



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9251st meeting

Friday, 27 January 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Ishikane (Japan)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2023/21)

Report of the Secretary-General on the internal review of the United Nations
Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (S/2023/36)

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23-02579 (E)



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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2023/21)

Report of the Secretary-General on the internal review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (S/2023/36)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Mali to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; and Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko, civil society actor and President of Association Protection Sahel.

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/2023/21, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, and document S/2023/36, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the internal review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

I now give the floor to Mr. Wane.

Mr. Wane (*spoke in French*): I address the Security Council at a pivotal moment in the ongoing collective efforts to promote lasting peace and security in Mali. Three aspects are worth highlighting in that regard.

First, we are halfway through the mandate cycle of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) renewed last June, with an emphasis on supporting the

implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, the transition process and stabilization of country's central regions.

Secondly, Mali is beginning a critical year on the road to a return to constitutional order, with several elections scheduled beginning in March.

Finally, we just concluded the strategic review of the Mission requested by the Security Council, with proposals on the way ahead.

Against that backdrop, this meeting takes on renewed importance. It will allow us to consider the developments over the past three months, while bearing in mind the Mission's overall performance and the trajectories that could be contemplated after its presence in Mali for nearly 10 years. I am grateful for the opportunity afforded to me to make an intervention at this stage, and I appreciate the Council's continued support to MINUSMA.

In my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.9154), I highlighted the complexity of the security environment. The situation has remained complex in recent months, particularly in the centre and in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. The activities of Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) continue to fuel insecurity in Gao and Ménaka, while the other northern regions are seriously affected by the displacement of the affected populations.

Two aspects are worth highlighting in that regard: first, the clashes between JNIM and EIGS, as observed in various places in December and January, in particular in the Ansongo *cercle*, in the Gao region, and in the Anderamboukane *cercle*, in the Ménaka region; and secondly, the continued deliberate attacks against civilians by ISGS and JNIM. Among other examples, I would point to the blockade of the village of Tessit, in the Ansongo *cercle*, in December, and the attacks carried out by extremists affiliated in JNIM against the village of N'tillit, also in the Ansongo *cercle*, in January. Similar pressure exerted by extremists on civilians has been observed in the Ménaka region.

The Malian Defence and Security Forces have intensified their efforts in the centre of the country, which has made possible an improvement in some localities and a decrease in the number of security incidents. Nevertheless, extremist groups still have the ability to carry out complex coordinated operations, as

evidenced by JNIM-claimed attacks in the Tenenkou *cercle*, in the region of Mopti, and in the Macina *cercle*, in the region of Ségou, on 10 January. In 2022, the Mopti region experienced the highest number of incidents and highest proportion of casualties.

Due to the persistence of security challenges, the number of internally displaced persons remains high, reaching just over 410,000 in December. In total, 8.8 million people need humanitarian assistance, which is a 17 per cent increase as compared to the beginning of 2022. Two million children under the age of 5 remain affected by acute malnutrition. The safety of humanitarian personnel remains a major concern, with numerous incidents impacting humanitarian personnel in 2022, including, unfortunately five humanitarian workers killed in the regions of Kayes, Ménaka and Ségou. Equally important is the need to mobilize additional resources. To date, only 38 per cent of the \$686 million requested under the humanitarian response plan for 2022 has been pledged.

Over the previous quarter, MINUSMA continued to make sustained efforts to protect civilians despite the difficult environment in which the Mission operates and the significant capability gaps facing it. Of course, that was done in support and to complement the efforts of the Malian Defence and Security Forces. Among other activities, I would like to highlight that day and night patrols in Ménaka continue jointly with the Malian Defence and Security Forces. In Gao, new plans have been implemented with our Malian partners to strengthen the protection of the sites for displaced persons on the outskirts of the city. Those sites have been the target of attacks perpetrated by extremist elements, the most recent of which took place at the end of December 2022 and beginning of January 2023. Our operations are also ongoing in other regions of Mali, in which we are deployed.

In the future, MINUSMA's capacity to contribute more effectively to improving the security situation in support of the Malian Defence and Security Forces will depend on several factors. The first factor relates to making available the capacities required and the timely replacement of troop-contributing countries that have decided to leave the Mission. It is encouraging to note that additional air resources from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are set to be deployed in Timbuktu, Gao and Mopti, respectively, in the coming months. Moreover, the Pakistani helicopter unit, which is currently based in Timbuktu, will be transferred to Mopti.

We are also working with the Malian authorities to make land available to allow for the deployment of an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance unit, which has long been promised by China. Efforts are under way to replace the units that are leaving the Mission or that intend to do so. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of those efforts, because the number of troops expected to leave accounts for 17 per cent of the total number of authorized troops for the Mission.

Secondly, we must strengthen coordination with the Malian Defence and Security Forces, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Mission's mandate and the November 2017 protocol agreement between MINUSMA and Mali. That is also a concern that was raised by the Malian authorities. The judicious use of existing resources and capacities, be they Malian capacities or MINUSMA capacities, is vital, in particular for the protection of civilians. During the reporting period, we maintained contact with the Malian authorities on those issues. On 18 January, the Mission held an in-depth discussion with the Chief of Staff of the Malian army with a view to strengthening joint planning and coordination mechanisms. I hope that tangible and diligent follow-up will enable us to make progress on that important issue.

Lastly, respecting freedom of movement, in line with the status-of-forces agreement, is crucial. More specifically, I would like to underscore the importance of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance flights for the safety and security of our Blue Helmets. They are also important for the implementation of our protection of civilians mandate. We will continue to work with the Malian authorities by drawing upon the new procedures agreed on 15 November 2022 and in subsequent discussions — the most recent having been held on 18 January — to reach a lasting agreement on the authorization of drone flights.

As has been said many times, the fight against terrorism must necessarily have a military and security component. However, in order to be successful, those operations must be based on a holistic approach that targets institutional, governance and socioeconomic challenges, which together create a fertile breeding ground for the spread of violent extremism. The strategy for the stabilization of the central regions, adopted by the Malian Government last August, is an important step in that regard. Emphasis must be placed on its decisive implementation. For its part,

MINUSMA has strengthened its cooperation with the permanent secretariat of the *Cadre politique pour la gestion de la crise au centre du Mali* and supports the operationalization of the regional governance committees, as outlined by the strategy. Along with the United Nations country team, we have aligned our activities with the priorities set out by the Malian Government.

Respect for human rights and international humanitarian law during military operations and accountability obligations in cases of violations are of the utmost importance in order to effectively address the scourge of terrorism and extremism. In that regard, the Mission has maintained dialogue with the Malian authorities and has continued to provide technical and capacity-building support.

In 2022, the Mission organized 122 training and awareness-raising sessions for slightly more than 3,000 members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces, including 563 women. The promulgation by the transitional President of a law establishing the modalities for compensation for damages resulting from serious human rights violations is a measure we welcome, and it should be commended. In the same vein, I would like to underscore the Bamako Court of Assizes' conviction of an individual, on 24 January, for a terrorist attack that was carried out in February 2019 and led to the death of three Blue Helmets.

The most recent assessment of the human rights situation for the reporting period revealed that there was a slight decrease in the total number of human rights violations and that terrorist groups were the primary perpetrators of such violations. MINUSMA will continue to investigate alleged human rights violations and abuses, and, to that end, we count on the full cooperation of the Malian authorities.

I would like to express my appreciation for the meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which allowed for a productive discussion on the human rights situation in Mali and Mali's obligations in that regard, including by strengthening existing cooperation and collaboration efforts.

(spoke in English)

Mali is less than two months away from the constitutional referendum that would mark the first of a series of polls expected to culminate with the

restoration of constitutional order in March 2024. The Malian authorities continue to demonstrate a commitment to holding the polls on time, as illustrated by the establishment of the central structures of the new Independent Authority for Election Management, following the adoption of a new electoral law in June 2022, the drawing up of a preliminary draft constitution and the update of the electoral register from October to December, even though turnout remained low.

However, several challenges remain. They relate in particular to the full operationalization of the new Independent Authority for Election Management, which requires the establishment of local offices across the country, as well as the finalization of the ongoing constitutional review process.

On that last point, it is worth mentioning that in December, in view of the reactions of various stakeholders, the transitional President established a 51-member committee to finalize the draft and ensure sufficient buy-in within Malian society. Meanwhile, a series of consultations with political parties and civil society have been conducted by the transitional authorities to discuss various aspects of the preparations for the constitutional referendum and other elections. Those initiatives must be encouraged and supported, as inclusion and consensus are crucial for the overall success of the transition process.

Two other aspects will determine the trajectory of the electoral process. The first is the availability of the necessary financial and logistical resources. To date, only 60 per cent of the resources required for the United Nations basket fund for electoral support has been mobilized. I encourage international partners to increase their support to Mali in that crucial endeavour. For its part, MINUSMA, including in collaboration with the United Nations country team, is providing technical and logistical support to the electoral process. Steps are under way to increase that support. The second aspect is the evolution of the security situation, which affects all stages of the electoral cycle. MINUSMA will provide all possible support to the Malian authorities in their efforts to secure the electoral process.

