, too. We also wish to emphasize the importance of upholding the human rights of members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community.

A resurgent region requires an educated, secure and enabled citizenry. We call again for the protection of the most vulnerable and for their empowerment through full engagement in peacebuilding, political processes and civic engagement, including the right to peaceful assembly.

We know all too well the complex nature of the region's challenges. They are unique and fraught, though not insurmountable. A complex situation does not necessarily require a complex solution. The pathways forward are clear and I wish to once again express Ireland's belief that only an integrated and holistic approach to tackling the root causes of insecurity can lead to durable solutions. Joint cooperation across the region, intercommunal dialogue and human rights-centred approaches are key in addressing long-term security issues, conflict prevention and reconciliation. We strongly support the continued efforts of UNOWAS in that regard, as well as the leadership role that regional organizations such as ECOWAS are playing.

Finally, Ireland looks forward to the important negotiations on a presidential statement that will commence shortly and which we are delighted to co-chair alongside our Ghanaian colleagues. We hope that, once again, the Council will unite not only in its vision for the region but also in its unwavering support for the continued work of the mission, which remains of immense importance.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Representative Annadif, as well as the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Ms. Waly, for the information provided. I would also like to thank Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré for her remarks on behalf of

the People's Coalition for the Sahel and assure her that her heartfelt words were received loud and clear.

(*spoke in English*)

Allow me to make three brief points.

First, Albania would like to recognize the positive developments since the last United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) discussion (see S/PV.8814). Together with regional organizations — first and foremost the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) — UNOWAS continues to play a crucial role in promoting peace and stability in the region. The presidential elections held in October in Cabo Verde and in The Gambia in December were positive steps. We encourage UNOWAS to support the countries of the region so as to best prepare for the upcoming elections and strengthen the security situation on the ground. We commend the democratic progress made in the Niger and its Government's commitment to addressing the deteriorating situation and increasing access to education, particularly for girls.

Unfortunately, in the rest of the Sahel the situation is grim. We have seen the closure of thousands of schools, leaving more than 13 million children without access to education — once again, especially girls. It is a trend that needs to be reversed without delay. Now more than ever, we must invest in women as central figures of local communities and drivers of positive and unifying narratives within societies. We commend the Special Representative for his focus on resolution 1325 (2000).

We praise the UNOWAS training delivered to women and young people on political participation, but we must see genuine political will and commitment on the part of local Governments. We concur with the Secretary-General's deep concerns regarding unconstitutional extensions of mandates and coups d'états in the region, risking democratic backsliding. We call on stakeholders in Mali and Guinea to ensure a transition of power to elected civilians and a return to constitutional order in a timely manner. The decisions taken yesterday by ECOWAS on the junta in Mali are yet another testament to the acute need to stay firm and to increase pressure on the military establishment to reverse its course.

Secondly, the security situation in the Sahel region remains extremely concerning. Despite all efforts, we have seen a severe and dangerous expansion of terrorism and an increasing number of terrorist attacks. The threat

from violent extremist groups clearly indicates the need to intensify the international community's engagement in and support for regional responses. We condemn in the strongest terms the recent attacks that led to the death of peacekeepers and defenceless civilians.

The security situation in the Sahel bears an impact on the whole region, the entire continent and far beyond, given its geographic position connecting sub-Saharan Africa to the Mediterranean basin.

While we stress the positive examples of African ownership, more work lies ahead. We are facing a serious and rapidly evolving threat heightened by large and porous borders, the extensive traditional cross-border movement of people, a lack of full institutional capacities, and the confluence of criminal and terrorist activities and organizations, including extensive drug trafficking, as Ms. Waly mentioned. We cannot and must not let our guard down.

Similarly, as also mentioned by Ms. Waly, the Gulf of Guinea remains a persistently challenging area in terms of piracy and armed robbery beyond the coast. Albania welcomes further discussions and supports regional efforts in that respect.

