



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9238th meeting

Tuesday, 10 January 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Ishikane (Japan)

Members:

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| Albania | Ms. Dautllari |
| Brazil | Mr. De Almeida Filho |
| China | Mr. Dai Bing |
| Ecuador | Mr. Montalvo Sosa |
| France | Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault |
| Gabon | Mr. Biang |
| Ghana | Mr. Agyeman |
| Malta | Ms. Gatt |
| Mozambique | Mr. Afonso |
| Russian Federation | Ms. Evstigneeva |
| Switzerland | Mrs. Baeriswyl |
| United Arab Emirates | Ms. Shaheen |
| 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/2022/1019)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 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/2022/1019)

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: Ms. Giovanie Biha, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel; and His Excellency Mr. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/1019, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

I now give the floor to Ms. Biha.

Ms. Biha: I would like to express my best wishes to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I take this opportunity to wish a happy, prosperous and peaceful new year to all members of the Council.

I am honoured to present today the most recent report (S/2022/1019) of the Secretary-General on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel and the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

Despite efforts by national security forces and international partners, security has again deteriorated in large parts of the region. As a consequence, more than 10,000 schools across the Sahel have had to close, leaving millions of children unable to acquire the necessary skills to build their lives and their countries. That is in flagrant disregard of resolution 2601 (2021), which condemns attacks against schools and demands parties to conflict to safeguard the right to education. Moreover, nearly 7,000 health centres have been forced to shut down owing to the activities of armed groups,

violent extremists and criminal networks. Those non-State armed groups are fighting among themselves for supremacy and control of resources, pushing States to the margin and causing untold misery to millions of people who have had to leave their communities to seek safety.

Indeed, the central Sahel continues to face multidimensional challenges, unprecedented levels of security and humanitarian challenges and sociopolitical instability, further compounded by the impact of climate change, and food insecurity, which has been exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine. Against that backdrop, UNOWAS supports the efforts of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by the former President of the Niger, Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, to find more innovative solutions and generate national, regional and international commitment for change in the Sahel.

During the reporting period, countries along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea saw an increase in the number of attacks against their territories, threatening transport arteries to the landlocked countries further north. In that regard, I commend the commitment by leaders in the region to step up collective efforts to address insecurity under the Accra Initiative. A holistic approach is necessary, and the establishment of the Initiative's Joint Force is an important development in that regard. As UNOWAS is engaging closely with the Initiative's leadership and secretariat, I wish to call on all partners to support it decisively and in a coherent manner, learning from past experiences.

UNOWAS is working with national stakeholders and partners to promote political consensus and ensure a level playing field ahead of the elections scheduled for this year in the subregion. In Nigeria, UNOWAS has liaised with the presidential candidates and other stakeholders and witnessed the signing of a landmark peace accord among political parties. In Kaduna state, in December 2022, the Mission supported the first of six State-level stakeholder forums to promote peaceful elections. In Benin, peaceful parliamentary elections were held just two days ago.

UNOWAS has also been working with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations system in the region and the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, as well as Government institutions and communities, to contribute to conflict resolution at both the regional and local levels. In that context, a joint UNOWAS-United

Nations Office for Central Africa initiative brought together farmers and herders and local Governments from northern Benin with counterparts from West and Central Africa, national authorities, ECOWAS, donors, the Office of the Special Coordinator and other United Nations entities to take an in-depth look at the pitfalls and opportunities of settlement initiatives for herders. We discussed solutions that could benefit all communities while strengthening collaboration, trust and resilience against violent extremists trying to establish a foothold in the borderlands.

On another transversal issue, with the support of partners UNOWAS worked with young people and women's groups from the region to promote conflict-sensitive best practices on climate-change adaptation and brought the findings to a broader audience at the twenty-seventh Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Sharm el-Sheikh. Our intervention energized a new commitment from ECOWAS and the African Union to accelerating the implementation of the Great Green Wall initiative. In Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, peace caravans supported by the United Nations concluded their journey through those countries, providing spaces for effective intercommunal dialogue along the way.

(spoke in French)

We are pleased to note that thanks to the joint efforts of national actors, regional and international institutions, agreements have been reached on the length of the transitions in Burkina Faso and Guinea. UNOWAS will remain actively engaged in the monitoring and evaluation mechanism agreed between Burkina Faso and ECOWAS and in implementing the transition timeline in Guinea. The United Nations system should continue to support the countries concerned by focusing on addressing the grievances that led to their coups d'état. Among those urgent challenges, combating insecurity and scaling up the provision of humanitarian assistance to adequately meet the urgent, basic needs of communities are vital in a context where millions of innocent civilians are still under constant attack, in particular in Mali and Burkina Faso.

We commend the determination of the Gambian authorities, civil society and citizens to pursue the implementation of the recommendations made by the Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, and we call on partners to support the process, including through the international conference

to be held in Banjul in a few months. We are also pleased that several countries in the region have adopted new national legislation on gender parity with regard to women's participation in political decision-making, after years of sustained advocacy. In that regard, we hope legislators and other stakeholders in Nigeria and the Gambia will find consensus through dialogue and relaunch the legislative process on this important issue.

For its part, UNOWAS will continue to work with the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel to assess the effectiveness of the current approaches and find new ways to ensure that half of the region's population has a voice in the forums where decisions are made and budgets approved. I welcome the ongoing process to establish a forum for the Ministers of Justice of the ECOWAS countries, which could be a key tool for addressing the recurring allegations of the exploitation of the justice system in the region. Furthermore, as recommended by the regional colloquium on the reinforcement of democracy and good governance in West Africa organized by UNOWAS in September 2022, we will continue to work actively with relevant stakeholders on the process of revising the 2001 ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance with a view to strengthening democratic governance.

(spoke in English)

Despite the many challenges facing the countries of the region, especially in the Sahel, the region remains a land of immense opportunities. The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel has leveraged those opportunities through its three pillars on building resilience, promoting good governance and strengthening peace and security. I urge Council members to continue supporting the Strategy. I would like to take this opportunity to salute the enormous resilience of the population of the region, particularly the Sahelian people, who, faced with many challenges of unprecedented magnitude, continue to fight every day for a better future.

On behalf of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and ahead of the renewal of our current mandate, I would like to thank the Council for its continued support and guidance. In accordance with our mandate, we will continue to work together with our regional and international partners for the consolidation of peace, security and democracy in West Africa and the Sahel.

