



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9302**<sup>nd</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 12 April 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Nebenzia . . . . . (Russian Federation)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Pérez Loose
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ishikane
Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Fernandes
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. DeLaurentis

## Agenda

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2023/236)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

Before adopting today's agenda, I would like to remind colleagues that today, 12 April, is International Day of Human Space Flight, which commemorates the day that Yuri Gagarin became the first person in the world to carry out a crewed flight into outer space. We hope that space will remain an area for cooperation, non-confrontation and peaceful exploration, and not for an arms race.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in Mali**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2023/236)**

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, to participate in this meeting.

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/2023/236, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali.

I now give the floor to Mr. Wane.

**Mr. Wane** (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council today. I will begin with an update on the security situation, which will be followed by an overview of political and other developments related to the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

As described in the report of the Secretary-General before the Council (S/2023/236), the security situation remains volatile, marked by ongoing acts of violence by terrorist groups in some areas of Mali, with devastating consequences for the civilian population.

The Council may recall that it was around this time last year that I first briefed the Council on the ongoing security crisis in the Ménaka region in north-east Mali (see S/PV.9012). Subsequently, in June of the same year, I highlighted my concerns about the worsening security situation and its consequences for the protection of civilians (see S/PV.9061). I also highlighted the limited capacities of the Mission and the Malian authorities to deal with it.

Since the beginning of the year, the situation has further deteriorated, with the resurgence of clashes between the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), which are competing to increase their areas of influence and control supply routes and engage in relentless attacks on the civilian population.

The Malian Defence and Security Forces are conducting operations against the ISGS around the town of Ménaka and in areas further south, including Indelimane, while carrying out convoy escorts along the Ménaka-Anderamboukane axis and on the road between Ménaka and Ansongo. On 24 March, the armed forces of the Niger announced that they had conducted operations aimed at pursuing elements of the ISGS in Hamarat, in the Ménaka region. Despite those efforts, the security and humanitarian situation remains dire, with more than 30,000 people currently displaced who have sought refuge in the city of Ménaka since the beginning of last year. Around 2,400 displaced persons have also found refuge in an area less than two kilometres to the north of the MINUSMA camp in Ménaka. I saw first-hand the devastating impact of those developments during my visit to Ménaka three weeks ago, my fifth such visit since my arrival in Mali in 2021. The influx of internally displaced people has increased pressure on the humanitarian response, with populations in urgent need of drinking water, food, medicine and shelter. Listening to the displaced people as they literally begged us for drinking water was a shocking experience.

In an increasingly complicated environment, MINUSMA, with its limited capabilities, continues to do its best to protect civilians through a combination of

day and night patrols in coordination with the Malian Defence and Security Forces, up to 15 kilometres outside the city of Ménaka. In addition, the Mission is pursuing its reconciliation and social cohesion activities with the aim of defusing the growing intercommunal tensions. The Mission has also on occasion supported local authorities through the provision of essential social services, including the delivery of drinking water to the displaced population in Ménaka. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the humanitarian actors for their commitment and to plead for the provision of additional resources so that they can respond to the needs on the ground. So far only 8 per cent of the \$751 million requested by the 2023 humanitarian response plan has materialized.

In addition to Ménaka, Gao and the centre of the country are also still dealing with difficult situations. In the Gao region more than 61,000 people have been displaced over the past year. In the past three months, the Islamic State and the JNIM have clashed near Bara, N'tillit, Anchawadi and Tessit. The signatory movements have also been involved in fighting with the Islamic State. The Malian Defence and Security Forces reported on the mainly aerial operations that they have been conducting against extremists in the region. In collaboration with them, MINUSMA is conducting protection-of-civilian patrols covering 17 sites for internally displaced persons in Gao and Ansongo, in north-eastern Mali, aimed at improving the security and safety of the displaced while at the same time preventing possible attacks by extremists. Operations were also conducted in other areas, including Djebock, which is approximately 34 kilometres to the north-east of Gao, as well as elsewhere in the region.