We strongly believe that peace and security issues must be addressed through a multidimensional and inclusive approach that spans the development, political, security, justice and human rights dimensions. I echo the words of my Irish colleague in saying that stability cannot be achieved or sustained without such a comprehensive approach.

Thirdly, the effects of climate change on peace are all the more apparent in the Sahel region, with climate change depriving people of their livelihoods and, in turn, exacerbating intercommunal violence and instability. We must recognize the challenges of climate change and the threat it poses to peace and security and take the necessary steps.

Let me conclude by reiterating that Albania stands ready to support UNOWAS and the Special Representative in strengthening its efforts toward democratic consolidation and consensus throughout West Africa and the Sahel region.

**Mr. De Souza Monteiro** (Brazil): I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the latest developments in the region (S/2021/1091), as well as Special Representative Annadif for the insights and measures undertaken by the United Nations Office

for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in support of West African States. I would also like to thank Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly and Ms. Cécile Thiombiano Yougbaré for their important remarks on the challenges faced in the field of security in the region.

Brazil welcomes the resumption of activities and progress made within the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission regarding demarcation and also the peaceful and orderly electoral processes held in Cabo Verde and The Gambia, since inclusivity and sustained peace greatly derive from democratic practices. In addition, we would like to commend the Gambian authorities for the outstanding work carried out by the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. We hope their accomplishments can be a source of inspiration.

While some positive developments have taken place in the countries covered by UNOWAS, plenty of work remains to be done at the political, humanitarian and security levels. In that regard, we endorse the Secretary-General's remarks related to Guinea-Bissau about the need to implement the institutional reforms outlined in the 2016 Conakry Agreement on the Implementation of the Economic Community of West African States Road Map for the Resolution of the Political Crisis in Guinea-Bissau. Brazil also encourages the Bissau-Guinean authorities to complete a consensus-based constitutional reform and reiterates its commitment to fully supporting the country's political stabilization process through the work of the Peacebuilding Commission Guinea-Bissau configuration, which we have the honour to chair. We are looking forward to continuing a fruitful dialogue with Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif and national actors on this matter.

The humanitarian situation in the Economic Community of West African States area is of great concern to us, and Brazil has been working closely with its African partners to multiply South-South cooperation agreements in order to address challenges in the health and food security fields.

Security in the Western African region is a critical issue both on land and at sea. Brazil welcomes the efforts of UNOWAS to implement the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. In the face of the threat of the expansion of terrorist groups from the Sahel to coastal States in West Africa, we commend the countries in the subregion for their commitment to cross-border cooperation and information-sharing and

encourage UNOWAS to support them. Moreover, Brazil has been paying increased attention to the international security implications of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea, which remains the world's piracy hotspot, even though the data available for 2021 shows a reduction in the rates of such crimes in the region.

As the States of the Gulf of Guinea bear the primary responsibility to counter piracy and armed robbery in the region, modalities for regional cooperation and naval capacity-building are key in addressing this complex challenge. I would like to recognize, in particular, the fundamental importance of the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Safety and Security in promoting regional coordination to counter piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. The Yaoundé Architecture brings together key regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic Community of West African States and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Additional support for countries and regional organizations in the Gulf of Guinea could help strengthen their ongoing counter-piracy efforts.

It is important to recognize that piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea have been causing financial hardship for the whole region through disruptions to shipping and international trade, loss of Government revenues, impacts on the security of seafarers and fishers, and inefficiencies in transportation. The costs of piracy also shift resources that might otherwise be used for the development and security of the region, including in addressing other transnational organized crimes.

The international community must acknowledge the complexity of piracy and deal with its various aspects in a comprehensive and integrated manner, starting with its root causes, usually associated with the lack of economic opportunities and extreme poverty. In this context, the Peacebuilding Commission could provide important inputs to consolidate peace in and around the Gulf of Guinea and integrate strategies to address the root causes of piracy on land.

As a member of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic, Brazil stands ready to engage actively in the Security Council to strengthen the ongoing regional counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Guinea, including through a new resolution on this matter.