The President: I thank Ms. Biha for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Touray.

Mr. Touray: The opportunity to address the Security Council is both a pleasure and an honour, as it comes at a time when the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) seeks to invigorate and strengthen efforts to address the burgeoning challenges to human security in West Africa.

I would like to preface my statement with a word or two about the strategic direction we have taken since our assumption of office in July 2022. In essence, we have identified four strategic objectives for our four-year mandate. Generally referred to as the Commission's four-by-four, they are enhanced peace and security, deeper integration, good governance, and inclusive and sustainable development. In addition to those four strategic objectives, we have identified two key enablers — capable institutions and equitable partnerships. Our briefing to the Security Council this afternoon is therefore not out of context for us. It aligns with our first strategic objective, which is enhanced peace and security.

The sociopolitical and security situation in the West African region is seeing worsening violence, particularly in the Sahelo-Saharan region, with spillover into littoral States. Since 2009, and particularly 2012, the Lake Chad basin and the central Sahel have emerged as epicentres and incubators of terrorism and violent extremism — initially homegrown, in the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria, but steadily incorporated into the two global terrorist franchises, Al-Qaida and the Islamic State. Data emanating from our regional monitoring mechanism — ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network, or ECOWARN — indicates that terrorist attacks, which by contagion are now affecting coastal countries, have gradually increased over the years. The incident count of these terrorist attacks rose from approximately 1,271 in 2019 to 3,519 in 2022. The number of deaths from the attacks follows the same pattern, from 3,827 in 2019 to 6,492 in 2022. Abductions and forced disappearances have also increased significantly, from 312 in 2019 to 1,068 in 2022.

These violent incidents have contributed significantly towards the dire humanitarian consequences in some of our communities. According to the available data, over 1.8 million internally

displaced persons were registered in Burkina Faso alone as of 30 November 2022, and 60 per cent of these were children. And for the same period, nearly one million children were affected by the closure of 5,500 schools. Additionally, the number of food-insecure people in the ECOWAS region is close to 30 million.

We cannot make mention of the sociopolitical and security situation in our region without an emphasis on the recent spate of coups d'état in the region. Since August 2020, West Africa has experienced three successful military coups — in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso — and two repeat “coups within coups” — again in Mali and Burkina Faso — and at least three documented foiled coup attempts — in the Niger, Guinea-Bissau, and the Gambia. This phenomenon constitutes a major setback to the gains made in the democratic consolidation since the 1990s. But it has also ignited deep deliberations and galvanized leaders into action. For example, during its sixty-second ordinary session, held in December 2022, the Authority of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government restated its commitment to ensuring that all the three member States in transition must restore full constitutional order by 2024. The Authority instructed the Commission to urgently complete the review of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to further strengthen the Community's zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means. The Authority also decided to establish a regional force that will support member States in addressing challenges to constitutional order.

With regard to terrorism, the authority further instructed the full operationalization of the December 2019 ECOWAS 2020–2024 priority action plan to eradicate terrorism, including the resort to kinetic interventions by the ECOWAS Standby Force. It is in that context that the Chiefs of Defence staff met in Bissau on 18 December 2022 to assess the modalities for the operationalization of the decision taken by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government by 2024.

I am pleased to report that transition processes in three countries — Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea — are on course, and ECOWAS remains fully committed to accompanying the processes to the desired outcome of inclusive, transparent, free and fair elections. Beyond the three countries in transition, ECOWAS continues to support member States in the conduct of elections. Currently, preparations for upcoming elections this

year have seen the engagement of ECOWAS with key institutions and stakeholders in the various member States. These engagements cut across the strategic and technical levels.

I mentioned the importance that our management attaches to partnerships, especially equitable partnerships. It is important for us that our partners stay engaged in the region as a whole and in the Sahel in particular. No number of current difficulties should lead to our disengagement, particularly with regard to humanitarian support and efforts to strengthen the capacity of the State to play its rightful role across national territories.

It is in this period that I would like to salute the excellent working relationship ECOWAS enjoys with the United Nations, especially through the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). Allow me to register our appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Annadif Mahamat Saleh, the immediate past Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ms. Giovanie Biha, for the tremendous collaboration. Since 2021, ECOWAS and UNOWAS have undertaken many joint initiatives, including joint assessment missions to Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone and the Gambia to promote capacity-building and dialogue towards the peaceful holding of elections. The two institutions are currently working with critical stakeholders in Nigeria, including the electoral management body, political parties, candidates, security agents, the National Peace Committee, the media and traditional and religious leaders to ensure the transparency, inclusiveness and peacefulness of the pivotal general elections next month.

In addition, ECOWAS and UNOWAS have undertaken joint assessment and facilitation missions to countries-in-transition Guinea and Burkina Faso. Indeed, ECOWAS and UNOWAS have a unique opportunity to bring the collaboration to a higher level through innovative and creative joint interventions. First, based on our comparative advantages, we can initiate or strengthen support mechanisms to ensure that the electoral cycle that has just begun in the region — and which will see critical elections held in the next two years — produce credible and peaceful outcomes.

Secondly, the United Nations should enhance the frameworks for its support to counter terrorism

and violent extremism in the region through an incremental engagement to empower youth, countering misinformation and disinformation, promoting intercommunal dialogue and local infrastructures for peace, engaging more actively in counter-improvised-explosive-device and mine-clearance efforts, and rolling out projects for deradicalization, reconciliation and reintegration in the region.

Permit me to conclude by congratulating Japan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January and to thank it for the kind invitation to participate in today's meeting. I wish all of us a more peaceful and prosperous 2023.

The President: I thank Mr. Touray for his briefing.

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

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Gabon, Mozambique, and Ghana (A3).

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) (S/2022/1019) and take this opportunity to thank the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Annadif Mahamat Saleh, for his sterling performance and significant contribution in addressing the challenges of the region. While looking forward to the appointment of a substantive head of UNOWAS, we thank Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Giovanie Biha, the Officer in Charge, for her briefing and insightful perspectives as well as for her continued engagement with regional stakeholders. We also welcome the briefings made by Mr Omar Aliou Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). We further commend the Peacebuilding Commission for its forward-looking advisory note, which underscores the importance of an integrated and coherent United Nations system.