Central Mali also continues to face complex security challenges. Most of the incidents reported over the past three months have occurred in the Mopti and Ségou regions. In general, the operations led by the Malian Defence and Security Forces in those areas have disrupted extremist groups' activities, mainly by forcing them to disperse to surrounding areas in the direction of Timbuktu and Gao. Under that pressure, extremist groups are using more improvised explosive devices targeting the ground movements of the Malian Defence and Security Forces, in addition to making surprise attacks on several police stations along the major supply routes. In that context, the Malian Government's adoption in September 2022 of its political strategy for stabilizing the centre, launched in March in the

presence of the Prime Minister, several Malian partners and representatives of MINUSMA, is an important step in advancing a comprehensive approach to the complicated crisis throughout the centre of the country. MINUSMA, which supported the development of the strategy, will support the permanent secretariat of the Cadre politique de gestion de la crise au Centre and the regional coordination committees, in addition to providing direct support on the ground through social cohesion, conflict resolution and reconciliation activities, including in the Niono, Douentza and Koro areas. MINUSMA is also continuing its protection-of-civilian operations in Ogossagou and Douentza, as well as helping to protect critical infrastructure and providing access to roads.

*(spoke in English)*

The Mission has continued to pay particular attention to the human rights situation in Mali, in line with its mandate. The preliminary findings for the first quarter, from January to March, show once again that the majority of human rights violations and abuses were committed by extremist groups. As I have stressed in previous briefings to the Council, it is important that the Malian authorities make every effort to ensure that military operations against terrorist and extremist groups are conducted in full compliance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law and that violations and abuses are transparently and promptly investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. At the same time, I will continue to engage with the Malian authorities to enhance our cooperation and facilitate the full implementation of the Mission's human rights mandate, in particular investigations into allegations of human rights violations and abuses, the objective of which is to strengthen justice and accountability, which are essential to achieving lasting stabilization in Mali. I want to take this opportunity to underscore that during the period under review, we have continued to provide the Malian Defence and Security Forces with important capacity-building support in the areas of human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as carrying out awareness-raising activities for their members. I welcome the collaboration that we have developed in that respect.

In view of the security challenges I have mentioned, the need for closer coordination between the Malian Defence and Security Forces and MINUSMA cannot be emphasized enough. It will enable existing resources

to be used more judiciously and ensure greater effectiveness on the ground. In that regard, I welcome the steps already taken at the regional level between local former commanders and the MINUSMA force and police, as well as the concerted efforts of the leadership of the MINUSMA force and police and their Malian counterparts in Bamako. Those steps must be enhanced in line with the 2017 memorandum of understanding between Mali and MINUSMA, as emphasized in successive resolutions mandating the Mission and in the recently concluded internal strategic review (S/2023/36). We will continue our consultations with our Malian partners to arrive at a level of coordination that is commensurate with the challenges at hand and can help MINUSMA to better deliver on its mandate in support of the Malian people.

Freedom of movement is equally important to the efficacy of our efforts. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, we continue to encounter challenges in that regard, particularly where the use of our intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets and some of our ground movements are concerned. Improvements in that area will be critical to the Mission's ability to meet the legitimate expectations of the Malian people and authorities for enhanced effectiveness. We will continue to engage with the Malian authorities on the matter, especially by enhancing coordination.

Finally, it is critical that MINUSMA retain full operational capability if it is to make a meaningful contribution to the improvement of the security situation and the protection environment in Mali. I want to pay tribute to all the members of troop- and police-contributing countries for the sacrifices that they have made during their deployment in Mali and look forward to the Council's continued support to ensure that MINUSMA has the required uniformed personnel and capabilities.