**Mr. Dai Bing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Annadif and Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Waly for their briefings. I also listened attentively to the statement made by Ms. Cécile Thiombiano Yougbaré.

Since last year, the countries of West Africa and the Sahel have worked actively to fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, maintain political stability and restore economic development. Special Representative Annadif is actively fulfilling his mandate and has played an active role in closely cooperating with West African countries and subregional organizations.

In the current situation, the region continues to face many difficulties and challenges. The international community should increase its support in the following areas.

First, the international community should step up its support for the continued maintenance of stability. Late last year, Cabo Verde and The Gambia successfully held their general elections. Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Togo promoted political dialogue and reconciliation, giving new impetus to maintaining overall stability and development. Mali and Guinea are in a critical period of political transition. The international community should support the relevant countries in resolving their differences through dialogue; promote political transition, peaceful reconciliation and preparations for general elections in the light of their national conditions and within their constitutional frameworks; and strive to maintain stability and eliminate the root causes of conflict.

There has been an increase in protests in Liberia and the public security situation is grim. The international community should pay greater attention to that and guard against any threats. China will continue to support the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union in their mediation efforts and assist regional countries in seeking development partners, in line with their own national conditions.

Secondly, the international community should increase its support for uniting against terrorism. Terrorist forces are rampant in Mali, Burkina Faso, the Niger, Nigeria and other countries, and are gradually spreading to the southern coastal areas of the Gulf of Guinea. They are conducting cross-border activities and frequently carry out attacks, causing heavy casualties and threatening security and

stability. The international community should support regional countries in strengthening counter-terrorism capacity-building and provide more support by funding equipment and logistical supplies through multilateral and bilateral channels.

It is necessary to ensure respect for the countries concerned in implementing their foreign security cooperation according to their own needs and to strengthen the coordination of counter-terrorism operations and information-sharing to strive for synergy. Through measures such as deradicalization, we should eliminate the root causes of conflict, carry out vocational education and training and community correction, address youth education and employment, and prevent youth and even children from being recruited by terrorist forces.

Thirdly, the international community should step up its support for the strengthening of maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea. In recent years, the problem of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea has become more prominent and piracy more frequent, which seriously threatens the security and stability of coastal countries and the livelihood of the people there, impacting international shipping and trade and the regional economy. On the basis of respect for the sovereignty and leadership of coastal countries, it is necessary to help regional countries strengthen their anti-piracy capacity-building, carry out training of maritime security forces and improve joint law enforcement surveillance and other operational capabilities. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and other relevant United Nations agencies should support the building of regional anti-piracy mechanisms to ensure their comprehensive, effective and sustainable operation. We can learn from the existing successful experiences and explore measures to step up the fight against piracy on the basis of full consultation with coastal countries.

China has taken note that Norway and Ghana have put forward a draft resolution on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. We will constructively participate in the relevant consultations and contribute to supporting regional maritime security cooperation.

Fourthly, the international community should increase its support to ensure access to vaccines for countries in the region. Recently, there has been a surge in coronavirus disease cases in West African countries. The situation does not allow for optimism.

The rapid spread of the Omicron variant highlights the imbalance in vaccine distribution.

It is necessary to continue to support countries of the region to fight against the pandemic, increase assistance, give early access to safe, affordable vaccines, promote exemptions to vaccine manufacturers' exercise of intellectual property rights, and support local vaccine production. China will comprehensively implement the outcome of the eighth ministerial meeting of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, increase vaccine assistance to Africa and make greater contributions to fighting the pandemic in the region.

A few days ago, State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China, Mr. Wang Yi, visited Africa, continuing the tradition of 32 years of Africa being the Chinese Foreign Minister's first foreign visit of the year. In this new year, China will work with the international community and make greater contributions to the stability, development and prosperity of the countries in the region.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Annadif, Ms. Waly and Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré for their briefings.