My last briefing to the Council took place against the backdrop of renewed momentum in the implementation of the peace process, following the August high-level decision-making meeting among the Malian parties and the subsequent ministerial session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee in September 2022. Not only

did the parties endorse the Government's proposal for the integration of 26,000 combatants into State structures, including the Defence and Security Forces, but they also agreed to set up an ad hoc commission to resolve the outstanding issue of grades and ranks for senior officers of the signatory movements. The terms of reference of the ad hoc commission were agreed, and MINUSMA pledged to extend the necessary support for its proceedings. Furthermore, the movements were given slots in the ad hoc commission established by the transitional President to finalize the draft constitution to ensure that the institutional reforms required for the implementation of the peace agreement are taken into account.

Unfortunately, in the past two months, new challenges arose with disagreement over the level of participation of the Government in the ordinary sessions of the Agreement Monitoring Committee and other related issues. That culminated in the decision by the signatory movements in December to suspend their participation in the peace process.

MINUSMA, along with the other members of the international mediation, led by Algeria, spared no effort to promote dialogue among the signatory parties to overcome the current difficulties. In December, I travelled to Algiers to talk with Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, who subsequently visited Mali for consultations with the Malian authorities. Follow-up discussions took place in Algiers, with a visit by the Malian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Malian Minister for National Reconciliation in mid-January. A few days ago, I met with the Malian Minister for National Reconciliation to exchange views on the way forward. Consultations were also held with the signatory movements.

I encourage the parties to spare no effort to overcome the current difficulties and achieve decisive progress in the implementation of the peace agreement. Ultimately, they bear the primary responsibility for the success of that process. The ongoing transition offers a unique opportunity to advance the agreement — an opportunity that cannot, and should not, be squandered.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Algeria's steadfast commitment and role in the efforts aimed at facilitating the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. I also pay tribute to the other members of the international mediation for their role.

Let me conclude by underlining that the situation in Mali continues to warrant sustained attention and engagement, particularly from the Security Council. MINUSMA has now been deployed in Mali for nearly 10 years. Over that period, the Mission has accomplished much, but the objectives that were set by the Council are yet to be fully achieved and the context has witnessed significant changes. In that regard, the review requested by the Council provides the opportunity for Mali and other members of the international community to determine the best way forward. As the Council considers the recommendations of the Secretary-General, it is worth keeping in mind that stabilizing Mali is critical not only for the country itself, but also for the entire region.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Dicko.

Ms. Dicko (*spoke in French*): Speaking before the Security Council as a member of civil society is not only a privilege for my humble self, but also, above all, a great responsibility — that of carrying the voice of the voiceless and of the daughters and sons of Mali, my country, of which I am proud.

Mali continues to face complex challenges. The threat of terrorist groups is still present, and today it affects all four corners of the country. Attacks on the Malian Defence and Security Forces are increasingly spreading to the south of the country, particularly the regions of Sikasso, Koulikoro, Koutiala and Kayes, and even in the vicinity of the city of Bamako. Other attacks, including some with improvised explosive devices, target public transport vehicles, logistics and humanitarian convoys and even peacekeepers.

Terrorist and similar groups kidnap and execute people, prevent farmers from carrying out their activities, burn crops and deprive local communities of their livelihoods or force them to leave their villages. According to the data of the Mali Displacement Tracking Matrix, 412,387 Malians, or nearly 80,000 households, are internally displaced, 54 per cent of whom are women. To those figures must be added nearly 200,000 Malian refugees in countries of the subregion.

Women are the first victims of such a situation. They look after their children, while their husbands are at large or have disappeared. They wander in the bush and do not know exactly where to go. They brave the bad weather and sleep in makeshift shelters. They are

subjected to all sorts of violence, including conflict-related. Moreover, those who were able to reach the larger towns in the north and centre of the country are subject to prejudice and have no help, hope or opportunity because the response capacity is limited.

The situation is exacerbated by food insecurity as a result of conflict, climate change and the forced withdrawal of some humanitarian actors who were supporting humanitarian and development projects and initiatives.

The Malian army has increased its military operations to combat terrorists. However, those military operations should be regularly re-evaluated in the light of the mixed results noted in relation to human rights. It must be said that the presence of Russian military partners alongside our Malian armed forces, whose bravery is to be commended, far from helps matters. Those actors are involved in committing serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Such violations were documented by civil society organizations in Mali and are reflected in official reports, particularly those of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), as well as other independent and credible organizations. Moreover, in the course of those operations, which also seek to target sources of funding for terrorism, such actors systematically target the property of the civilian population and valuable possessions and dispossess communities of their livestock, which represents a cultural legacy of considerable economic value.

I therefore call on the Malian authorities to disassociate themselves from such acts, which could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, and to take preventive measures so as to discourage their perpetrators, whoever they may be, and reassure everyone. At the same time, I call on the judicial authorities to take concrete steps to prosecute the alleged perpetrators of those crimes, as well as the perpetrators of the incidents of sexual and conflict-related violence mentioned in the Secretary-General's 6 January report on the situation in Mali of (S/2023/21).

The Malian army has become better equipped. In the interests of greater transparency, the authorities should reassure the Malian people about the current spending on major military equipment to modernize our army and make it more professional. They should

take into account the need for a balanced distribution of the national budget in relation to other essential sectors, particularly education and health.

With regard to the pre-electoral process and context, I welcome the political will of the authorities to respect the electoral timetable. In that regard, I would like to call for respect for civil liberties and the democratic space guaranteed by the Constitution in order to enable the daughters and sons of Mali to express themselves freely during the process, which we want to be inclusive, transparent and credible.

The implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, the outcome of the Algiers process, has not made significant progress, especially given that women's participation has remained insignificant. Despite the adoption of the 30 per cent quota law, which is considered a major victory, much remains to be done. Malian women want to play a greater role in the implementation of the peace agreement, particularly through its various mechanisms.

I would like to commend the positive outcome in the case of the 49 Ivorian soldiers who were pardoned by the President of the transition after having been sentenced by the Malian justice system. That is an encouraging step that is part of the process of normalizing our relations with neighbouring countries and resolving bilateral disputes through responsible diplomacy. I urge the international community and all partners to support Mali in the reforms it has already initiated and above all to explore opportunities for sustainable development, because without genuine development in the Sahel, Malians will continue to face terrorism and insecurity in their daily lives.

I call on the Malian authorities to mobilize resources and seek alternative partnerships with humanitarian actors in order to address the issue of internally displaced persons, whose numbers continue to grow as a result of insecurity. We also hope to reopen classrooms in the affected areas. I also call on the authorities to strengthen their collaboration with MINUSMA and draw on the staffing and logistical resources available in order to protect civilians and combat terrorism through coordinated and genuine partnerships. Finally, I call on the authorities to ensure more equitable protection for all communities, publicly condemn any instrumentalization or stigmatization based on ethnicity and strengthen dialogue with the affected communities in order to ease existing tensions and conflicts.

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

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

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Representative El-Ghassim Wane and Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko for their briefings. I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali.

The international community must pay the necessary attention to the situation in Mali and the Sahel region. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/36) on the internal review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) gives us the opportunity to do so. I would like to begin by underscoring the quality and lucidity of his strategic review. MINUSMA is the main instrument deployed by the international community in support of Mali. Its primary objectives are to implement the Algiers Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, protect civilians and support the transition. Considerable efforts and sacrifices have been made through MINUSMA: it has an annual budget of \$1.2 billion, and 13,000 Blue Helmets have been deployed, of whom 180 lost their lives in the past 10 years.

However, as the Secretary-General reminds us, in Mali, as elsewhere, a peacekeeping operation cannot be effective without credible political prospects and the sincere cooperation of the host country. The Secretary-General notes that the implementation of the Algiers Agreement has stalled, restrictions in the political arena are worrisome in terms of continuing the transition, the security situation has seriously deteriorated, and the obstacles to the freedom of action and the mandate of MINUSMA have greatly increased. The Secretary-General also notes the presence of mercenaries of the Wagner Group, which is known to all and recognized by the Russian authorities, as reflected in regular acts of violence perpetrated against Malian civilians and the increasing obstruction of the work of MINUSMA. That is not acceptable.

On the basis of that very clear observation, the Secretary-General draws useful conclusions for the future. He lists the parameters that are essential for MINUSMA to be able to continue its mission. The Algiers Agreement, which remains the main instrument for lasting reconciliation, must be implemented. The political transition must be conducted according to the timetable agreed with the Economic Community

of West African States (ECOWAS). There must be freedom of movement and action for all MINUSMA personnel and resources. Finally, all components of the mandate of MINUSMA, including the human rights component, must be implemented. Those parameters must also lead to concrete actions by the Malian transitional authorities. That is all the more urgent since, as we heard, several major troop-contributing countries have already decided to withdraw from MINUSMA, which is in danger of being progressively emptied of its substance, both externally because of the constraints placed on it and internally because of the weakening of some of its critical capacities.