Let me now turn to the recent political developments in Mali. As Council members are aware, MINUSMA and the international mediation, under the leadership of Algeria, have continued to engage the signatory parties to the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali to find ways to ensure the resumption of the various monitoring mechanisms of the peace agreement. The paralysis of their activities since December has heightened tensions and fuelled concerns about the viability of the peace process. Following a long consultation process with the parties, the international mediation submitted proposals last week to facilitate

the resumption of the activities of the monitoring mechanisms and accelerate the implementation of the outstanding provisions of the peace agreement. It is the considered view of the entire international mediation that those proposals should take into account the concerns expressed by the parties in the course of the consultations held in Mali and Algeria since January. It is my earnest hope that the parties will consider those proposals with the required spirit of compromise in order to bring about lasting security and stability and deliver on the long-awaited peace dividends in Mali. Equally, the parties must refrain from any action or statement that could heighten tensions or undermine the ongoing efforts. Now, more than ever before, is the time for the parties to respond to the profound aspiration of the Malian people for peace and to rise above particular interests. The Council's continued support for the efforts of the international mediation is critical at this juncture.

Regarding the transition, the Malian authorities on 10 March announced the postponement of the constitutional referendum, which was initially scheduled to be held on 19 March. The delay was attributed to the need to ensure the full operationalization of the newly established *Autorité indépendante de gestion des élections*, including the establishment of its local branches. Another element relates to the need to popularize the draft constitution, which was presented by the transition President to Malian stakeholders on 20 March. Although a new date has yet to be communicated, the Malian authorities have stated that the delay will not compromise the restoration of constitutional order within the agreed timeline — that is, by March 2024. To that end and as detailed in the report of the Secretary-General, several steps have been taken by the Malian authorities to facilitate the completion of the transition process, including the finalization of the draft constitution and the adoption of critical pieces of legislation related to electoral law and territorial reorganization. It is also worth noting the ongoing efforts to fully operationalize the local structures of the *Autorité indépendante de gestion des élections* and the printing and distribution of biometric identity cards, which will serve as voter cards.

While key challenges remain — ranging from the number of polls to be conducted within the remaining period of the transition to the related logistical and financial requirements and the security conditions in parts of the country — no effort should be spared to

ensure the return to constitutional rule by the agreed deadline of March 2024. The United Nations integrated electoral team, which includes MINUSMA and the United Nations country team in Mali, has continued to extend multifaceted support to the transition process by providing technical assistance to build the capacities of the members of the *Autorité indépendante de gestion des élections* at the national and local levels, as well as logistical and financial resources to support the administration of elections, including the acquisition of ballot boxes and computer equipment, in addition to the efforts made to encourage inclusivity and consensus at all stages of the electoral process. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on all partners to extend the necessary assistance to Mali for the successful conduct of elections.

In conclusion, while the challenges in Mali are manifold, advances are also being made in some areas. It is important not to overlook them, even if what has been achieved after a decade of intense international engagement falls below expectations — not least those of the Malian people. Indeed, those advances are proof that, with the sustained engagement of the international community and the commitment of the Malian stakeholders, the situation can be turned around. Clearly, the primary responsibility for stabilizing the country falls to the Malians, and that cannot be otherwise. The predicament in which their country finds itself calls for renewed commitment and efforts to fully harness the goodwill of the international community, including the Council, which has unfailingly renewed MINUSMA's mandate since 2013. In the same vein, I remain convinced that the United Nations offers the best framework within which to support the lasting stabilization of Mali and the larger Sahel region, in close partnership with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States. We have all the tools required, ranging from peacekeeping to peacebuilding and development, and our action is predicated on the principles that bind the entire membership of the Organization, of which Mali is a part. That unique position should continue to be leveraged, given the importance of Mali's stability for the region and beyond.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Wane for his briefing.

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

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing. I wish to highlight three points.

My first point concerns the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The Council has always been unanimous in emphasizing the major importance of that agreement and calling for its full implementation. We now see that it is under greater threat than ever. The temptation of escalation is real. The resumption of hostilities would be disastrous, not only for the people of Mali but also for the people of the entire region, and would play into the hands of the terrorists. The Council must therefore call on all parties to take responsibility and support the mediation efforts of Algeria and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Secondly, I wish to refer the political transition, which must continue in a timely manner. The Security Council must be attentive to the assessments of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, which have taken very clear decisions and are closely monitoring the process, in particular following the postponement of the constitutional referendum initially scheduled to be held on 19 March. It is crucial that all political and civil society actors be able to express themselves freely and participate in the electoral campaign.