More than 20 years after its establishment, UNOWAS continues to make significant contributions to the peace and stability of West Africa and the Sahel region. Since the most recent briefing on UNOWAS to the Council in July (see S/PV.9086), we have seen useful progress in the consolidation of democracy in some countries of the region, observed the continuing effectiveness of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed

Commission and witnessed the reduction of maritime piracy incidents in the Gulf of Guinea.

However, we note persisting concerns about insecurity in some parts of the region, the stagnation of democratic practices in some countries and the challenging humanitarian situation in several societies. Those prevailing challenges, coupled with regional aspirations, require a concerted United Nations effort to pursue balanced actions for a resilient region. We therefore believe that the Office's mandate, which is up for renewal, remains relevant.

In addition, the A3 wishes to highlight some points on the political, security and humanitarian situations.

On the political situation, we welcome the diplomatic efforts that have enabled the release of the 46 Ivorian soldiers who were detained in Mali, thus putting an end to a diplomatic crisis between the two brotherly countries.

We note that the elections will be held in 10 countries of the region and are encouraged by the consolidation of democracy in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Cabo Verde and Benin, which two days ago concluded successful legislative elections. We look forward to successful general elections next month in Nigeria, the region's largest democracy. In that regard, we welcome the signing of a peace pledge by the presidential contenders and encourage a good-faith commitment by all stakeholders to peaceful elections.

We condemn all attempted coups in the region and continue to be concerned about the countries in transition. We encourage the restoration of constitutional order in the countries concerned, in accordance with the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. We recall the communiqués of the sixty-first and sixty-second ordinary sessions of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, urge adherence to the agreed electoral timetables for a definitive return to constitutional rule and note the need for sustained engagement for inclusivity and tolerance of political pluralism.

With regard to the security situation, the A3 remains deeply concerned about widespread insecurity in the Sahel and its potential spread to littoral countries. We note the adverse impact of terrorist incidents on civilian populations and the increasing use of improvised explosive devices, which also target peacekeepers and national security personnel. We express our deepest

condolences and sympathy to all the families of the victims of terrorism in the region.

We support the efforts of regional initiatives such as the Accra Initiative, the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force and welcome the Secretary-General's call on partners to increase their contributions to enhance the implementation of such regional arrangements, including the ECOWAS plan of action to combat terrorism for the period 2020–2024. We look forward to the upcoming report of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by former President Mahamadou Issoufou of the Niger, and hope that it will provide realistic recommendations that leverage the best elements of the existing regional initiatives and an enhanced unified regional force in a robust response to the growing incidence of terrorism in the region.

We reiterate our long-standing position that the question of adequate, predictable and sustainable funding for regional security initiatives that respond to threats to international peace and security is a pressing matter on which the Council must have a unified position. We urge continuing engagement on the spillover effect of the lingering crisis in Libya on the Sahel and the threat that the return of foreign terrorist fighters and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons pose to the region's stability. We similarly affirm the need for continuing attention on maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, even though coordinated actions are beginning to yield a downward trend in piracy incidents.

The humanitarian situation in the Sahel is worrisome. Approximately 6.3 million persons are displaced, and 11,000 schools are closed. The situation of insecurity and other aggravating factors, such as climate change and food insecurity, are worsened by violations of human rights in many contexts.

The frequency and severity of climate-related crises seem to be rising exponentially. Last year, we saw catastrophic droughts and floods, all of which are believed to have been exacerbated by climate change. We note the link between climate change and insecurity, resulting in increasingly stressed tensions and intercommunal clashes.

We urge support for humanitarian assistance and towards livelihood empowerment pipelines that leverage homegrown and regional initiatives such as

the Climate Responses to Sustaining Peace initiative launched at the just-ended twenty-seventh Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Egypt, as well as the Dakar Call to Action on Climate Change, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel.

Lastly, we re-emphasize the need to prioritize investment in addressing the root causes of instability in the region, including governance and development deficits. That would require adopting deliberate measures aimed at empowering young people and women to meaningfully participate in governance processes. We welcome the integration of the human security concerns of women and youth into the recently adopted 2022–2026 ECOWAS early warning and early response strategic plan and encourage further support for the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

Before concluding, let me convey our support for the efforts of the penholders to work on a presidential statement on UNOWAS with members of the Council. Such a statement, we believe, could boost the efforts of UNOWAS in dealing with the crises in the region.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the briefers for their valuable presentations. I would like to express our appreciation to the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, for guiding the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). We look forward to working with his successor upon appointment. We also thank Ms. Giovane Biha for her work as interim head of the Office.

Switzerland has a long-standing commitment to peace and development alongside the countries of the Sahel. Our priorities — the protection of civilians, sustainable peace and climate security — are at the heart of the Office's activities.

The people of West Africa and the Sahel face multiple challenges. They bear the cumulative burden of climate change, armed conflict, food insecurity and energy prices. While that is a heavy burden for everyone, it is particularly so for the vulnerable: 40 million children in the Sahel do not attend school, an alarming figure in the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/1019). The future of those children, especially that of girls, is at stake.

We cannot delay in helping those populations, especially the youth, in order to develop their potential and that of their region. Let me mention three concrete ways to do that.

First, it is essential to address the root causes of violent extremism and conflict in a holistic manner, as UNOWAS is doing and the Peacebuilding Commission recommends. That is essential in order to address the persistent insecurity in the region, including the terrorist threat in central Sahel and the risk of spillover to coastal countries. Counter-terrorism measures must comply with international law, including human rights and international humanitarian law. We also wish to emphasize the importance of the inclusion of, and respect for, human rights in the prevention of violent extremism. Their key role has been repeatedly emphasized during the regional conversations that UNOWAS and Switzerland have been organizing since 2016, the next edition of which is scheduled for the end of February in Dakar.

Secondly, on the political front, support for States in transition — in particular Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea — in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States must remain a priority. Switzerland underscores the importance of inclusive dialogue in those contexts and calls on all stakeholders to respect the constitutional order and the rule of law. We are encouraged by the peaceful elections in Senegal, the progress towards social cohesion and reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire and the advancement of transitional justice in the Gambia. At the same time, we regret the limited progress achieved in terms of women's representation and participation in political and decision-making processes. We encourage UNOWAS to continue to advocate for the full, equal and meaningful representation of women in the electoral processes scheduled for this year.