I would like to address three points — first, the worsening security situation in the Sahel, which is threatening all of West Africa. The terrorist threat is now affecting coastal countries, with, for the first time, three attacks against defence and security forces in Benin. Violence against civilians continues in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. We express our condolences to the families of the victims and to the countries affected.

This situation requires a response. We must equip the countries of the region to fight terrorism. The Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel must be supported in a predictable and sustainable manner. We remain convinced that a United Nations support office is the best mechanism to achieve this end. We also encourage cooperation between coastal countries and the countries of the Sahel. The Accra Initiative is promising. We welcome the joint military operation carried out in this framework in November by Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Togo.

France will continue its security support to the Sahel countries, in coordination with its European partners, several of which are participating in Task Force Takuba. This is a long-term commitment, whose objectives have been jointly defined with the

Sahel countries and clearly set forth. In contrast, we condemn the ongoing deployment on Malian territory of Wagner Group mercenaries, who are well known for threatening civilians, looting resources and violating international law and the sovereignty of States. This can only contribute to the further destabilization of the Sahel.

Beyond the Sahel, France is concerned about maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. We support regional initiatives to fight piracy within the framework of the Yaoundé Architecture. We are conducting maritime exercises with several African countries and participating in the European Union's coordinated maritime presences concept, which strengthens the effectiveness of European efforts in the area and supports coastal countries.

My second point concerns development programmes, which must go hand in hand with security responses. We support the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, but the strategy must not be limited to holding meetings or workshops. On the contrary, it must implement concrete and operational programmes. It is also imperative that the States of the Sahel work to restore trust with their populations and improve their governance. We must also take into account the effects of climate change and its consequences for security and conflict prevention.

My last point concerns the political situation. We welcome the holding of presidential elections in Cabo Verde on 17 October 17 and in the Gambia on 4 December. With regard to Guinea, France notes that the transitional authorities have given the first signs of progress, in the appointment of a civilian prime minister and the formation of an inclusive transitional Government. Like the European Union, France, in collaboration with its partners, is ready to support the transition process. But we remain vigilant and await the rapid publication of the transition road map requested by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the establishment of the National Transition Council.

In contrast, France remains gravely concerned by the failure of the transitional authorities in Mali to respect their commitments to returning to constitutional order in accordance with the timetable set out in the Transition Charter and endorsed by the Security Council. The Council will have the opportunity to return to this issue tomorrow during the meeting devoted

to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. But I would like to reiterate our full support for the efforts of ECOWAS, which met yesterday and adopted new sanctions against the transitional authorities in Mali, who have once again failed to comply with the demands of ECOWAS and with their own commitments.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Special Representative Annadif, Executive Director Waly and Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré for their briefings and for their work.

Let me start on the topic of politics by welcoming the peaceful election in the Gambia in December. This was an example of West African democracy in action. However, the United Kingdom remains concerned by ongoing transition challenges, including in Mali and Guinea. We encourage the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to continue its good-offices role in support of the upcoming local elections in Senegal, Sierra Leone and the Gambia, as well as in the preparations for the Nigerian elections in 2023.

We will have the opportunity to discuss Mali in more detail tomorrow, but the United Kingdom shares the concerns set out by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) this weekend, by Ghana on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Gabon, Ghana and Kenya — and by others, at the proposal of the Malian transitional authorities to postpone elections by up to five years. We will continue working with ECOWAS, UNOWAS, the Security Council and the international community to hold the transitional authorities to their commitments.

More importantly, on security, the United Kingdom remains concerned by the deteriorating situation across the Sahel. The prevalence of conflict and violent attacks in the tri-border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger is having a tangible impact on security across the West Africa region — most recently the deadly attack in northern Benin. This conflict is driving an alarmingly high level of humanitarian need and severe food insecurity, compounded by the continued impacts of the coronavirus disease. And, as others in the Council have said, climate change is also a driver of insecurity in this region. With these interconnected challenges facing this region, we welcome the continued implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel

and the close engagement of UNOWAS with the region and with regional bodies.