Thirdly and finally, I would like to underscore the role played by MINUSMA. For almost 10 years, it has represented the considerable efforts of the international community, with the help of dozens of troop-contributing countries that are paying a heavy price and to which I would like to hereby pay tribute. MINUSMA also has an annual budget of over \$1.2 billion. Of course, that tool is not perfect. We must be more demanding of MINUSMA. Its mandate is robust and must be implemented in order to protect civilians, support the peace agreement and guarantee humanitarian access to the thousands of displaced persons. Like all peacekeeping operations, MINUSMA has a mandate in the area of human rights and must be able to carry out its tasks without hindrance. In that regard, it is not right that we have yet to be informed about the Moura massacre, which was committed more than one year ago, with the involvement of the Wagner Group as we know. Those responsible must be prosecuted. However, we must also recognize that MINUSMA is doing what it can in a difficult environment. We are extremely concerned about the restrictions on its activities, which

are unacceptable. I recall that without drones, the Mission cannot conduct operations. The announcements regarding the withdrawal of many contingents, which represent 20 per cent of the Force, should alert us to the gravity of the situation.

France calls on Mali and all members of the Security Council to give the most careful consideration to the internal review submitted in January by the Secretary-General (see S/2023/36), which raises important questions that we must answer together before the mandate is renewed. The priority for us all should be to take the necessary decisions so that MINUSMA can carry out its mission. In that regard, I would like to recall that the Secretary-General has set four key parameters — the continuation of the political transition, the implementation of the peace agreement, MINUSMA's freedom of movement and respect for its entire mandate, including in the area of human rights. France is ready to work constructively to ensure MINUSMA's success, together with all members of the Council, the troop-contributing countries and, of course, Mali.

**Mrs. Alhefeiti** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), for his briefing. We appreciate his efforts and those of MINUSMA in supporting Mali's stability. We also welcome the participation of the representative of Mali in today's meeting.

I would like at the outset to reiterate our continued solidarity with the Malian people, who aspire to live a dignified and secure life and put an end to the cycle of challenges their country faces. A comprehensive approach is needed to address those challenges, paying equal attention to the political, security, humanitarian and development aspects, as is the Council's continued support for those efforts, including in the upcoming discussions on the renewal of MINUSMA's mandate. We hope that the Council will speak with one voice in the interests of the Malian people, while taking into account regional perspectives on the matter. There is no question that if peacekeeping missions are to carry out their duties effectively, they must maintain their cooperation with their host countries, while the Council must focus on enabling peacekeeping forces to carry out their duties safely. In that context, we look forward to the joint study of the Department of Peace Operations on the capabilities of the military and police

forces, which should inform the Council's discussions on the future of MINUSMA. I would like to highlight three points.

First, our main goal must continue to be the success of the political process, given its importance in building State institutions. It is therefore essential to continue making progress during the political transition, in particular with regard to electoral arrangements for next year, as well as the related constitutional steps. Dialogue at the national and regional levels, including with the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union, remains a fundamental pillar for building on the gains made in the political process, which also requires the continued support of the international community. The Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali provides a framework for establishing sustainable security and stability in Mali, and in that regard, we hope that international mediation efforts will help the signatories to communicate constructively in order to address outstanding issues and overcome the obstacles to the Agreement's implementation.

Secondly, addressing the security challenges in Mali requires an approach that matches their complexity, in particular where the transborder challenges are concerned. The most salient example is the threat posed by terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and those affiliated with Al-Qaida, which continue to threaten the security and stability of Mali and the region through their spread of extremism and violence. Regional and subregional cooperation is a major element in addressing those grave threats, and we believe that regional initiatives and leaders' efforts to enhance coordination and cooperation in the Sahel are encouraging steps that deserve support. The United Arab Emirates continues to support regional initiatives, which reflect the commitment of the countries of the region to continuing to work together to advance shared goals and enhance collective security. Achieving long-term peace and stability in Mali demands that we focus our efforts on addressing the root causes of violence and extremism. That includes ensuring that those efforts are adapted to the local contexts in Mali and to the community's needs, including those of religious leaders, women and young people, as well as initiatives aimed at spreading the values of tolerance and moderation.