Therefore, the next few months will be decisive for the future of MINUSMA. As the Secretary-General points out, the status quo is not an option. All options are on the table, and they will have to be discussed with all stakeholders: Malian actors, Algeria as the leader of international mediation efforts, ECOWAS and the African Union, neighbouring countries, troop-contributing countries and donors. The Security Council must approach that discussion with an open mind. The future of Mali and the future of MINUSMA depend on the transitional Malian authorities. Without clear commitments and tangible actions, it will not be possible to rebuild trust or to re-establish a dynamic partnership.

We must also rethink our collective approach in the Sahel beyond Mali. It is in that spirit that we have contributed to the work of the High-level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, which was given a mandate by the United Nations and the African Union. When the time comes, we must be able to respond at all levels to the proposals put forward.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I thank Special Representative El-Ghassim Wane for briefing us today. We recognize the work that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is doing in extremely difficult circumstances. I thank Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko for her contribution, and I welcome the participation of His Excellency Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

First, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to the MINUSMA family for the sacrifices they make every day. We honour the legacy of the peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the line of duty. We must also remember the tens of thousands of civilians killed

and displaced by extremism and violence in the north, the centre and now also the south of the country. We must strive to discharge our responsibility as a Council and ensure that Mali emerges more resilient, stable and inclusive.

The strategic review of MINUSMA is a welcome step forward that will help the Council to tailor the Mission's mandate to the needs on the ground. We appreciate the opportunity to reflect on the options outlined by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2023/36), because business as usual is no longer an option for MINUSMA or for the Council. That review, along with the forthcoming report from the High-level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel and other regional initiatives, will be helpful as the Council considers MINUSMA's future and continues its support to the people of Mali.

After more than a decade of United Nations engagement in Mali, the situation remains alarming. While there is no easy fix for the challenges facing the country, the international community cannot and must not fail. The 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali laid out the framework for peace in Mali, and it is necessary to build on that foundation. We encourage all parties to remain resolute and committed to its implementation. More specifically, attention should be paid to ensuring progress in the electoral and constitutional processes. We acknowledge Algeria's constructive role in that regard.

Maintaining open channels of communication and creating space for dialogue in the Security Council, in the region and in Mali is critical. To that end, we note the positive steps taken towards regional engagement, including the return of members of the Ivorian forces. Good-neighbourly relations will be critical to overcoming Mali's and the region's interdependent challenges. The Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and MINUSMA continue to be key partners in supporting national State-building efforts. In the light of the complex challenges that Mali continues to face, I would like to highlight three key points.

First, as extremism continues to spread, a comprehensive response is needed. In Mali, extremists exploit communities' existing vulnerabilities and distort religion to radicalize and recruit followers. Such political and social challenges are inextricably linked to the deteriorating security situation and must be addressed accordingly. In order to be effective, counter-

terrorism operations need to work in tandem with the extension of State authority and the provision of basic services. The growing presence of State authorities in the north and centre of Mali can, for example, contribute to the implementation of policies that will help protect the population, address their basic needs and create an environment where extremism cannot thrive. That must be a strategic priority for the Mission, and it behoves the Council to take action in ways that complement regional counter-terrorism efforts.

Secondly, the human cost of violence is unacceptable. We cannot ignore the complex humanitarian crisis that is being exacerbated by insecurity, including through its far-reaching consequences for women and children. Mali's social fabric is being torn apart and its future is in jeopardy. More than 587,000 children are still affected by the closure of 1,950 schools. As we focus on the most pressing needs, we should ensure that in addition to more immediate responses we also prioritize medium- and longer-term planning. That will in turn lay the ground for rebuilding a more resilient and sustainable Mali.

Thirdly, in considering the review and MINUSMA's future configuration, we are greatly looking forward to engaging constructively with all the relevant stakeholders. The Council's decision should not be merely the lowest common denominator of our respective positions but rather a significant, results-oriented push in support of the people of Mali. For that, engagement with African stakeholders must be given a central role in addressing the challenges facing Mali and the region.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates will continue to support all efforts aimed at preserving stability and peace and alleviating the suffering of the people of Mali. As a Council, we must remain engaged and prioritize their stability and prosperity.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I would like to thank Special Representative Wane and Ms. Dicko for their informative briefings. I want to start by expressing my deepest condolences to Nigeria and Chad, which together have lost six peacekeepers serving in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) since the last time the Security Council convened to discuss the Mission (see S/PV.9200). We honour the sacrifices made by the brave men and women who risk their lives for the people of Mali and the prospect of

peace. We echo the Secretary-General's deep concern about the exceptionally high level and frequency of violence in Mali and condemn the horrific attacks by terrorist groups on civilians, Malian security forces and MINUSMA personnel. We are particularly alarmed by the grave impact of the conflict on the safety and livelihoods of Mali's women and girls.

While we are encouraged to hear about the many ways in which MINUSMA continues to deliver on its mandate, we are extremely concerned about the significant political, operational and capacity constraints limiting the Mission's success. It is clear both from Special Representative Wane's briefing and the report of the Secretary-General on the internal review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (S/2023/36) that MINUSMA is at a critical juncture. Unfortunately, its extremely volatile operating environment is made more dangerous by the restrictions that the transition Government continues to impose on the Mission and which needlessly put peacekeepers — and the civilians they seek to protect — in harm's way. The fact that in his most recent report (S/2023/21) the Secretary-General indicates that the Malian authorities denied or gave no response to 237 MINUSMA flight requests is completely unacceptable. It means that on 237 separate occasions the transition Government blocked the Mission from deterring or responding to attacks, investigating alleged human rights abuses and violations and ensuring safety for travelling convoys. To make matters worse, those restrictions typically occur where protection is most needed. It is not an exaggeration to say that those continued obstructions have become an existential issue for the Mission and a bit of a crisis for the Council.

Once again, we demand that the transition Government lift all restrictions on MINUSMA and allow all the Mission personnel to operate freely and safely in service of its mandate. As the internal review states, MINUSMA's success will hinge on the support and cooperation it receives from the transition Government. The continued obstructions of MINUSMA's mandate, in addition to the blatant violations of the status-of-forces agreement, should force the Council to seriously reconsider its support for MINUSMA in its current form. They are preventing the international community from seeing the full scope of human rights violations and abuses reportedly being perpetrated by violent extremist groups and by Malian

armed forces in partnership with the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group forces. We strongly urge the transition Government to cooperate with all MINUSMA's human rights activities, particularly requests for access to sites of alleged human rights abuses and violations, and for the United Nations to report with full transparency on alleged abuses and violations. The promotion and protection of human rights is not a political agenda possessed by one or a few Member States, but a priority task that the Council has authorized MINUSMA to carry out since the Mission's inception.

The United States welcomed the acknowledgement by the United Nations of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group's presence through an explicit reference in the strategic internal review. We hope that future United Nations reporting on Mali will be similarly candid about the threat posed by Wagner Group forces to Malian civilians. As we made clear last week, the Wagner Group is a criminal organization that is committing widespread atrocities and human rights abuses in Mali and elsewhere. The United Nations must be able to provide an honest and transparent analysis of the destabilizing role of such criminal organizations in places where United Nations field missions operate.

Reporting by expert panels remains a key source of information on the situation in Mali. We want to reiterate the call in resolution 2374 (2017), on the existing sanctions on Mali, for all Member States to facilitate the work of the Panel of Experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017), including the timely issuance of visas.

Turning to the political situation, we commend the progress made by the transition authorities on electoral reform. MINUSMA's support to that effort is indispensable and demonstrates that the Mission remains vital to overcoming the many complex challenges related to electoral capacity-building, awareness, registration, mobilization and security across Mali's vast territory. The United States continues to offer its full support and encouragement to the Mission and to those within the transition Government who are endeavouring to restore democracy, civilian rule and constitutional order.

After welcoming the resumed functioning of the Algiers accords monitoring committee last fall (see S/PV.9154), we have been deeply discouraged to see that progress being undone in recent months. The unwillingness of the transition Government to engage at the appropriate levels has led to a splintering of the

mediation process, whereby signatory armed groups must negotiate with the international mediation group without participation from the transition authorities. The recent suspension of participation by signatory armed groups in the monitoring committee is cause for serious concern. We extend our full support to MINUSMA, Special Representative Wane and Algeria's Government in their efforts to reinvigorate the mediation process. We call on the transition authorities, the signatory armed groups and other actors in the region to demonstrate renewed political will by taking immediate steps to restart the monitoring committee's activities.

In closing, I want to once again echo the Secretary-General in saying that given the current context in Mali, business as usual is not an option. While the Council must ultimately vote on the Mission's mandate, the future of MINUSMA also rests in the hands of the Malian authorities, the parties to the Algiers accords and actors in the region, whose actions we will monitor closely in the months to come.

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

We welcome the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on Mali (S/2023/21) as well as his report on the internal review (S/2023/36) of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which is currently being reviewed. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General El-Ghassim Wane for his insightful briefing, as well as his diligent engagement in helping to find durable solutions to the situation in Mali. We also thank Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko for her perspective and welcome the presence in this meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali, His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Diop.