Finally, the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/1019) illustrates the multiple effects of climate change on living conditions, food security and conflict in West Africa and the Sahel. Helping communities adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change must be an integral part of the response to the region's challenges. In order to create local economic opportunities, Switzerland is making investments aimed at strengthening the resilience of the countries concerned and preserving their natural resources.

The Secretary-General's report is further evidence of the importance of UNOWAS in addressing the

challenges in the region. As part of our role as co-penholder with Ghana, we will work with all the members of the Council to provide continued support to the work of the Office and the United Nations presence in the region.

In conclusion, I echo my Ghanaian colleague in announcing negotiations for a presidential statement that we hope to submit for the Council's consideration very soon.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Deputy Special Representative Biha and Mr. Touray for their briefings. Their work and insights are particularly valuable and important to us during this perilous time for the region.

Let me begin, as others have, by noting that we are approaching the expiration of the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). We strongly support its renewal before the end of this month and look forward to working with the co-penholders.

Like our briefers, the United States is deeply concerned about the security, humanitarian and political crises in the Sahel, which are causing a dramatic increase in the strength and influence of the violent extremism that is spreading into parts of coastal West Africa, as we have heard. Violent extremism thrives when State authorities are absent, the delivery of services is weak, democracy is fragile or fleeting, justice is inaccessible and economic and political exclusion prevail. For the United States, instability in the Sahel is clearly a security problem with a democratic-governance solution. We also cannot ignore the fact that the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group is interfering in African countries' internal affairs, robbing them of their resources, committing human rights abuses and endangering the safety and security of peacekeepers and United Nations personnel. Its presence and operations are not only failing to address the immediate violent extremist threat but are actually increasing the likelihood that violent extremism will grow.

We are also gravely concerned about democratic backsliding across the region and urge the return of democratically elected, civilian-led Governments. We applaud the continued efforts of UNOWAS to support democratic processes and advise transitional Governments on how to return to full civilian-led democracy. We strongly condemn the killing of 28 people in northern Burkina Faso in late December.

We will continue to engage with the transitional Government to strengthen protection for human rights and civil liberties, and we will support accountability for human rights violations and abuses. We share the concerns expressed by the United Nations on the departure of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burkina Faso and are concerned about reports that the French Ambassador to Burkina Faso has been asked to leave the country.

In Mali, the Government must eliminate all the restrictions on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali so that it can effectively carry out the mandate authorized by the Council, which includes protecting civilians, promoting human rights and advancing peace and stability in Mali.

We must reinvigorate our collective action and support our African partners in addressing the problems that cross borders. We applaud the efforts of the United Nations, the African Union, the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States to support the region and hope to soon see a joint strategic assessment in accordance with their timeline.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I thank Deputy Special Representative Biha and Mr. Touray, the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for their informative briefings. Albania commends the good offices of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in promoting inclusive dialogue, stability and peace in the region and welcomes the cooperation with ECOWAS.

I would first like to draw attention to the growing political instability in West Africa and the Sahel. In the past two years, unconstitutional changes of Government have become an alarming trend. We urge Governments in the region to focus on resolving the governance crisis and strengthening their democratic institutions. We commend the efforts and leadership of ECOWAS in responding to the political crises and supporting countries towards the restoration of constitutional rule.

Secondly, this year is crucial for West Africa and the Sahel as the region prepares for several important elections. We encourage political actors to pursue inclusive dialogue and build consensus on outstanding disagreements in order to ensure the peaceful conduct of elections. We welcomed the elections held in Benin on Sunday with the increased participation of parties, as well as the holding of peaceful legislative elections

in Senegal in July. We also welcome developments such as the peace accord in Nigeria. We stress the importance of the representation of women and young people in political and decision-making processes, and we urge Governments, with the support of UNOWAS, to promote their full and meaningful participation.

Thirdly, we are concerned about the continued deterioration of the security situation in large parts of the Sahel, including the terrorist threat, which is expanding from the Sahel towards coastal West African countries. In that context, we welcome regional anti-terrorism mechanisms, including the Accra Initiative. The presence of the Wagner Group also poses a significant threat to human rights and international humanitarian law, and we urge Governments in the region to consider the long-term risks in that regard.

Fourthly, the dire humanitarian situation demands our attention, especially given that instability, violence, forced displacement, climate shocks and food insecurity have reached alarming levels. Moreover, the closure of more than 11,000 schools is a very disturbing trend that has deprived at least 40 million children of their fundamental right to an education. We also stress the important role that Resident Coordinators play in facilitating much-required humanitarian assistance in the region. We deplore the events in Burkina Faso and join the call of the Secretary-General in that regard.

It is clear that United Nations support remains critical to addressing the complex crisis facing the region. The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel are key frameworks for addressing the current challenges, and we encourage actors to coordinate their implementation efforts.

In conclusion, we welcome the joint strategic assessment of security and governance in the Sahel and anticipate the related recommendations. We also look forward to providing UNOWAS with a fit-for-purpose mandate by the end of the month and hope that we can agree on a presidential statement in order to demonstrate the Council's unity on the matter.

Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Giovane Biha, and the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mr. Omar Alieu Touray, for their briefings.

France welcomed the democratic progress that characterized 2022 in West Africa, with the holding of legislative elections in the Gambia and Senegal, the advances through political dialogue made in Côte d'Ivoire and the preparations under way for upcoming 2023 elections, particularly in Nigeria and Guinea-Bissau. Unfortunately, three countries of the region have yet to restore constitutional order. France welcomes the efforts of ECOWAS to secure a clear commitment from the authorities of Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali on the duration of their transitions and the holding of credible and transparent elections.

In that context, the United Nations has a crucial role to play. I would like to commend the excellent work done by Special Representative Mahamat Saleh Annadif and his Deputy. We hope that the appointment of a new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) will take place without delay. In that regard, I would also like to recall the importance of the role of the United Nations Resident Coordinators in the region. The role being played by UNOWAS and all the United Nations teams is more important than ever in supporting political transitions in partnership with ECOWAS, while at the same time addressing the factors essential to achieving peace, such as respect for human rights, the fight against impunity, the ability to meet humanitarian needs, development, the opening up of civic space, freedom of the press, the participation of women and efforts to address climate change. For all those reasons, France supports the Secretary-General's recommendation that UNOWAS's mandate be renewed for three years.