As we all know, there can be no security without development and no development without

security. Supporting development and humanitarian programmes in Mali is therefore crucial. Initiatives such as the strategy for Central Mali have the potential to help protect peoples against extremist ideology and provide opportunities for prosperity. We also believe that consolidating national efforts would improve the security situation in Mali, including by making progress in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

Thirdly and lastly, particular attention must be paid to the humanitarian crisis in Mali resulting from violence, food insecurity and climate change. The fact that nearly 9 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance demands that we make further efforts to strengthen Mali's resilience. We also reiterate the importance of improving our understanding of the relationship between climate change and insecurity, including its impact on the humanitarian situation. We stress the importance of including information and analysis on the threats posed by climate change to peace and security in the Secretary-General's report, which would help the Council to address such issues proactively, comprehensively and effectively.

**Ms. Dautllari** (Albania): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his briefing and commend the work of the dedicated peacekeepers and personnel of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We also welcome the representative of Mali to today's meeting.

This year is crucial for Mali as the country prepares for a return to constitutional order by March 2024. However, Albania remains concerned about the multidimensional crisis facing the country and the outstanding benchmarks that need to be reached to facilitate the transition. I would like to make three points.

First, we acknowledge that some progress has been achieved by the transitional authorities in recent months, and we welcomed the advancement of the constitutional review. However, it is now crucial to ensure that the draft constitution is adopted with a broad-based consensus. We encourage the authorities to facilitate the return to constitutional order within the timelines agreed with the Economic Community of West African States, and stress the importance of organizing a transparent, inclusive and credible electoral process that includes women and civil society

and ensures respect for freedom of expression. The constitutional reform should not be a reason to delay the elections.

The stalled implementation of the Algiers Accord is a major concern, and we urge all parties to demonstrate their commitment to implementing the agreement. In that regard, we commend the international mediation efforts and the communiqué issued on 9 April, and we join the call for the parties to accept the proposals, overcome their differences and resume a dialogue.

Secondly, we remain deeply concerned about the security situation in Mali. As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/236), the Gao and Ménaka regions have become an epicentre for hostilities by violent jihadist groups targeting civilians, causing mass displacement and using improvised explosive devices, which have killed three peacekeepers and injured five others. We recognize the challenges that the transitional authorities face in tackling insecurity, but it is a deplorable fact that since the Malian Defence and Security Forces started conducting military operations with the Wagner Group, violations and abuses have increased. We stress that States are responsible for conducting military operations with full respect for human rights and within the framework of international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, we commend MINUSMA's efforts to work with the transitional authorities to stabilize the country, but regrettably, the Mission continues to face major restrictions on its freedom of movement, with approximately 300 flight denials just in the last quarter and restrictions on the effective implementation of its mandate, especially the human rights pillar. To that end, we have yet to receive a report on the atrocities committed last year during the Moura operations and call for the release of those findings.

As we approach the mandate renewal in June, the MINUSMA review conducted by the Secretary-General will play a crucial role in determining the best course of action for the Mission. During that period, the authorities must show commitment, end all restrictions and respect the status of forces agreement with MINUSMA, which affects the protection of civilians and the safety of peacekeepers.

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

We welcome the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2023/236) and thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General El-Ghassim Wane for his insightful briefing and for his effective leadership of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We also welcome the participation at this meeting of our brother, the Permanent Representative of Mali.

While the situation in Mali continues to be complex and difficult, we acknowledge that some gains have been achieved since the last briefing to the Council three months ago (see S/PV.9251), including on the substantive elements of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali, such as the draft constitution, the justice, truth and reconciliation commission and the efforts to operationalize the electoral management body.

We pay tribute to the gallant MINUSMA personnel who continue to sacrifice their lives to achieve peace in Mali. We believe that the continued operation of the Mission is essential to stabilizing the security situation in the country. The A3 welcomes the resolve of the Malian Armed Forces to secure the Malian territory in line with its sovereign commitments.