The A3 appreciates the positive contribution of MINUSMA to the stability of Mali, and as this year we mark MINUSMA's decade-long presence in Mali, we urge support in consolidating the gains made in helping our brother people of Mali to address the myriad challenges facing their country. We understand Mali's continuing concerns regarding the security situation there and believe that with the support of the Security Council and the cooperation of the Malian authorities, the implementation of MINUSMA's mandate, which remains relevant, will help the Malian people to achieve

their aspirations for a peaceful, stable and united nation. In that regard, we will closely engage the Secretary-General and the other members of the Council on the best configuration for MINUSMA following the present review. We look forward to the joint military and police capability study to be carried out during this quarter by the Department of Peace Operations.

While acknowledging the gains made on the political track, our quest for lasting peace for the people of Mali should continue unabated considering the complex political challenges, heightened insecurity and deteriorating humanitarian situation that persist in the country.

On the political situation, the restoration of constitutional order remains a critical enabler for peace in Mali. In that regard, we welcome the submission of the draft constitution as well as the adoption of the electoral law, which form part of the broader reforms required to take forward the political transition and fulfil the Algiers peace agreement. However, we encourage enhanced outreach among the stakeholders that have expressed some concerns about the ongoing reforms to ensure inclusivity and national ownership of the process. We urge support for the work of the commission established to monitor the timetable for political and institutional reforms to help achieve that goal. We call on all the signatories to the peace agreement to remain engaged in its implementation, including the resolution of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes. We also underscore the importance of adequate funding for the success of DDR processes, which form part of the conditions for the return of peace and security in Mali and the region.

We reaffirm our support for the decisions taken by the Authority of the Heads of State of Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at its sixty-first and sixty-second ordinary sessions and encourage international support, where required, for the national processes in realizing the March 2024 electoral timeline. We welcome the improvement of relations between Mali and its neighbours and appreciate the diplomatic efforts that led to the release of the 46 Ivorian soldiers. We hope that improving regional solidarity will help in the coordination of security arrangements that would inure to the benefit of Mali.

Concerning the security situation, we express our deep concern about the unabated attacks by terrorist groups on military and civilian targets, including

through the use of improvised explosive devices. We strongly condemn all such attacks and express our condolences and sympathy to all the families of the victims of terrorism in the region.

We remain concerned by the limited State presence in the centre and north of Mali and the impact that that has had in ensuring the security of the civilian populations who are captive to the activities of terrorist groups. We commend the important role that MINUSMA has played in maintaining presence in areas with little or no State presence and note the impact that the withdrawal of international counter-terrorism partners and their assets is having on MINUSMA's capacity to stretch its resources to more distant locations.

We encourage the Malian authorities to work with MINUSMA to urgently address the issue of misinformation and disinformation, which threaten the safety of the Mission's personnel and undermine their impact on the ground. We therefore hope that the Council can converge on the Secretary General's recommendations contained in his internal review report for adopting innovative communication strategies to enhance the Mission's role in tackling the complex security situation.

Beyond MINUSMA's presence, we underscore the useful role played by regional mechanisms in helping to ensure regional security, including the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force, the Accra Initiative and the Multinational Joint Task Force. While we note the augmentation of Mali's security capabilities, we encourage regional joint efforts to undertake the required counter-terrorism operations until such a time as Mali's security personnel are able to take full charge of the security situation in the country.

It is our hope that the upcoming independent report of the High-level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, former President of the Niger, will leverage the best elements of the regional initiatives in proposing a robust response to the security challenges of the Sahel. We underscore our position for adequate, sustainable and predictable funding for those regional mechanisms, which in essence are acting on behalf of the international community.

We urge coordinated action in addressing the spillover effect on the Sahel of the lingering crisis in Libya and in managing the threat that the return of foreign terrorist fighters and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons pose to the stability of Mali.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation resulting from the heightened insecurity as well as other aggravating factors, including climate change, food insecurity and the dire socioeconomic conditions in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease pandemic, are of great concern. The aggravating factors, including the climate menace, do not only affect the environment but also have the propensity of escalating conflict in the country and region.

The closure of over 1,000 schools and the increasing number of incidents of sexual exploitation of women and girls, among other vices, are regrettable and undermine the fundamental human rights of the victims. We encourage the Malian authorities to continue their efforts in clamping down on the violations of the rights of its citizens, including through speedy investigation and prosecution of culprits. We also reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an increase in funding support from donor partners and the international community to help meet the needs of the over 5.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

It is important to prioritize efforts in tackling the root causes of instability in the country, which cannot be dissociated from regional dynamics. Addressing the instability would include investing more in women and youth and enhancing their participation in governance processes as well as the creation of employment opportunities to enable them to contribute meaningfully to the country's development. We also underscore the critical role of the Peacebuilding Commission, including its involvement in climate-related peace and development interventions, as well as in the promotion of community-based dispute resolution mechanisms.

In conclusion, we reiterate our solidarity with the people of Mali and reaffirm our respect for its territorial integrity and sovereignty. We believe that a business-as-usual approach in restoring lasting peace in Mali would not be helpful. What is required is a multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approach characterized by strong political will among all the stakeholders, including the host authorities, the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS and donor partners. Now more than ever, we all need to make good our commitment to help restore lasting peace for the people of Mali.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): Let me start by thanking Special Representative El-Ghassim Wane for his comprehensive briefing and Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko for the tangible views expressed. I also acknowledge the presence of the Foreign Minister of Mali.

I express Malta's condolences to Nigeria and Chad over the loss of lives and thank all peacekeepers for their service.

Our message today is one of mutual respect, cooperation and engagement to ensure that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) continues to carry out its mandate effectively. The Mission's relevance in executing its duties should remain central to our efforts. Any external restrictions of movement imposed on its operations could potentially subject personnel and civilians to life-threatening risks. We hope that the new modalities for flight requests agreed to last November will constitute a first step in the withdrawal of any restrictions on the Mission.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/36) on the internal review of MINUSMA provides a solid and comprehensive starting point for critical reflection on the Mission's future and must be well-considered at this critical juncture for the country. The current environment in Mali is especially challenging for peacekeepers. On that note, we express our deepest gratitude for their service in the region and strongly condemn recent attacks targeting them. Ensuring the utmost safety and security of Mission personnel when carrying out their mandate remains paramount. We would also like to commend MINUSMA for its efforts in creating a more inclusive environment for women police peacekeepers through the Elsie Initiative Fund for Women in Peace Operations.

The full implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, resulting from the Algiers process, remains vital. We regret to note that progress on its implementation has been lacking. We call on all parties to focus on strengthening dialogue and taking pragmatic steps, with the support of the Malian public, in the hope of restoring their trust. We look forward to efforts to reset the peace process through the work of the Agreement Monitoring Committee and call for an inclusive dialogue.

Malta is encouraged by the submission of the draft constitution. Consensus must remain the driving force behind its drafting and adoption process.

We acknowledge the operationalization of the Independent Authority for Election Management as a positive step and welcome the appointment of women to the National Transition Council. Their full, equal and meaningful participation in all local and State authorities, local dialogues and electoral process remains of fundamental importance.

We strongly encourage the Malian authorities to continue their engagements with MINUSMA, the Economic Community of West African States Commission and the African Union to meet the transition deadline of March 2024.

Today nearly one in five people in Mali need one or more forms of assistance as a result of conflict, socio-political instability, climate change and multifaceted insecurity. Conflict-driven food insecurity is emerging as a major threat in a region already heavily impacted by climate-related issues, such as decreased rainfall and desertification. The humanitarian consequences of both conflict and climate change will be a worsening of existing inequalities, as violence and the further loss of livelihoods will exacerbate the cycle of forced displacement and deprivation. We call on all actors to respect and to facilitate rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access in Mali. Now more than ever, it is essential that humanitarians can reach those most in need, when they need it the most.

The proliferation of violence and human rights abuses committed against civilians by armed groups and private military companies, such as the Wagner Group, are very concerning. Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls and the alarming number of grave incidents committed against children are deplorable.

Malta strongly condemns all violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Such heinous acts must cease immediately, and we welcome MINUSMA's support for the justice sector response to conflict-related sexual violence. We call on the Malian Authorities to ensure accountability and a safe environment in which its population can be protected.

Malta reiterates its continued support for the work carried out by the Special Representative and MINUSMA. The way forward truly depends on a route that is underpinned by mutual trust and respect among all stakeholders.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I would like to thank Special Representative Wane for his briefing today and to commend the important work carried out by the personnel and peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), who operate in very difficult

conditions. I also extend my thanks to Ms. Dicko for her frank assessment and welcome Minister Diop to this meeting.

The political and security situation in Mali has faced significant challenges and setbacks. The socioeconomic crisis has deepened, humanitarian needs have risen, the civic space is shrinking and the number of internally displaced persons continues to increase, with women and children being the most affected.