My final comments are about the security situation. In that regard, France would like to emphatically underscore the tragic results of the Wagner Group mercenary model, which has shown itself to be ineffective in combating terrorism and whose actions have also left a trail of destruction. It is already responsible for many human rights violations, which we have seen in Moura, in Mali, with more than 300 civilian victims. Nor can we be allowed to forget the plundering of natural resources in the countries where the Group is deployed.

It is clear that security is a major issue for the region, but we cannot react to it with brutal, ruthless or partial measures. France reiterates its full support for the collective initiatives led by the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS, the Group of Five

for the Sahel, the Accra Initiative and the Yaoundé Architecture for maritime security. France and the European Union will continue to be major partners in those initiatives. I also reaffirm our support for the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by President Issoufou. We hope that it will come up with innovative proposals. France will continue to provide assistance to countries in the region that request it within a framework that conforms to international law.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate our long-standing support for the African Union's request for predictable and sustainable funding for its peacekeeping operations, including through mandatory United Nations contributions. The issue will be raised by our Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Catherine Colonna, during her visit to Addis Ababa this week together with her German counterpart.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Giovane Biha, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Omar Aliou Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for their informative briefings. I also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2022/1019) on the latest developments in the region. Ecuador acknowledges the importance of the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). The work it is doing in partnership with the countries of the region to address the underlying causes of violence is vital to building sustainable peace.

We believe that creating opportunities for the populations in the region and improving their living conditions are key tasks for which we must establish and maintain the conditions necessary for political stability and security. Ecuador supports initiatives and actions aimed at consolidating democracy and State institutions. In that regard, we welcomed the holding of elections in Senegal in July 2022 and in Benin last Sunday. We also welcome the progress made to improve civic coexistence in Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania and the Niger. We are concerned about the destabilizing effects of unconstitutional changes of Government and coups d'état. We hope that Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali will return to constitutional rule as soon as possible, and we appreciate the work of ECOWAS to that end. We are closely following the preparations for elections in Mauritania, Liberia, Nigeria, Togo, the Gambia and Sierra Leone, and we

hope that the elections scheduled for this year will be conducted peacefully. We also hope that the issues that led to the postponement of elections in Guinea-Bissau will be resolved and that they will be successfully held in June.

Ecuador is very concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in the central Sahel, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as the danger of terrorist violence spreading to the countries along the Atlantic coast. We condemn the violence in recent months that has mainly affected Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger, Benin and Nigeria and express our solidarity with the families of the victims. We learned from this morning's briefings that many of the victims are children and young people, who are crucial to the development of all our peoples. We call on the countries of the area to step up their cooperation to fight terrorism in all its forms, while recalling their obligation to respect human rights and international humanitarian law and ensure accountability at all times.

Ecuador supports regional initiatives that contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as — to paraphrase the late former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali — they lighten the burden of the Security Council and contribute to a deeper sense of participation, consensus and democratization. We therefore welcome the decrease in acts of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and the strengthening of the Yaoundé Architecture for maritime security. The progress made in the work of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission is encouraging. Ecuador agrees that greater participation of women in political processes fosters social cohesion, development, the prevention of violence and consequently peacebuilding. Accordingly, we commend Liberia's adoption of quotas for women's participation in legislative elections and UNOWAS's support for the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel.

In conclusion, it is clear to us that the Council's work related to achieving sustainable peace in Africa must take account of the interrelated nature of such diverse factors as terrorism, organized crime and food insecurity, among others. For that reason, I reiterate Ecuador's support for the work of UNOWAS and the renewal of its mandate, which are vital to overcoming the challenges facing the region.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I would like to begin by thanking Deputy Special Representative Biha for her

report and comprehensive briefing and His Excellency Mr. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for his valuable insights.

Malta welcomes the peaceful democratic efforts in the region, which offer hope to other countries pursuing their own political and democratic paths. The legislative elections in Senegal in July 2022 and in Benin on Sunday, and the continued efforts aimed at national reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire, are examples of that. In looking ahead, we call for similar democratic approaches to ensuring inclusive and peaceful elections in the run-up to the 2023 electoral cycle in the region. We are encouraged by the relatively calm environment in which preparations for the February and March general elections in Nigeria are taking place.

Despite that progress, we remain concerned about the successive coups d'état in the region, which are hindering progress towards democratic consolidation, and we call on the authorities concerned to respect democratic processes. Malta fully supports joint efforts by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and ECOWAS to that end, such as the joint UNOWAS-ECOWAS high-level mission to Burkina Faso following the coup there in September. We also commend ECOWAS for immediately condemning the attempted coup in the Gambia last December and for standing firmly by the democratic results.

On the security front, Malta deplores the increasing threats of terrorism and violence from armed groups, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali, as well as the presence of mercenary groups. We strongly condemn the terrorist attacks, which are resulting in civilian casualties and exacerbating the already dire situation for local communities. The continued fighting between armed groups and the spread of terrorist activity are jeopardizing the prospects for long-term stability in the region. We urge for local, regional and international efforts to reverse these increasingly violent trends and address the underlying conditions that lead to the spread of terrorist activity.

Climate change is also exacerbating instability in a region already contending with the serious displacement of populations and food and water insecurity. Malta is strongly committed to solutions designed to bridge the climate-security nexus, and acknowledges the work of UNOWAS in integrating those interlinkages through risk analysis and road maps, including the Dakar Call to Action. As things stand, more than 24.4 million

people in the Sahel needed life-saving assistance in 2022. That situation cannot be allowed to continue. Beyond this, women and girls in the region continue to face high risks of sexual and gender-based violence, abductions, displacement and trafficking. As a founding member of the Group of Friends of Women of the Sahel, Malta is committed to actions that can ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, including in leadership roles, in political processes in the region. They include increasing the protection of women's human rights defenders and facilitating exchanges among women leaders and women's civil-society organizations within and outside the Sahel. We commend UNOWAS for promoting the women and peace and security agenda and ECOWAS for establishing its Women, Peace and Security Steering Group. We also echo the remarks of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the importance of protecting children's right to education, in line with resolution 2601 (2021). The links between education and peace and security are clear, and we need to safeguard the right to education.