With regard to the Lake Chad basin, ongoing conflict involving extremist groups in north-eastern Nigeria and the wider Basin region also remains deeply concerning. The United Kingdom remains committed to working alongside regional and international actors to support better cross-border efforts to respond to the conflict and tackle the ongoing terrorist threat.

In closing, it is clear that a holistic and integrated approach is needed to address the interconnected challenges in the region. In this regard, the United Kingdom supports wider United Nations integration and coherence in the region, including greater alignment between the work of UNOWAS and the United Nations country teams. National security efforts need to be joined up with the efforts being made by wider development partners, United Nations agencies and the Peacebuilding Commission to help tackle the root causes and drivers of conflict and to help build social cohesion, good governance and open, inclusive societies.

**Mrs. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Khatir Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, for his valuable briefing. The United Arab Emirates affirms its support for his good offices in the region. We also thank Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for her briefing. We have also listened carefully to Ms. Cécile Thiombiano Yougbaré from the People's Coalition for the Sahel.

West Africa and the Sahel have recently witnessed several positive developments, which must be built upon, including progress made in various political processes. We thank the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) for its efforts in that regard. Nevertheless, the region still suffers from a number of difficult and complicated challenges that require a comprehensive and concerted approach. National, regional and international efforts notwithstanding, more work remains to be done to promote unity of vision in order to set the region on the path to recovery, security and stability.

Having said that, I would like to focus on the following issues.

First, the deteriorating fragile security situation in West Africa and the Sahel represents a source of concern for the international community. In that context, we must continue our efforts to combat terrorist groups in those areas, especially Da'esh and Boko Haram, as they take advantage of the political vacuum and the deteriorating social and economic conditions that provide an environment conducive to their terrorist activities.

Meanwhile, we must pay special attention to the growing link between organized crime and terrorism. In that regard, we commend the efforts made by the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), supported by my country, to combat terrorism and organized crime in the region.

The persistent acts of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea threaten international navigation, security and the sustainable development of neighbouring countries. In that connection, we support strengthened cooperation at the international, regional and subregional levels in order to counter maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, including by enhancing States' capabilities in the region.

Security and stability both require UNOWAS to continue strengthening and coordinating regional and international efforts to address cross-border challenges in the region. In addition to adopting a regional approach, it is of paramount importance to understand the country-specific contexts, as that would help build countries' capabilities to better meet the challenges they are facing.

Secondly, my country stresses the importance of providing urgently needed humanitarian aid to countries in West Africa and the Sahel, and attaches particular importance to the problem of food insecurity currently affecting 20 million people in the region. We must work towards the provision of vaccines and the medical equipment necessary to confront the coronavirus disease pandemic.

The United Arab Emirates, for its part, continues to provide development and humanitarian assistance to the countries of the Sahel, amounting to approximately \$240 million from 2016 to 2020. My country has also provided more than 69 tons of medical aid to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

Thirdly, climate change is one of the most important challenges facing West Africa and the Sahel, especially

given its impact on the security and humanitarian situation there. This issue should therefore be adequately addressed in our discussion. Integrated strategies and programmes should be developed to address this phenomenon and its repercussions on West Africa and the Sahel. That will eventually contribute to ensuring food and water security for the region's population.

Lastly, with regard to the efforts of UNOWAS to support women's participation in political and security processes in the region, we welcome the adoption of national plans by most countries of the region in order to achieve those goals. We look forward to seeing greater effort in that connection.

Similarly, initiatives to empower young people in the region must continue. The recent annual West African and Sahel Youth Forum emphasized the important role of young men and women in building peaceful societies.

In conclusion, we reiterate our support for UNOWAS and its implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. We also commend the tireless efforts made by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States to address the challenges in the region.

**Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the three briefers for their presentations.

In the complex context that characterizes the region of West Africa and the Sahel, I will limit this intervention to two issues that I believe are central.