We welcome the release of the Ivorian soldiers by the Malian authorities and the diplomatic efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations and other actors. As mentioned by the civil society representative, those efforts are very important when it comes to regional relations.

The implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and coordination with all the relevant actors is key in that process. In that context, the implementation of the electoral calendar, within the agreed timelines, with ECOWAS must be a priority to facilitate a democratic transition. We urge the Malian authorities to focus their efforts on advancing outstanding legislative matters and the constitutional process, including establishing a single legislative management body. We welcome the support of MINUSMA in that process.

The growing violent extremist and terrorist threat is alarming. We are concerned that, if not properly addressed, the changing security architecture in Mali has the potential to create security vacuums, which can destabilize the country and the region. In that regard, we fear that the presence of the Wagner Group poses a significant threat to the safety of peacekeepers and civilians. As highlighted by the Secretary-General, MINUSMA has documented serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law during military operations with the involvement of foreign security personnel belonging to the Wagner Group. We condemn those acts and urge the Malian authorities to reassess their partnership and to release the findings of ongoing investigations.

Furthermore, we regret the signatory movements' decision to suspend their participation in the Agreement Monitoring Committee and stress the importance of the peace agreement in stabilizing the situation. We call for

enhanced engagement and coordination among relevant stakeholders to implement the agreement and achieve long-term peace in Mali.

We are also deeply concerned about the persistent restrictions MINUSMA continues to face, including on ground and air movements and the denial of flight requests, especially in areas where counter-terrorism operations are conducted. The review clearly states that the Mission cannot continue with the status quo. The Malian authorities must work with MINUSMA and allow the mission to operate safely and freely, without obstacles, as mandated, including in its human rights monitoring.

Albania welcomes the Secretary-General's detailed internal review of MINUSMA, which we consider to be a good basis to begin our discussions on the future of the Mission. We commend the work of the United Nations in preparing the review, in consultations with the Malian authorities, as mentioned by the Special Representative, which is essential considering the importance of MINUSMA's presence in Mali and the need to strengthen the Mission to better deliver its mandate.

In conclusion, we look forward to engaging with Council members and relevant stakeholders in the coming months to ensure the best course of action for MINUSMA and the people of Mali,

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative Wane for his briefing.

I join others in expressing our deepest condolences following the deaths in December of two peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We salute the dedication of all personnel and condemn any attacks on peacekeepers.

Let me begin by underlining that the United Kingdom remains committed to supporting the people of Mali, as we are doing through humanitarian, stabilization and development aid and as we have done through our contributions to MINUSMA. The Malian people deserve the support of the international community to address the challenges they have faced in recent years. In that context, we welcome the publication of the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/36) on the review of MINUSMA and thank the Secretariat and the Mission for all their efforts. I have three points to make on the report.

First, we agree with the Secretary-General, and others who have said it today, that business as usual is no longer an option. The Mission cannot continue as it currently stands, with restrictions hindering operations and without the full cooperation of the host Government. The safety and security of peacekeepers are at stake, as well as the reputation of the United Nations if it cannot effectively deliver its mandate and uphold United Nations principles, including on human rights.

Secondly, we agree that the fulfilment of the four parameters set out in the review are essential for the continued viability of the Mission. We need to see tangible progress on the political transition and renewed commitment and dialogue on the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, including a way forward on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. We urge the Malian authorities to adhere to the status-of-forces-agreement, while ensuring freedom of movement for peacekeepers. We expect to see greater access for the Mission to investigate human rights allegations.

Thirdly, we need to re-evaluate the support provided by MINUSMA to the Malian Defence and Security Forces. As the Secretary-General highlights, a number of military operations have been marred by allegations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. As others have said, the report also confirms the presence in Mali of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group. In that context, we need a hard look at the relationship between the Mission and Malian forces. The Council should use this review to take stock of the challenges and ensure that the Mission adapts as needed in order to remain effective in a changed reality. There is a short window until the next mandate renewal. Progress against the Secretary-General's parameters will be essential if we are to empower MINUSMA to make a meaningful contribution to building the peace and stability the Malian people deserve.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): Let me start by thanking Mr. Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), for his detailed and comprehensive briefing. Brazil welcomes His Excellency Mr. Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, to this meeting. We listened carefully to the briefing by the representative of civil society.

We received with dismay the news of the terrorist attacks against MINUSMA in Timbuktu on 16 December. We regret the deaths of two peacekeepers from Nigeria and offer our sincere condolences and solidarity to the Government of that country, the families of the victims and MINUSMA.

Brazil reiterates its firm condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. There is no justification for such acts. We support the efforts of the Malian armed forces to fight terrorism, which remains a major challenge to the restoration of State authority in the centre and the north of Mali. While MINUSMA remains committed to assisting the Malian authorities in that crucial task, it is our duty in the Council to seek safer conditions for peacekeepers and civil personnel alike as they perform their tasks. In that regard, we note with concern the persistence of incidents involving protests of the local population against the Mission and acts that seek to prevent peacekeepers from discharging their core duties. Taking into account that such episodes primarily result from disinformation, we take this opportunity to underscore the need to develop the strategic communications component of MINUSMA. We count on other Council members to pursue that objective collectively when the Mission's mandate and tasks are reviewed. The safety and security of peacekeepers should be a top priority.

At the same time, we welcome the final settlement reached between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire on the liberation of the Ivorian troops who had been detained in Malian territory for several months. We hope the transition authorities will, in future, handle the issue of the rotation of contingents more promptly and in a manner that is more compatible with our common aim to make MINUSMA's work safer and more effective.

In the light of the magnitude of the threats in the security field and the key contribution that cooperation may provide to the Malian armed forces, we not only encourage improvements in collaboration with MINUSMA but also urge further consideration to be given to re-establishing or increasing coordination with the Group of Five for the Sahel. Cross-border problems often require regional responses. We believe that regional cooperation can be equally beneficial to Mali at the political level. In that regard, Brazil fully supports the decision of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), taken at the Summit of the Heads of State and Government last month, to continue

the dialogue with Malian authorities on collaboration in order to develop and implement a transition plan that is conducive to the restoration of constitutional order.

Brazil supports confidence-building measures among the Malian political forces. The return to democratic normality, including the drafting of a new constitution, is a collective endeavour that must include women, young people, and ethnic and religious minorities. It is encouraging to see the renewed engagement with the transition process and the lead-up to elections. However, as an ECOWAS official rightly pointed out recently, the transition plan means little without the peace agreement. Therefore, we encourage the Malian political forces to remain engaged in dialogue and redouble their efforts towards the full implementation of all provisions of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

In concluding, and in view of the humanitarian situation and the socioeconomic assessment contained in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/21), my delegation would like to underscore once again the need to address the root causes of conflict. In that sense, we can certainly draw valuable lessons from the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund with the Sahel. We wish all the best to Mali and the Malian people in overcoming this moment of challenge.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I also welcome the representative of Mali and Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko, civil society actor from Mali.

I express my condolences to the Government of Nigeria and the families of the Blue Helmets who were killed and wounded in the attack of 16 December. Ecuador also stands together with the families of the peacekeeping personnel who suffered casualties as they discharged their mandates.

The analysis of the situation in Mali presented today reflects the more complex security environment. We condemn the disinformation and misinformation campaigns, in particular those directly targeting MINUSMA. They imperil the security of Mission personnel, as seen in the Mopti region, which has been affected by the proliferation of improvised explosive devices. We are concerned by the increasing number

of those incidents, and we take note of the action plan to counter the threats of improvised explosive devices developed by MINUSMA and the Mine Action Service. We reiterate the value of strategic communications for overcoming those challenges. We deplore the land and air movement restrictions that MINUSMA faces. Those restrictions hinder the gathering of intelligence, which threatens the safety of Mission convoys and undermines the protection of civilians. We urge the Malian authorities to support MINUSMA's freedom of movement and other related activities, in accordance with the status-of-forces agreement. We condemn the terrorist attacks, which have claimed hundreds of lives and displaced hundreds of people in the northern regions. We are concerned by the illicit trafficking in small arms, which fuels armed violence. We therefore encourage the continued development of the border management and security strategy.

We encourage the work to prevent radicalization and violent extremism in prisons, the strengthening of the Specialized Judicial Unit on Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime, and the work undertaken by the Ministry for Justice and Human Rights to implement the national criminal policy and the prosecutorial strategy on terrorism-related and international crimes, which was developed with MINUSMA's support.

We recognize the work and efforts of the Mission in the area of political transition, with confidence-building, dialogue-facilitation and mediation tools, including in promoting the full implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

In that regard, we are concerned by the decision of certain movements to suspend their participation in the implementation process of the Agreement, and we support the Secretary-General's call for the parties to cooperate constructively with each other and with the international mediation team led by Algeria, with the support of MINUSMA, in order to advance the peace process.

The full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the mechanisms set out in the Agreement is a priority. We call for the further strengthening of women's presence in all political functions and positions so as to not only comply with the minimum quota of 30 per cent, but exceed it. The dialogue on the draft constitution must be inclusive. That requires the participation of all political actors and civil society, including women.