Despite those challenges, we are pleased to see that solutions continue to be forged through UNOWAS and regional partners, including the African Union, the Group of Five for the Sahel and ECOWAS. Supporting authorities in improving local governance, addressing social grievances, ensuring education and promoting gender equality within the scope of all peacebuilding efforts must remain an integral part of our approach.

Malta underlines the importance of continuing to enhance and strengthen resilience through various UNOWAS projects. Additionally, we reiterate our support for any United Nations, regional or local efforts striving to advance sustainable development in the region. To that end, we welcome the greater cooperation in combating terrorism and transnational organized crime under the Accra Initiative. We also fully support the timely set-up of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, and we look forward to its findings later this year. Malta underlines the central role of UNOWAS in holistically addressing the challenges in the region, and we strongly support the renewal of its mandate. Despite the many challenges, the commitment demonstrated by UNOWAS to consistently upholding the values of its good offices is greatly valued.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to thank Ms. Giovane Biha,

representative of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and Mr. Omar Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for the information they provided.

We share the concerns voiced today regarding the situation in many countries in West Africa and the Sahel. The region is facing increased terrorist threats and ongoing inter-ethnic and intercommunal conflicts, while organized crime and drug trafficking are flourishing. During the second half of 2022, a large number of civilians died at the hands of militants. We express our support to all who are waging the difficult war on terrorism in the region, and it is alarming to see that subversive elements are seeking ways to escape to Gulf of Guinea countries.

We have to admit that the withdrawal from Mali of the counter-terrorist Operation Barkhane and the European Union's Takuba Task Force without Bamako's agreement is having a negative effect on the security situation, at least in the short term. In the circumstances, the Malian army has had to assume the full responsibility for counter-terrorism efforts. Nevertheless, we have already seen some positive results. Russia is providing the country with appropriate assistance on the basis of bilateral agreements. In that connection, we reject any unfounded allegations that attempt to smear Russia's assistance in Mali and other countries on the continent. Some countries have again claimed today that Russia is allegedly plundering Africa's resources or contributing to the growing terrorist threat there. But it is the very countries making those claims that are in fact themselves involved in such actions all over the world and in Africa in particular. In their desire to plunder Libya's resources, those countries have not ceased their destruction of that country and their destabilization of the whole of the Sahel. The accusations aimed at Russia are simply a mockery of common sense and the ability of the leaders of African nations to assess the causes behind their problems themselves, as well as their sovereign right to choose with whom they wish to cooperate.

We welcome the political mediation efforts of ECOWAS in the region. We are convinced that equal and respectful dialogue between that African organization and the authorities of Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea will help to resolve the current disagreements and contribute to the restoration of constitutional order in those countries. At the same time, we are extremely

concerned about various Western countries' attempts to drive a wedge through African unity by pitting some countries against others, including on the basis of their cooperation with Russia. As we see it, such actions can only worsen the situation.

We believe firmly that it is the States of the region that should play the main role in maintaining peace and security there, with the international community providing them with effective assistance in that regard. We support Africans in conducting fully independent policies aimed in resolving relevant issues based on the principle of African solutions to African problems. We support the decision taken at the ECOWAS summit in Abuja on 4 December 2022 to generate \$1 billion as soon as possible to implement the 2020–2024 ECOWAS Action Plan in order to combat terrorism. In that regard, we wish the countries of the region every success in implementing the joint assessment strategy on governance and security, as well as in realizing the Accra Initiative.

Returning to the topic of UNOWAS, it is clear that the Office is facing difficult, large-scale challenges in its efforts to help settle regional crises, participate in political mediation, provide assistance to strengthen State institutions and implement the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, as well as perform coordinating functions for other United Nations presences on the ground.

The effectiveness of the work of UNOWAS completely hinges on how well it cooperates with such regional organizations as the African Union (AU), ECOWAS and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. We support the numerous decisions of the AU Peace and Security Commission on the need to strengthen cooperation and coordination between all structures in the region in order to tackle problems facing the Sahel.

In conclusion, we would also like to remind colleagues that after the closure of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau in 2020, monitoring events in the country became the responsibility of UNOWAS. In these circumstances, we believe that maintaining Security Council sanctions against Guinea-Bissau under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which provides for sanctions only in the case of a threat to international peace and security, is absurd. We call for them to be gradually dismantled.

Russia will continue to constructively participate in collective efforts aimed at ensuring stability in West

Africa and the Sahel, including as a permanent member of the Security Council. Russia will continue to support the countries of the region bilaterally, including by improving the military preparedness of the armed forces, training servicemen and law-enforcement personnel and providing humanitarian assistance. We are prepared to have a fruitful and constructive discussion on renewing the mandate of UNOWAS for a further three years.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Giovane Biha, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer in Charge of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and Mr. Omar Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for their briefings

Recently, in the face of the complex and daunting international and regional situation, West African and Sahel States have made a series of important achievements in maintaining shared security, restoring economic and social development and strengthening solidarity and cooperation. The region is strategically located and rich in energy resources, and it has great development potential. The international community and the Security Council should gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties, challenges and real needs of the countries in the region, make great efforts to tackle their root causes and provide more targeted support and assistance for regional peace and sustainable development.

First, to give more vigorous support to regional cooperation so as to build a collective security shield, West African countries recently convened a summit and a conference on the Accra Initiative during which major consensus was reached on combating terrorism and creating a joint regional counter-terrorism force. Nigeria's efforts to wipe out its domestic terrorist forces and deepen cooperation with such neighbouring countries as Benin and Burkina Faso deserve our recognition. Meanwhile, the expansion of terrorist forces in the region is picking up speed, and the problems of trafficking in drugs and arms and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea are far from being tackled. None of this can hardly be effectively dealt with by one country alone.

China supports countries in the region in strengthening the concept of a security community, deepening communication and coordination on security affairs, advancing the development of regional joint counter-terrorism forces and other security

mechanisms, and striving to enhance their capacity to maintain stability and fight terrorism. The international community and traditional partners in particular should stay engaged in regional security and increase financial, equipment, intelligence and logistical support for countries on the front lines, such as the Group of Five for the Sahel, so as to build a strong defence against terrorism. The Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel is actively working under the leadership of His Excellency President Issoufou, and China looks forward to the Panel's pragmatic and feasible recommendations, which will inject new momentum into regional cooperation.