First, Mexico welcomes the successful elections in Cabo Verde and the Gambia, as well as the progress of political dialogue initiatives in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, to mention just a few. We also welcome the preparation of elections in Senegal. Those developments demonstrate that political dialogue and democratic governance are key to resolving the complex problems affecting the region. However, we are deeply concerned about the recent threats to democracy and the rule of law in Guinea and Mali. Mexico backs the decisions of the Economic Community of West African States and underscores the responsibility that, ultimately, falls to the Security Council if regional efforts come to naught.

Through its good offices and preventive diplomacy, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the

Sahel (UNOWAS) plays a critical role in supporting the institution-building process in the region, which should go hand in hand with military cooperation initiatives.

Indeed, without the necessary reforms in governance and economic development and without strengthening State and constitutional order, violence fuelled by extremist groups, organized crime, self-defence militias and intercommunal rivalries will continue to undermine security efforts. We therefore need more sweeping and far-reaching reforms.

Secondly, we insist on the need to move towards a strategy that curbs illegal arms trafficking, specifically with regard to small arms and light weapons. The weapons entering and circulating illegally in the region increase the lethality of conflicts, represent a constant threat to the human rights of the population and are, unfortunately, behind the vast majority of attacks against civilians.

In accordance with resolution 2616 (2021), adopted in December, Mexico believes that UNOWAS can contribute to harmonizing current efforts in each country and to coordinating a regional vision to effectively combat illicit arms trafficking, inter alia by attacking its financing model and its sources of supply. We hope that the presidential statement on this issue will include that suggestion and will be reflected in what we expect UNOWAS to do in the coming months. As was said earlier, that means a more operational mandate that is less focused on solely holding conferences and organizing workshops.

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): My thanks go to Special Representative Annadif and Executive Director Waly for their briefings. I also especially thank Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré for her compelling and powerful presentation. The recommendations that she and the People's Coalition for the Sahel made last year and that she underscored today certainly will influence the United States Government's approach to the challenges we face in the Sahel. I therefore thank her for that.

The United States reiterates our appreciation for the continued efforts of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to advance the Security Council's aim of a stable and secure Sahel region, which UNOWAS does by working to deepen democratic processes, bolster the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and

other subregional institutions and engage Governments and civil society actors.

Like other speakers today, the United States also welcomes more civil society participation in the political life of the Sahel region. The United States therefore continues to encourage civic engagement in the many upcoming elections across the region, consistent with necessary public health precautions. We join others in welcoming last year's free, fair and transparent election processes that took place in Cabo Verde and The Gambia. The United States applauds the people of both those countries for making their voices heard through the ballot box as both countries move towards peaceful, democratic consolidation. Like others, we are deeply concerned about the lack of progress in Mali. We urge the Malian transitional authorities to return to democracy in a timely fashion. We note the decision taken by ECOWAS yesterday with regard to additional sanctions, which we are reviewing, and look forward to further discussion in the Security Council this week.

We condemn the September 2021 coup in Guinea and urge the transition Government there to rapidly hold elections and return the country to constitutional, civilian-led democracy.

The United States joins others in being gravely concerned about the terrorist violence against civilians and security forces that is occurring across the Sahel and expanding into coastal West Africa. That includes instability exacerbated by ongoing conflicts and the increased flow of arms and mercenary groups that threaten the peace and stability of the region. We support the efforts of the region to counter terrorism and promote stability through holistic strategies that address the underlying drivers of conflict.

Governments undermine their own effectiveness and credibility when State officials, particularly the security forces that are charged with protecting their own populations, engage in human rights violations. We urge all parties to armed conflict to grant greater access for humanitarian aid organizations and to respect the applicable international law obligations, including those under international humanitarian law.

The United States continues to support the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and regional initiatives in various Sahel countries to strengthen peace and security infrastructure that can prevent violence at the national and community levels. The inclusion of civil society organizations promotes the

development of community-led solutions to counter attacks and violence proactively. UNOWAS work with Governments in West Africa and the Sahel region to develop a civilian-led joint project to address local conflicts is critical, we believe, to the stability of the region.