In this statement, the A3 intends to address the political, security and humanitarian situation in Mali. First, on the political situation, we remain concerned by the paralysis of the Follow-up Committee on the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali, which has not met since November 2022. We urge the early convening of the seventh high-level session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee to address the differences in the implementation of the Agreement and encourage the safeguarding of the civic space since it underpins efforts in advancing the political process. We note the partial implementation of the accelerated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the continued holding of the ceasefire arrangements under the Peace Agreement and some progress in the transition road map. We believe that these factors are necessary building blocks that must be consolidated in the transition to restore constitutional order through the conduct of peaceful elections by March 2024.

While recognizing the efforts being made by the Malian authorities to restore constitutional order in the country, we remain concerned about some obstacles, including unresolved differences over the draft constitution and the postponement of the

referendum. The transition serves as a springboard to the effective realization of the Peace Agreement as well as the fulfilment of the country's obligations under the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS). It is important that the remaining time be effectively organized to realize the institutional reforms and fulfil the electoral commitment.

We call on all the parties to the Peace Agreement to remain united in resolving prevailing differences since the lack of unity undermines the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, including the development of the national strategic plan for 2022–2024. The implementation of the Peace Agreement remains essential to getting the country out of the crisis, and we accordingly urge all the signatories to show political will. We commend in this regard the diplomatic efforts and investments of Algeria on the issue.

Secondly, on the security horizon, we remain worried about the nature of the situation, which has been characterized by persisting incidents of terrorist attacks and the continuous use of improvised explosive devices, leading to civilian and military casualties. We strongly condemn such attacks and express our condolences to the families and victims of these atrocious acts. The security gaps in parts of Mali, especially in the north and centre, risk heightening insecurity and emboldening terrorist groups to navigate their way through and wreak more havoc. We welcome the launch of the strategy for the stabilization of the centre by the Prime Minister in Mopti on 17 March and call for strong commitment in its implementation to help tackle the security situation. We hope that the withdrawal of some troop-contributing countries, the most recent being Jordan, will be mitigated and that State presence will be enhanced.

While awaiting the outcome of the joint military and police capability study on the strategic review, it is important for urgent steps to be taken in addressing the logistical and operational constraints facing the Mission. The provision of adequate troop strength, enhancement of the counter-terrorism strategies, provision of airlift assets, and removal of both land and air restrictions are critical in making the Mission more responsive to the evolving security challenges in Mali. We continue to encourage the host authorities' cooperation with MINUSMA in accordance with the status-of-forces agreement.



The A3 recalls that the destabilization of Mali and the Sahel region is directly connected to the destabilization of Libya, as we note with concern the spillover effect on the Sahel of the lingering crisis in that country. We call for coordinated action to help manage the threat that the return of foreign terrorist fighters and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons pose to the stability of Mali. We also note the complementary role of regional security arrangements, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force, the Accra Initiative and the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force, and hope that the upcoming report of the high-level panel on the Sahel will interlock the benefits of those arrangements in ways that would advance Mali's stability.

The dire humanitarian situation, arising from the persisting conflict, climate shocks and food insecurity that has resulted in 175,000 additional refugees and an estimated 8.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023, requires urgent attention. We recall that climate change is one of the causes of persistent insecurity and the rise of communal tensions in Mali and the Sahel region. We appeal to donor partners to consider increasing their funding support to help meet the \$751.4 million target required to tackle the humanitarian situation.

Despite the efforts being made by the host authorities on the human rights front, including the establishment of a human rights division within the Ministry of Justice, we consider that we are not yet out of the woods, given the persistence of grave human rights violations against women and children, including conflict-related sexual violence, as well as abductions that are committed mainly by armed groups. For justice to prevail, we encourage the authorities to expedite investigations and facilitate the speedy arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of such crimes.

Lastly, we urge the prioritization of investments in inclusive processes for socioeconomic development in addressing the root causes of instability in Mali. This can be achieved through interventions that create meaningful jobs for women and youth, and harness their potentials in the governance process, including in decision-making, conflict-prevention and mediation efforts. The intervening role of the Peacebuilding Commission in climate-related peace and development interventions as well as in the promotion of community-based dispute-resolution mechanisms, *inter alia*, remains paramount and should be encouraged.