On electoral reform, we support the joint work of MINUSMA and the United Nations agencies involved in the preparation and logistics of the electoral process. We appreciate the role of the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union in mobilizing resources to meet the March 2024 transition deadline. The Council should take the necessary measures to increase the capacities of MINUSMA, which is experiencing operational difficulties in terms of personnel, equipment, transport and supplies.

Finally, we call for an end to human rights violations and abuses and urgently call for enhanced cooperation between the Malian forces and MINUSMA and the support of the international community, with a view to creating conditions to alleviate the humanitarian situation aggravated by the increase in internally displaced persons. Women and girls are always the most affected in such situations.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Wane for his briefing. We listened attentively to the remarks by Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko. We welcome His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Abdoulaye Diop, to today's meeting. His briefing today will help the Council fully and accurately grasp the situation in Mali and the needs of the country.

Special Representative Wane mentioned in his briefing that Mali has made major strides in promoting the political transition, advancing the peace process and combating terrorism, none of which would have been possible without the joint efforts of the Malian Government and the international community. As we speak, the political and peace process in Mali stand at a critical juncture. They require the ongoing attention and support of the international community. We must help the Malian Government properly address the various challenges it faces.

First, Mali must maintain unity and stability. Recently, Mali initiated the constitutional process, set up a more inclusive National Transition Council and made progress on election preparations. China welcomes those positive outcomes. A political transition can hardly be achieved overnight. It is essential to ensure broad-based participation, take into account the interests of all parties, safeguard unity and stability and address differences through dialogue and consultation, thereby creating conditions conducive to the constitutional referendum and the electoral process.

When providing support, the international community should respect Mali's sovereignty and ownership. The African Union and the Economic Community of West African States should continue to play a constructive role. The implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali is of vital importance. We welcome the efforts made by all parties concerned to reopen the dialogue mechanism, including the Agreement Monitoring Committee, commend the important role played by Algeria in leading the international mediation team and look forward to greater contributions from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Secondly, Mali must strengthen its counter-terrorism capacity-building. Recently, Mali conducted counter-terrorism operations in Mopti, Ménaka and Gao, among other areas, in order to maintain local stability and protect civilians. Those efforts merit our full recognition. That said, terrorist forces remain rampant and are constantly harassing villages and kidnapping and attacking civilians. Such security threats are spilling over to neighbouring countries. Mali stands at the forefront of counter-terrorism efforts in the Sahel and West Africa. To support Mali in combating terrorism is to safeguard regional peace. The international community should help Mali strengthen its counter-terrorism capacity-building, provide financial, material, intelligence and logistical support and respect Mali's sovereign right to engage in external security cooperation. The countries of the region should preserve the momentum in counter-terrorism cooperation and forge synergies.

Thirdly, MINUSMA should continue to improve its peacekeeping performance. Under the leadership of Special Representative Wane, the Mission has worked diligently to maintain peace and stability in Mali. However, the nation faces a great many new problems and challenges. The Secretary-General's most recent report on the internal review of MINUSMA (S/2023/36) provides a series of recommendations on strengthening the work of the Mission and its reconfiguration. Improving the peacekeeping performance of the Mission is a shared aspiration of all Council members. We should seize the opportunity presented by this internal review to strengthen the Mission's top-level design, streamline and optimize its mandate and focus its resources and strength on the most central and urgent tasks, thereby coming up with a practical and viable

plan. The relevant position papers submitted by the Malian Government should be taken seriously by the Council. When reconfiguring the Mission, the Council should fully heed the views of Mali and accommodate its legitimate concerns. The report referred to the problems encountered by the Mission in air and ground operations and in implementing the status-of-forces agreement. Those problems should be resolved through dialogue and consultation between the Mission and the Malian Government so as to create a sound environment conducive to the Mission's mandate delivery.

Fourthly, Mali must enhance its sustainable development. Mali faces a grim economic situation, with a quarter of its population in need of humanitarian assistance. We should work together to help alleviate its difficulties, ensure that relief funds are in place and forestall the recurrence of humanitarian disaster in Mali. It is necessary to scale up investment in peacebuilding, support Mali in implementing projects in such areas as agriculture development, infrastructure, education and health, and help Mali enhance its own development capacities. Many young Malians are caught up in conflict, violence and poverty. It is important to increase policy support and investment in that sector of the population. In December, phase two of the Kabala campus of the University of Bamako, the largest educational infrastructure project built with Chinese aid in West Africa, was completed. China stands ready to work with the international community in order to make greater contributions to lasting peace and development in Mali.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko for their informative briefings, and I welcome His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

Mali has been a priority and partner country of Swiss cooperation since 1977 — over 40 years. Active primarily in the regions of Sikasso, Mopti and Timbuktu, Switzerland is committed to the fight against poverty, focusing on local education, economic development, sustainable peace and respect for human rights. There is still a long way to go towards such peace. I take this opportunity to say that our thoughts are with all the families of the victims, members and troops of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Malian civilian population. We welcome the steps taken

to move the political transition forward, in particular the enactment of an electoral law, the draft constitution and the updating of the electoral list. Such a path should be taken forward in an inclusive, impartial, transparent and time-bound process. We encourage the authorities to work closely with the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union. Let me highlight four key points.

First, the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali remains the cornerstone for peace, democracy and prosperity in Mali. The continued commitment of the signatory parties to reviving that process remains crucial and pressing. We welcome the efforts made by the international mediation in that direction, and we call for the rapid operationalization of the ad hoc commission and the resumption of regular dialogue among the parties. Switzerland is ready to support those processes. We see encouraging signs of women's representation and active participation. Their inclusion at all levels of decision-making and the mainstreaming of their capacities and input in all processes are essential.

Secondly, the ongoing insecurity, including the threat of terrorism, is worrisome. Peace efforts are undermined by the lack of security and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, for which the civilian population pays a high price. In addition, impunity plays a role in perpetuating cycles of violence. The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/21) informs us that non-State armed groups, including violent extremist groups, as well as State actors and foreign security personnel, are responsible for those violations and abuses. In order to ensure the protection of the civilian population and restore their trust in Malian institutions, Switzerland calls on all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Thirdly, humanitarian needs, including food needs, have increased. The lack of security and climate change are exacerbating the food crisis and forced displacement, leading to an even more precarious security situation. We are concerned that 1,950 schools remain closed, affecting almost 590,000 children in the centre and north of the country. The future of those children, especially girls, is at stake. We call on all actors to ensure and protect humanitarian access and on the international community to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs.

Fourthly, Switzerland thanks the Secretary-General for the good internal review of MINUSMA, which notes that its overall strategic priorities remain relevant. Regardless of the future configuration of the mandate and the Mission, two points seem important to us. First, to fulfil its mandate and effectively support the Malian efforts, MINUSMA must have the necessary resources. Together with the Malian authorities, it must be able to create and maintain a security environment that allows it to operate effectively. In addition, a relationship of mutual trust between Mali and MINUSMA must be based on respect for the existing agreements, particularly the status-of-forces agreement. The Mission's freedom of movement is critical to the fulfilment of its mandate. The four parameters identified by the internal review could therefore form the basis for a stable and predictable relationship between the Mission and its host country.

The insecurity in Mali has an impact on regional stability. The continued and united support of the Security Council is crucial to seeking a common understanding and, by working with local and regional stakeholders, improving the current situation in Mali. Switzerland is pleased to contribute to that.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, and Ms. Aminata Cheick Dicko for their briefings. We welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, at this meeting.

We firmly believe that the Malian authorities are determined to do their best to address the challenges facing their country, especially in terms of security and internal political stability. Malians have shown a strong commitment to restoring constitutional order in the country within the agreed time frame. Efforts are being made to fully implement the transitional road map. Work is continuing on the drafting of a new constitution that takes into account the key provisions of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process.

It is important that the Malian leadership be committed to upholding that document, which remains the basis for achieving peace and national reconciliation in the country. At the end of last year, after a break of almost a year, the Agreement Monitoring Committee convened and adopted some important decisions, including with regard to the disarmament,

demobilization and reintegration process of former combatants. We call on the signatories, particularly the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, to renew their participation in the substantive work of the Committee. We hope that a mutually acceptable solution regarding the modalities for the meetings will be found.

We agree with the current Malian authorities that the issue of security is an overriding priority of the transition period. The country continues its tough and challenging fight against terrorism. Because of the security vacuum due to the hasty withdrawal of French and European military contingents from Malian territory, terrorists from the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims became significantly more active. Those groups, affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaida, continue to carry out regular raids against civilians, Malian army units and United Nations peacekeepers. However, despite some obvious difficulties, in recent months, the Malian armed forces have demonstrated that they are capable of achieving results in the fight against terrorists.

We express our support for the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) aimed at helping the Malian authorities and people to address the problems facing them, particularly in order to stabilize the situation. We are aware of the threats that deployment in Mali, especially in the central and northern regions, poses to the Blue Helmets. We pay tribute to the peacekeepers and Malian soldiers who gave their lives for the sake of peace and security in that country.