We applaud the partnership among UNOWAS, the Regional Office for West and Central Africa of the International Organization for Migration, the Regional Collaboration Centre of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Environment Programme to launch a regional working group to address the adverse effects of climate change on security and development in West Africa.

Finally, the United States also continues to work with the Global Coalition to Defeat Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), which remains engaged in West Africa and the Sahel. The Coalition welcomed Burkina Faso as its eighty-fourth member in late 2021. The Coalition also announced the formation of the Africa Focus Group last month, which seeks to enhance African Coalition members' civilian-led counter-terrorism capabilities, which can counter ISIS-affiliated and other transnational terrorist groups. The Africa Focus Group has an initial prioritization on border security, battlefield evidence protection and biometric enrolment of terrorist suspects.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Mahamat Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) for his briefing. Russia welcomes his efforts to help the countries of West Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin overcome current difficulties. There is no question that the results of UNOWAS work are highly commendable.

We share the concerns about the dangerous challenges facing many countries in West Africa, especially those in the Sahel. Terrorist activities, interethnic and intercommunal conflicts, organized crime and drug trafficking continue unabated in the region. Throughout the second half of 2021, we received tragic reports of the loss of life in deadly terrorist attacks and clashes with militants. We express our support for all those people who are engaged in the difficult fight against terrorism in the region.

The humanitarian situation remains extremely challenging. The number of internally displaced

persons and people in need of food aid has grown dramatically. Many schools and medical facilities have been closed. All of that calls for the countries of the region, especially in the Sahel, to redouble their efforts to restore effective State control and governance.

With regard to the situation in Mali, we believe that the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, the eradication of terrorism and the improvement of the socioeconomic situation depend on internal political stability. Further political upheavals could lead the country into a dead end. Let us give the respect due our Malian colleagues and support their understandable efforts to establish order within their own country and rely on the partners they deem most appropriate to that end. Any double standard used to evaluate the situation or attempt to act on unverified information — of which, unfortunately, we heard today — is completely unacceptable and unworthy of any self-respecting State.

The obligations of the transitional authorities in Mali to restore constitutional order must be fulfilled while keeping the realities on the ground in mind. Of course, we would like to see the elections held on time. We understand, however, the difficulties faced by the Malian authorities in preparing for the elections. We agree that, without the return of State control to many parts of the country, it will be difficult to consider the results of the elections as credible. That would lead directly to further political destabilization, as happened in Mali after last year's elections.

Returning to the subject of UNOWAS, we are convinced that the Office faces a range of extensive and complex tasks: helping resolve regional crises, participating in political mediation, providing assistance in strengthening State institutions, implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and carrying out coordination functions with other United Nations entities on the ground. The effectiveness of the Office will depend directly on how well it cooperates with other regional organizations, such as the African Union, ECOWAS, the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. UNOWAS cooperation with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa is required on certain issues, including combating piracy, the Lake Chad basin and the demarcation of the Cameroon-Nigerian border.

After the closure of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau in 2020, the

monitoring of events in that country fell under the purview of UNOWAS. In that context, we believe that maintaining Security Council sanctions against Guinea-Bissau under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which provides for such sanctions only where there is a threat to international peace and security, makes no sense whatsoever. We call for those sanctions to be removed.

**Mr. Tirumurti** (India): At the outset, I thank Special Representative Annadif for briefing us on the latest developments in the West Africa region. I also thank Ms. Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré of Médecins du Monde for their insights.

The countries of the region have remained steadfast in pursuing democratic traditions, despite a few aberrations. That positive trend is evident in the successful and peaceful elections in Cabo Verde and The Gambia held in October and December respectively. We congratulate the people of The Gambia and Cabo Verde for reposing faith in democratic values. India also extends felicitations to the elected leaders. We need to recognize and unequivocally support countries pursuing the democratic path.

However, democracy has witnessed a setback in Guinea with the coup d'état in September. Despite the efforts made by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), there has been no progress towards the restoration of democratic order. In Mali, the implementation of the 18-month transition that was agreed initially by the Malian authorities remains uncertain.