In concluding, the A3 believes that the expected peace dividends in Mali can be realized if all stakeholders comprising the Security Council, the African Union, ECOWAS, donor partners and the host authorities consider the solution to the crisis as a shared responsibility and demonstrate strong political will in fulfilling their respective obligations. Additionally, the convergence of views among Council members towards the successful mandate renewal of MINUSMA in the coming months will be critical. The A3 encourages the Malian authorities to continue their efforts in addressing the crisis and improve access to basic social services, including the restoration of State authority and presence nationwide. We express our solidarity with the people of Mali, reaffirm our respect for their sovereignty and territorial integrity and call on the international community to unite their actions in restoring lasting peace in the country.

**Mr. Pérez Loose** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and acknowledge the presence of the representative of Mali at today's meeting.

Today's briefing on the situation in Mali shows that the challenges in the security environment persist and that unfortunately little progress has been made. In this context, an analysis of the MINUSMA mandate in the light of next June is pertinent. For now, I will focus on four axes: first, the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali; secondly, the MINUSMA mandate; thirdly, progress made by the truth, justice and reconciliation commission; and fourthly, completion of the transition process.

First, the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali is, and will remain, essential. We therefore commend the role played by the international mediation, led by Algeria, and the steps taken on 13 March, with the support of MINUSMA. Mali's security and stability are indisputably linked to the stability of the Sahel region and the entire North-West Africa region. In that regard, Ecuador calls for the meetings of the implementing bodies to resume as soon as possible, particularly the Monitoring Committee.

As the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/236) rightly points out, the peace agreement is the best way to promote lasting reconciliation and break the cycles of violence. Re-establishing State authority throughout

the country is essential to strengthening the peace process. That will allow for building an environment conducive to development, the defence of human rights and inclusion policies, which, among other factors, will facilitate the return of the displaced — a situation that is currently exacerbating the humanitarian crisis facing the country.

Secondly, MINUSMA's ability to implement its mandate requires respect for, and the implementation of, the status-of-forces agreement. I am referring in particular to the Mission's freedom of movement and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance flight permits, including the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, both of which are essential for the effective protection of civilians and the safety of Mission personnel in an environment of asymmetric threats.

It must be borne in mind that the rules of engagement of United Nations peace operations do not allow the deployment of forces to fight against terrorists. It is therefore essential to strengthen regional and subregional strategic cooperation in an environment of porous borders in order to stop the proliferation of terrorist activities and organized crime.

Thirdly, we recognize the progress of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, which has the support of MINUSMA. Let us remember that there is no peace without justice and no justice without the reconciliation and reintegration process of ex-combatants. In that regard, we believe that the Malian Government should bring to justice the perpetrators of serious violations and criminal activities, whatever their origin. My delegation wishes to recall that the MINUSMA mandate regarding investigative activities is an indispensable tool to that end. We therefore call on the Government to allow access for such activities to be carried out in an unimpeded manner.

We also call on all actors to respect human rights and international humanitarian law. In that regard, we recognize the training activities that MINUSMA carries out with the Malian Armed Forces to combat terrorism.

Fourthly, the timely completion of the transition process, including the adoption of the draft constitution, is crucial. We encourage the continued support of the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and MINUSMA, whose catalytic management requires the necessary resources to bring about a return to constitutional order.

Meanwhile, I would like to recall some aspects that continue to cause us concern. Ecuador condemns the smear campaigns and attacks on social networks to which the civil society representative invited to the Security Council consultations on 27 January has been subjected, illustrating a reduction in civic space. We call for such attacks to be counteracted by encouraging campaigns to combat disinformation, especially against the opposition and MINUSMA. In that context, we deplore the expulsion of the Head of the MINUSMA Human Rights and Protection Division, which sends an adverse signal of the politicization and instrumentalization of human rights.

I would like to reiterate that, for Ecuador, the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all areas is a priority. We urge the further strengthening of the presence of women in all functions and political positions, in compliance not only with the minimum 30 per cent quota but beyond it.