Secondly, to give more vigorous support to political consultations and dialogue so as to maintain the overall situation of peace and stability, Nigeria and Sierra Leone made steady advances on their election agendas during the reporting period, while Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and the Gambia actively engaged in political dialogue. This year, a number of countries will move their election agendas forward. We hope the political forces in the countries concerned will step up dialogue, forge consensus and steadily advance their political agendas so as to make positive contributions to the stability and development of their countries. Meanwhile, protests and demonstrations around issues such those that have arisen in relation to the general elections in Liberia, inter alia, have added to the political-security risks in some countries. This warrants high vigilance. The international community should provide timely and constructive support. China supports the ongoing active role of ECOWAS and its member States in regional affairs. The consensus on political transition reached between ECOWAS and Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso and other countries is a hard-won achievement that should be jointly safeguarded.

Thirdly, calling for more vigorous support for development and governance so as to lay a solid foundation for long-term peace and security, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/1019) states that growth in West Africa and the Sahel region has slowed down, the food crisis has deteriorated, energy and inflation problems have become more severe and the international community — major developed countries in particular — have cut back development assistance to the region. Recently, some countries of the region have been plagued by political instability and terrorism, which has triggered the vicious cycle of poverty begetting chaos and chaos begetting poverty,

which fully demonstrates that security and development are inseparable.

UNOWAS and the relevant United Nations peacekeeping operations should focus on sustainable development at all stages of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding and balance security and development in order to create synergy. Developed countries should fulfil their official development assistance commitments and increase financial and technical support in poverty reduction, infrastructure, food security and climate change.

It is worth noting that some developed countries have adopted irresponsible monetary and trade policies, and their negative spillover effects have aggravated the fragility of the economies of countries of the region. During the reporting period, UNOWAS conducted dialogues with countries of the region and supported the cooperation initiatives of regional organizations. Its achievements are commendable.

China supports the efforts that were made by former Special Representative Annadif Mahamat Saleh. It also supports in principle the renewal of the mandate for UNOWAS and hopes that it will fully listen to and respect the concerns of countries of the region and play a greater role in regional stability and development based on its mandate from the Security Council.

As a good brother and partner of African countries, China has always stood firmly with West Africa and the Sahel countries. Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang recently kicked off a visit to Africa, including to that region, which was his very first trip abroad since becoming Foreign Minister. That continued the fine 33-year tradition of Chinese Foreign Ministers devoting their first foreign visit of any given year to Africa. China will uphold the philosophy of sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith, as well as the righteous concept of upholding justice while pursuing shared interests, and carry forward the spirit of friendship and cooperation between China and Africa so as to contribute to the maintenance of regional peace, stability, unity and self-improvement.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I would like to thank Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Biha and President Omar Touray for their informative briefings.

The region of West Africa and the Sahel presents problems and challenges as varied as the countries of which the region is composed. However, there is a

common thread that pervades many of the conflicts in the region, namely, the link between the humanitarian, political and security crises there. We often see that difficult humanitarian situations are fertile ground for political instability, which is often expressed through violent means. Violence and security, in turn, increase economic hardship and aggravate the humanitarian situation.

The proper functioning of democratic institutions is essential to breaking this cycle and preventing it from taking place. In that context, I would like to highlight the peaceful legislative elections that took place in Senegal last July. I also recall the preparations for the general elections that will take place in Nigeria in February and March. The National Peace Accord, signed by party leaders on 29 September, bodes well for the successful and orderly conclusion of the electoral process. In Guinea-Bissau, a country to which Brazil is linked by close linguistic and historical ties, President *Úmaro Sissoco Embaló* set the date for the elections as 4 June 2023. We hope that the postponement of the original proposed date will allow for the completion of the process in an orderly and peaceful manner.

It is in the Sahel that the link between political instability and security and humanitarian crisis is most clear. The Council already noted with concern the overthrow of the transitional Government in Burkina Faso on 30 September 2022, in what amounts to the second coup d'état in that country in 2022. We urge the new President of the transition to abide by the transition timeline approved by the national conference held in October 2022.

In Mali, the decision of the authorities to withdraw from the Group of Five for the Sahel created additional difficulties for the Joint Force in fulfilling its duties in the fight against terrorism. We are encouraged by the agreement with the Economic Community of West African States, which made it possible to lift sanctions on the country.

It is with great concern that we note the expansion of terrorist activities from the central Sahel to coastal countries, such as Benin and Togo. We are encouraged, however, by the increased regional efforts to fight this scourge, be it in bilateral agreements or in the framework of the Accra Initiative. We take note of the setting up of the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative.

Brazil is also encouraged by the improvement of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. That is an achievement, above all, of the countries of the region, which have joined their efforts in the framework of the Yaoundé Architecture. Brazil has proudly contributed to those efforts. As a member of the Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, we have provided cooperation and taken part in naval operations such as Operation Guinex, Obangame Express and Grand African NEMO.

The humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel, particularly in the latter, shows no signs of improving. The number of displaced people, closed schools and empty hospitals has increased. Successfully tackling that situation requires the combined efforts of the countries of the region and of the international community.

In that context, Brazil praises the efforts of the leadership and of all the personnel of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), who have provided an invaluable service — be it providing good offices or facilitating delicate dialogues or providing much-needed technical assistance and expertise to regional initiatives. In particular, I would like to express gratitude towards His Excellency Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif for his work at the head of UNOWAS, and I wish him success in his new functions as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chad.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I am grateful to our briefers — Ms. Biha, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) — for their presentations. I also thank former Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mahamat Saleh Annadif for his dedicated service.

Today I will make three points focusing on democracy, security and humanitarian issues.

First, the United Kingdom is concerned about the democratic backsliding and the shrinking of civic space that the region experienced in 2022. We urge progress towards the restoration of constitutional Governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea within the agreed time frames. We commend ECOWAS and African Union efforts to make that happen.

This will be an important year for democracy in West Africa, with presidential elections in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) has an

important role to play, including through its good offices. The United Kingdom supports the focus we have heard today on boosting women's participation in those processes.

Secondly, there has been a clear deterioration in the security situation in the region, notably in Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin. We share concerns raised by others today about the risk of instability spreading to the coastal States. We cannot ignore the destabilizing role that the Wagner Group plays in the region. They are part of the problem, not the solution. Tackling the region's security challenges requires a holistic response. This includes the need to recognize the security impact of climate change, which multiplies the threats faced by vulnerable populations, for example, through changes in rainfall patterns.