We are satisfied with the progress made in the dialogue with the transitional Government and that there has been progress in ensuring an adequate level of coordination. We regret the fact that some troop-contributing countries decided to withdraw or suspend their participation in MINUSMA. We believe that MINUSMA must strictly adhere to its human rights mandate, namely, to support the Malian authorities in carrying out their investigations. The politicization of that file is unacceptable.

In the context of evaluating the modalities of MINUSMA's work and the Mission's internal review, we would like to stress that we continue to consider ways to reconfigure the United Nations presence. We

hope that that entire process will be geared towards Mali's needs and support for its efforts. Since the opinion of the host State is crucial, we believe that consultations should continue.

In general, we believe that the effective implementation of Mission's mandate, including with regard to helping to restore constitutional order and implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, as well as other areas, will not be possible without support for the Malian Defence and Security Forces. Only they are capable of mounting the required offensive against terrorists.

Russia provides comprehensive assistance to the Malian army, including by increasing its combat capacity and training military personnel. Such engagement, undertaken at Bamako's request and in strict compliance with the relevant norms of international law, is yielding results. The Malian armed forces are carrying out successful counter-terrorist operations in the central regions of the country. They are also taking consistent steps to liberate areas in the north and east of the country from militants. In our view, the negative response of our Western colleagues to the enhanced cooperation between Mali and Russia is yet another manifestation of the neocolonial policies that, combined with a lack of tangible results in the efforts to stabilize Mali after years of a military presence in the country, were the very reason Mali decided to find new partners. The Secretary-General's internal review report on MINUSMA (S/2023/36) makes it clear that those efforts were ineffective. We saw a similar situation in Afghanistan, where 20 years of a United States presence led to total failure accompanied by numerous crimes. As in the case of Afghanistan, the Security Council is going to have to fix everything, and yet somehow Russia is to blame.

Unlike some of our Western colleagues, Russia does not try to interfere in Mali's politics or attach conditions to the assistance it provides that could undermine the country's sovereignty. Our relations are based on our years of equitable bilateral cooperation and our understanding of our common aim of combating the global evil of terrorism. It should therefore come as no surprise that we have heard no complaints from our African partners regarding the parameters of our interactions. Using the platform of the Security Council to settle scores with Russia is not only irresponsible but disrespectful to millions of Malians.

We have noted the official statement from Paris that France will no longer be funding development assistance programmes in Mali. The Malian Government's response was understandable when in November of last year the authorities banned non-governmental organizations receiving material or technical support from France from operating there. France's decision could clearly further exacerbate the dire humanitarian situation in Mali, where according to United Nations data, more than 5.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and the number of internally displaced persons now stands at 440,000. Meanwhile, the humanitarian appeal for Mali remains chronically underfunded.

Russia intends to continue to provide constructive support for normalization efforts in Mali both through the Security Council and via comprehensive bilateral assistance to Bamako. We believe that effective assistance to the Malian authorities for the purposes of ensuring security and implementing a balanced policy on issues relating to a resolution of the crisis is in our common interest. Without a collective effort it will be very difficult to achieve solid peace and stability throughout the Sahara-Sahel region, which to this day has been unable to overcome the challenges created by the West's illegal intervention in Libya in 2011. That said, we firmly believe that it is the people of the Sahara-Sahel who must play the main role in advancing peace and security there. We support the States of the region in implementing a genuinely independent policy based on the principle of African solutions to African problems.

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

I thank Special Representative Wane and Ms. Dicko for their insightful briefings. I also welcome the participation of Minister Diop in today's meeting. Japan joins others in expressing its condolences regarding all the peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the line of duty, including the recent deaths of two Nigerians.

Peace and stability in Mali are the hope and desire of the Malian people. A return to constitutional order and the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law are therefore imperative if Malians are to decide their future for themselves. Japan notes the political progress that has been made, including through a presidential decree in December, to establish a committee to finalize a draft constitution. We command the continued efforts of the

Economic Community of West Africa States, with the support of the African Union and the United Nations, to assist the Malian authorities in meeting the transition deadline of March 2024. Japan stresses the importance of the unobstructed and constructive participation in the transitional reform process on the part of all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society, women and young people. Japan believes that the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali remains the only existing framework for achieving sustainable peace and ensuring Mali's territorial integrity. Japan encourages all parties to continue to engage in productive and decisive dialogue towards the implementation of the peace agreement.

We are deeply concerned about the worsening security situation in Mali. Japan acknowledges the continued efforts of the Malian forces to address insecurity. However, we are disturbed by the documentation by the United Nations of human rights violations allegedly committed by Malian and foreign security personnel. Japan will continue to support efforts to build the capacity of security officers regarding international humanitarian law, human rights law and gender issues.

The role of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) remains pivotal as Mali's multifaceted challenges continue. Japan applauds MINUSMA's efforts amid its continuing high toll of casualties, about which Japan is greatly concerned. The high number of improvised explosive device attacks remains alarming. Japan thanks the troop- and police-contributing countries and pays tribute to all who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Considering the unprecedented difficulties that the Mission is facing, Japan urges the Malian authorities to cooperate with MINUSMA to ensure the Mission's secure and uninterrupted movement in fulfilling its mandate. We also call on MINUSMA to further improve its communication with the Malian authorities and local communities. Japan welcomes the issuance of the internal review of MINUSMA (S/2023/36), providing us with a clear view of MINUSMA's status and the parameters that the discussion of options for MINUSMA should be based on. We look forward to engaging with our colleagues in discussing the future of MINUSMA in the coming months.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Council is here to assist the people and the Government of Mali. Strengthening cooperation between Malians

and the international community is the best way forward. I would like to reiterate our solidarity with the people of Mali and their hopes for a stable and peaceful country, as well as our strong support for MINUSMA.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

Mr. Diop (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council, and wish you and the other new members of the Council every success.

The Government of Mali takes note of the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/21), under consideration today. I thank our brother Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), for his briefing and updates. The Malian Government's comments in response to the Secretary-General's report are contained in a memorandum that has already been circulated to the members of the Council. I would now like to convey the Government's views on several issues.

On the political front, I welcome the consensus on the significant progress made during the reporting period. In its desire to rebuild the Malian State, the Government is continuing its implementation of political and institutional reforms as part of a process that is both transparent and inclusive. In that regard, I am pleased to inform the Council that following the submission of a draft of the new constitution to His Excellency Colonel Assimi Goita, Transitional President and Head of State, the commission mandated to prepare the new constitution remains engaged in consultations with key sectors of Malian society to achieve a foundational text that enjoys broad consensus with regard to the major aspirations of the Malian people. Following those consultations, the Government intends to submit the draft constitution for a final decision to be taken by the Malian people via a referendum that is scheduled for March. The Government is also resolutely committed to implementing other priority initiatives that are already on its calendar. They include the election of a local communities adviser in June, the election of members of the National Assembly in October and November and lastly the election of the President of the Republic, scheduled for February 2024.

In line with the Government's desire to see constitutional order restored, the members of the Independent Authority for Election Management were installed by the President of the transition and Head of State on 10 January 2023. In addition, the first joint meeting between the Authority and the Steering Committee for the Referendum and General Elections was held on 23 January. Arrangements are under way for the establishment of the Independent Authority for Election Management's offices in all constituencies throughout the national territory and in diplomatic and consular missions, with a view to better organizing the referendum and elections. I would also like to underscore that the convening of a social conference from 17 to 22 October 2022 and the forthcoming adoption of a pact on social stability, with the involvement of the trade unions, will contribute to calming the social climate. The Government has furthermore accelerated its administrative reorganization of the territory by adopting six draft laws in the Council of Ministers, notably on establishing the boundary lines of the newly created regions.

With regard to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process — the subject of much debate by the Council — I would like to solemnly reiterate the commitment of the Malian Government to pursuing its rigorous and unequivocal implementation, as we remain convinced that it is paramount for achieving lasting stability in our country. I can assure members that undeniable progress has been made, particularly in the framework of the accelerated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. We have integrated 1,718 ex-combatants from the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad, the Plateforme and the Mouvements de l'inclusivité into the national defence and security forces. The Government is also working towards the development of a new DDR programme for the period 2023–2027, as well as an integration programme for 2023–2025 to further strengthen the process. With a view to speeding up the implementation of the Agreement, the Government adopted a decision in the Council of Ministers on 18 October 2022 to set up an ad hoc commission responsible for resolving outstanding issues, in particular those relating to the chain of command in the national defence and security forces and the integration of senior civilian officials from the signatory movements into national institutions.

The development aspects of the Agreement have also received sustained attention from the Government, which is working to enhance development in the northern regions. The Government remains determined to implement the 16 projects it launched in 2021, with the full involvement of the signatory parties, so as to create conditions conducive to delivering peace dividends to all the people of Mali.