In the current scenario, the role of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in preventive diplomacy, political mediation and facilitation has become even more important. The mission should remain focused on its mandate, work closely with national stakeholders and regional and subregional organizations, particularly ECOWAS, and continue assisting them in their efforts to address those challenges.

The security challenges in the Sahel have become alarming and the reasons are evident from the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/1091). Terrorist and extremist armed groups in the Liptako-Gourma region of Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso continue to demonstrate their capacity to mount large-scale coordinated attacks on civilians as well as security forces, leading to fatalities

and also driving displacement. The Lake Chad basin has been targeted primarily by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province.

The nexus among terrorists, criminals, drug traffickers and pirates continue to fuel instability and violence in those regions. Terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaida and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant continue to instrumentalize the religious and ethnic dimensions of the farmer-herder conflicts to their advantage.

While countries in the region have been confronting that challenge individually and collectively through mechanisms such as the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and the Multinational Joint Task Force, in order to be more effective those mechanisms urgently need financial resources and logistical support. We therefore support the call of the Secretary-General to ensure predictable and sustainable funding to regional security initiatives such as the G-5 Sahel Joint Force.

Acts of piracy and robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea, despite a decrease in the frequency of such incidents, remain a serious threat to seafarers. Several Indian sailors have also been victims of piracy and kidnappings. There is an urgent need to increase surveillance to ensure maritime security in the area through increased international collaboration.

Despite the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the countries of the region are showing positive economic growth. In that regard, the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel assumes significance. While implementing the Strategy, we believe that UNOWAS needs to focus on utilizing African capacities, products and services.

India attaches high importance to its relations with the West Africa region. Thus far, India has provided soft loans amounting to more than \$3.5 billion for projects in West Africa and Sahel. Under the ambit of the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund, we are also providing \$9 million for livelihood projects in nine West African countries. India has also established a robust security partnership with countries in the region. India remains committed to supporting countries in West Africa, including through capacity-building and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Norway.

I thank the briefers for their insights.

We thank Special Representative Annadif for his work as Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) on everything from elections to women and peace and security and for staying ahead of the curve on climate and security. We also share his concern about unconstitutional extensions of presidential mandates and coups d'état in the region and welcome his efforts to strengthen protocols on democracy and good governance.

We are pleased to see increased cooperation between UNOWAS and other key players, such as the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the critically important Economic Community of West African States, as we saw yesterday. In a situation where we see terrorism and other security and humanitarian challenges spreading across borders, cooperation is the master key to solutions. In that respect, we repeat our call for United Nations support to the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) Joint Force as a cross-border solution that must be in full compliance with international law, including international human rights law. We commend the G-5 Sahel for its plan of action on gender equality.

Secondly, as Executive Director Waly and others have said, maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea persists as a menace to the region and to seafarers who pass through. Almost all kidnappings at sea happen in the Gulf of Guinea. We agree with the Secretary-General in that Member States should collaborate urgently to address that issue.

Especially as we approach the 10-year anniversary of the Yaoundé Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of Central and West African States on Maritime Safety and Security in their Common Maritime Domain, it is appropriate to assess what is working and what can be improved. Therefore, and as our three African Security Council colleagues have already mentioned, we ask for members' cooperation towards the first Security Council resolution on the topic in 10 years.

Thirdly, as civil society so often does, Ms. Thiombiano Yougbaré and the People's Coalition for the Sahel have reminded us why we should think holistically. It is also clear that the protection of

civilians should be at the heart of all our efforts. What the People's Coalition for the Sahel appropriately call the four people's pillars, are fundamental to ensuring sustainable development and peace in people's lives.

In conclusion, 2022 should be a year for action. Stopping the disastrous spiral of the closures of schools would be a good place to start. Through resolution 2601 (2021), the Security Council has sent a clear

message that safe access to education provides a vital contribution to the achievement of international peace and security.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

*The meeting rose at noon.*