We welcome the efforts of UNOWAS to enhance coherence and coordination, including by supporting the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the Accra Initiative. UNOWAS must use its new mandate to focus on tackling the root causes of conflict.

For our part, the United Kingdom is building our bilateral cooperation through security dialogues with Ghana and Nigeria. And we are enhancing multilateral cooperation through the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Stabilization Facility for Lake Chad.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation in the Sahel remains dire, compounded by rising prices and floods. The United Kingdom remains committed to our humanitarian efforts in the region. We call on all actors to ensure full cooperation, as well as safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, we look forward to the Office's mandate renewal and the appointment of a new Special Representative of the Secretary-General so that UNOWAS can continue to support regional efforts towards peace and prosperity.

Ms. Shaheen (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Giovane Biha for her valuable briefing and efforts in leading the important work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). I take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to Mr. Saleh Annadif for his tireless efforts during his tenure. I also thank Mr. Omar Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for his briefing.

Despite the crises facing West Africa and the Sahel, we believe that the region has immense potential to yield peace, security and sustainable development. That requires doubling the collective efforts to find innovative and inclusive solutions to respond to the threats facing the region.

We stress in that context the need to focus on steps that enhance dialogue and constructive engagement in the region and prevent it from drifting deeper into divisions and instability. Such steps include maintaining and building upon the current diplomatic efforts among the countries of the region, particularly their efforts to create an environment conducive to holding elections and making necessary reforms with regard to governance while fostering long-term growth and prosperity.

We stress the important role of regional organizations, the United Nations and its entities, including UNOWAS and the Peacebuilding Commission, in supporting the States of the region and enhancing their capabilities in building their institutions, maintaining their political unity and deepening partnerships among them. Therefore, we believe that progress must be made in the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. We hope that the recommendations of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by His Excellency Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, will provide a clear assessment of the region's needs and help us adopt effective and innovative solutions to meet them.

Given the continuous deterioration of the security situation, we support the regional efforts to address the cross-border security challenges in the region, especially extremism and terrorism. We are concerned about the expansion of terrorist activities along the Gulf of Guinea and the coast of West Africa as well as its accompanying repercussions on security and development. We believe that some of the existing regional initiatives, such as the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and the Accra Initiative, are essential for promoting regional peace and security. We reiterate that regional stakeholders with strong international support play a pivotal role in identifying gaps that undermine stability in the region and providing recommendations on addressing them.

West Africa and the Sahel are among the continent's areas most vulnerable to environmental threats that undermine security and stability in the region. It is

therefore essential for the Council to keep that issue at the top of its priorities, including by strengthening the role of UNOWAS in helping the States of the region to confront the issues of climate change and assess and manage risks. We consider the appointment of a Climate, Peace and Security Adviser to be an important step to that end.

As the host of the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) this year, we look forward to continuing the important discussions held during the previous session, including with UNOWAS and other relevant regional and international actors. We encourage the Office to continue its efforts in that regard, including those aimed at enhancing youth participation in providing innovative solutions to adapt to climate change.

We cannot ignore the fact that climate change affects humanitarian situation and stability in the region. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 15 per cent of the region's population suffer from food insecurity resulting from the impacts of climate change and droughts that have caused a shortage of wheat and fertilizers and a rise in food and energy prices. That highlights once again the need for measures to address climate change. Although we realize that such measures alone are insufficient to improve the humanitarian situation in the region, they will help mitigate the food crisis and provide an opportunity for a more sustainable approach in the future.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates emphasizes its continued support for the mandate of the UNOWAS, its local and regional partners, as well as its efforts to integrate youth and promote the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women. We hope that all those endeavours will contribute to establishing peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel.

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

I would like to thank Ms. Biha, Deputy Special Representative and Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), for her briefing and His Excellency Mr. Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for his insights. I also thank the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) for the valuable written comments.

First, Japan appreciates the pivotal role that UNOWAS is playing in the region. As we witness the further deterioration of security and political situations in the region, UNOWAS efforts to build and sustain peace and stability in close coordination with regional organizations, notably ECOWAS, are all the more crucial.

Last month's attempted coup in the Gambia, approximately one year after the conclusion of peaceful, free and fair presidential and legislative elections, is a reminder that political stability in the region needs to be reinforced. Unconstitutional changes of government undermine the security and stability of any country. In that regard, Japan applauds the leadership of ECOWAS and the African Union, who have upheld clear principles.

On that note, Japan calls for the timely preparation of free and fair elections in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea in order to ensure their return to constitutional rule. From the perspective of the rule of law, efforts should be focused on establishing effective, accountable and democratic institutions, as was reiterated in the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) advisory note and pointed out by Mr. Touray. As several West African countries prepare to hold elections in 2023, Japan, under the New Approach for Peace and Stability in Africa, will continue to support efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and governance.

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to be major threats to peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel, and their expansion to the coastal States is of deep concern. Japan welcomes regional initiatives such as the Accra Initiative and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework.

Socioeconomic development is vital for sustaining peace and stability in the region. Japan echoes the PBC advisory note in underscoring the importance of the rule of law in support of socioeconomic development and in noting the need to undertake

comprehensive institution-building to enhance good economic governance.

Japan recognizes that the adverse effects of climate change pose a serious threat to human security. It is imperative to integrate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation into early warning systems, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Japan strongly believes that the protection, empowerment and inclusion of — as well as solidarity with — vulnerable populations, including women, young people and minorities, must remain at the centre of efforts to bring peace and stability in the region. In that regard, Japan welcomes efforts by the United Nations and regional organizations, particularly ECOWAS and the African Union, to integrate human security concerns, such as those of women and young people, into their activities, including peacebuilding, security sector reform and climate action.

The challenges the region faces are diverse yet interconnected, and we therefore need to take an integrated and holistic approach. In that regard, Japan looks forward to the report by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel. We hope that the report will provide us with an assessment of and innovative recommendations on a future integrated approach to deal with the region's challenges.

I would like to conclude by reiterating our support for the work of UNOWAS and its mandate extension so that it can continue to engage with and align the work of various actors, including civil society, in promoting peace and security in that complex region.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.