Despite the undeniable progress that has been made, I regret that the reporting period was marked by the withdrawal of signatory groups from the mechanisms of the Agreement Monitoring Committee. That decision is all the more regrettable as it runs counter to the positive momentum that has accumulated in recent months. We hope to reach a common understanding with the signatory movements in the near future, because they are indeed our brothers from the same country. We also appreciate the participation of the signatory movements, standing alongside us in the same Government.

To address the specific issue raised by the representative of the United States with regard to his request that the Government participate at an appropriate level in the Agreement Monitoring Committee, I would like to recall that the Government remains committed to the implementation of the Agreement. Allow me to clarify the situation. We are a State, whereas the other parties are signatory movements. The Government has indicated that for a minister of the Malian Government to participate in meetings of the follow-up committee, it would like the principal leaders of the signatory movements to be present. There is an imbalance owing to the fact that every time the Malian Government sends ministers, we are talking about experts. As States, we should all understand that there are protocols for working together in such a framework. Mali has not demanded anything but reciprocity. Whenever the principal leaders of the signatory movements are in attendance, Mali will also send members of the Government. That has absolutely nothing to do with the Government's level of commitment, because when an expert participates, they have the full authority to take decisions on such issues. We would be glad if members were better informed about the situation, but that is all I have to say on that specific issue.

With regard to the suspension of the work of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, Mali has asked Algeria, as leader of the international mediation efforts and Chair of the follow-up committee, to hold a ministerial-level meeting of the Agreement Monitoring

Committee as early as February 2023 in order to resume the dialogue. I commend those members of the Council that have appealed to our brothers to return to the table so that we may continue working together to overcome the challenges we face. I welcome Algeria's constructive actions and enormous efforts to bring the parties together to find a solution. I appreciate all and any support that could be extended to us in that regard.

On the security front, the Government regrets that the report of the Secretary-General once again fails to mention the efforts and actions of the Malian Defence and Security Forces in securing the territory and protecting civilians. Such progress is to the great satisfaction of the Malian people, although we recognize that major challenges persist in some places. I believe that the position adopted by the Secretary-General's report is also reflected in what I have heard around this table. Few delegations have praised the work carried out by the Malian Defence and Security Forces or paid tribute to the thousands of Malian soldiers who have died on the ground — I believe it is important to highlight those facts. The Malian Defence and Security Forces remain determined to continue their offensive actions, which were launched in December 2021 and are aimed at preventing and combating the indiscriminate attacks and reprisals perpetrated by extremist groups against our civilian populations and their property. The offensive posture adopted by the Malian Defence and Security Forces has resulted in not only the neutralization of many terrorists and the destruction of their safe havens but also the voluntary surrender of several of those terrorists, particularly in the regions of Douentza and Mopti.

As part of the implementation of the new integrated strategy for the centre of Mali, as mentioned by the Special Representative, the State is strengthening its presence across the territory, contrary to the figures provided in the report. In 2022, the situation of vacant posts in the centre of the country improved significantly, the details of which may be found in the note published yesterday. That increased State presence is contributing to improvements in the provision of basic social services to the population in the areas still affected by insecurity.

On the question of human rights, which has also been subject to much commentary around this table, the 58 per cent reduction in cases of human rights violations noted by the Secretary-General is the result not only of the offensive operations undertaken by the

Malian Defence and Security Forces against extremist groups, in strict compliance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law, but also of the increased State presence over a large part of the country's territory, despite the security challenges. I assure the Council that the Government of Mali, while firmly opposing any idea of instrumentalizing or politicizing the issue, will continue to work tirelessly for the protection and promotion of human rights on our territory in accordance with Mali's ancestral humanist values, as reaffirmed in our contemporary national and international commitments. In terms of justice and reparations, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General pointed out, the President of the transition enacted laws on 15 November 2022 that established the general rules for reparations for harm caused by grave human rights violations.

Regarding MINUSMA's operational challenges, I note that the report of the Secretary-General acknowledges the positive development of the new flight request procedure agreed to on 15 November 2022, which has enabled an increase in the number of approved flights. I think the Council should register the good news rather than just focusing on the so-called obstacles and restrictions, and those positive results can be attributed to the new procedure's emphasis on decentralizing coordination and clarifying responsibilities. That encouraging progress is unfortunately undercut by the fact that the data collected by the drones is sometimes partial or unusable, and I believe that collaboration should be strengthened in that regard. I would like to remind the Council that despite everything the drone flights have been resumed, and we can hope that Mali's expectations will be met. I would like to remind the Council once again that my Government's actions are critical to the degree that they are dictated by national security concerns, and we remain open to working with the Mission to identify the solutions needed to move forward.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, the Government remains concerned about the issue, especially since the humanitarian needs in Mali are only 34 per cent funded, as we all know. That gives me an opportunity to appeal to the international community as a whole to give the Sahel, especially my country, the same degree of attention it has accorded other regions of the world in crisis. For its part, my Government will continue to work to provide the necessary assistance to our compatriots in vulnerable situations, including

those living in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees. We also continue to believe firmly that improving the humanitarian situation is very closely linked to stabilizing our territory.

I would like to assure the Council that Mali remains faithful to its commitment to pan-Africanism, peace and its policies of good-neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and the strengthening of friendly relations based on mutual respect and trust. It was in that spirit that Colonel Goïta, President of the Transitional Government, decided in full independence to grant pardons to and fully revoke the sentences of the 49 Ivorians convicted under the Malian justice system.

I would now like to make some preliminary observations about the Secretary-General's report on the internal review of MINUSMA (S/2023/36). The Government of Mali has taken note of the report. We note at first glance that its proposals do not take into account the legitimate expectations of the Malian people, which as the Council knows are about security first and foremost. The fact is that for the most part, the Secretary-General's options for reconfiguration are limited to changing the number of personnel in MINUSMA or converting it into a special political mission, which in fact is not far from the actual status quo, which has not really responded to the situation.

The Government of Mali would like to point out that the main challenge facing MINUSMA is its ability to adapt its mandate to the security conditions in which it is deployed, and as we all know, improving that requires a change of doctrine in this house and of the rules of engagement, but above all it requires genuine political will in order to help our country emerge from the crisis. There needs to be a real willingness between MINUSMA and the Malian Defence and Security Forces to cooperate on the ground and turn the situation around. It was with that in mind that the Government of Mali contributed positively to the consultations for the internal review, in the hope that it would respond to the Malian people's aspirations. Unfortunately it did not. However, the Government of Mali will remain open to dialogue in the coming months with the United Nations to identify a way forward.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the people of Mali's sovereign choice to control their own destiny. Under the authority and guidance of the President of the Transitional Government and Head of State of Mali, the Government will continue to pursue its current actions,

which should culminate in a return to a peaceful and secure constitutional order. We also remain committed to defending our national territory, protecting the people and their property, implementing the peace agreement, respecting and ensuring respect for human rights and improving the country's governance and the living conditions of our fellow citizens. To achieve those ambitious goals, the Government of Mali remains ready to cooperate with all its partners — I repeat, all — including our neighbours, the countries of the region and regional and international organizations, naturally in strict respect for Mali's sovereignty, its strategic choices and the choices of its partners, and the interests of the people of Mali.

Let me remind the Council once again that the President of the Transitional Government established three key principles that will govern our relations with our partners going forward, one of which — related to comments I have heard around this table regarding the cooperation between Mali and Russia — is State-to-State cooperation. Mali will not continue to justify its choice of partners. We make those choices based on specific contexts, and as the representative of Russia has just indicated, that cooperation in the areas of training and equipment is being undertaken in full respect for international standards. We hope that will be understood in order to enable our country to move forward and ensure its security. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all of Mali's friends, bilateral and multilateral, for the significant efforts they have made in support of ending the crisis. Lastly, I want to pay tribute to the memory of all the victims of the crisis in Mali — civilian and military, foreign and Malian — who have sacrificed their lives on the battlefield.

Before I finish my statement, I want to express my delegation's great surprise on discovering that a Malian would brief the Council at today's meeting, and I have to say that we were not informed about it. We do not know that person, the organization she represents or on whose behalf she was speaking, and we naturally doubt her representativeness and credibility in appearing before the Council. It is important for the members of the Council themselves to remember that using civil society to pursue hidden agendas does not serve the cause of civil society. That person could have instead met with the Malian authorities in order for us to work together to protect the entire community.

It goes without saying that Mali is an ancient country with a multi-confessional tradition, and a multi-ethnic country with a mosaic of peoples. Neither our Government or even its army would ever engage in fighting any part of its own population. I think that the people with hidden agendas who have succeeded elsewhere in pitting communities against one another and creating ethnic wars have tried to do the same in Mali. But it has not worked. The Malian army, a professional, multi-ethnic force, will continue to work to defend all Malians — the entire Malian community — to strengthen our national cohesion. I believe that what the country needs today is not messages of division but

messages that unite us. Mali will continue to work to that end in full respect for human rights and with the aim of bringing Malians together. And we hope that within the framework of our partnership, the Council will also be able to review its working methods so as to strengthen its collaboration with my country.

The President: 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 12.10 p.m.