Finally, I would like to mention the MINUSMA internal review, which identifies three options for the Mission's future. Its analysis by Council members should point out that it is always preferable to bring about and strengthen cooperation on all fronts, and not in isolation.

Ecuador reiterates its support for any effort that benefits the Malian population and respectfully calls on that country's authorities to advance on the path of dialogue and conciliation.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I thank Special Representative Wane for his briefing. I welcome Ambassador Issa Konfourou, Permanent Representative of Mali, to this meeting.

As Special Representative Wane said in his briefing, Mali is at a crucial stage in implementing the peace agreement, promoting the political transition and preparing for elections. The international community must move in the same direction with the Malian parties and provide constructive support for its peace and development. Allow me to stress the following points.

First, we must support Mali's efforts to counter terrorism and maintain stability. That is the top priority. The Malian Government has been vigorously conducting counter-terrorism operations, launched a comprehensive strategy to stabilize the central regions and made robust efforts to improve the regional situation and ensure the safety and security

of its people. Such efforts merit our recognition. Nonetheless, terrorist activities in central and northern Mali remain rampant. Terrorists ransacked villages and expelled villagers, causing massive casualties and displacement and posing a serious threat to the stability in Mali and the wider region. The international community must prioritize supporting Mali's efforts in counter-terrorism, maintaining stability and protecting civilians. Assistance must be increased by, inter alia, funding equipment, intelligence and logistics. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) must effectively fulfil its mandate from the Council and provide all-round support.

The representatives of some countries spoke of the human rights issue. We believe that the ultimate purpose of counter-terrorism operations is to protect the rights of civilians to life, security and other basic human rights. We object to using human rights as a political instrument to interfere with counter-terrorism operations, and we do not uphold linking human rights with counter-terrorism support. That would amount to intervention in Mali's sovereignty and be counter-productive to the protection of human rights.

Secondly, we must promote the implementation of the peace agreement. That is critical to maintaining peace and stability in Mali. We look forward to concerted efforts by the Malian Government and other signatories. We commend and support Algeria for its mediation and good offices. The parties should effectively fulfil their commitments, adopt measures such as high-level dialogue to accommodate each other's concerns and resolve their differences in a collective effort to maintain national sovereignty, security and unity. MINUSMA must provide more support in areas such as supporting the parties' compliance with the ceasefire arrangement, advancing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process and assisting in capacity-building for the national security forces. China supports MINUSMA in rolling out the community violence reduction projects and quick-impact projects in central and northern Mali and providing more support for water supply, agriculture, infrastructure, vocational training, et cetera, to eliminate the root causes of conflicts.

Thirdly, we must provide constructive support for the political transition. The Malian authorities have engaged in extensive dialogue with the parties and have done a great deal of work in drafting the constitution

and preparing for the general elections, among other things. The international community should support the Malian parties in taking the opportunity of the political transition, resolving their differences through dialogue and ensuring the smooth holding of general elections so as to lay a solid foundation for lasting stability in Mali. China supports the Economic Community of West African States in its continued good offices and mediating efforts on the basis of respect for Mali's sovereignty and ownership. The international community must remain patient, provide more support and encouragement for Mali's political transition and take practical steps to help Mali tackle any difficulties that may arise in the electoral preparations and other areas.

In guiding MINUSMA to overcome its trials and tribulations, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane has also accomplished a great amount of work. In the current context, the Mission has been confronted with many new issues and challenges in discharging its duties. China supports closer communication between the Mission and the Malian authorities to resolve issues through dialogue and consultation. In June, the Security Council will discuss the Mission's mandate renewal. It is our view that the Security Council should listen attentively to the views of the Malian Government and should streamline and optimize the Mission's mandate, as required, in order to enhance its operational performance. Recently, MINUSMA tweeted a video clip showcasing a typical day in the working life of Zhou Juan, a female Chinese paramedic at a level-2 hospital. The tweet was widely praised and received numerous likes. Such practices help project a positive image of peacekeeping operations by winning the support and trust of the Government and the people of the country concerned. China stands ready to work with the international community to make a greater contribution to lasting peace and development in Mali.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General El-Ghassim Wane for his briefing.

Switzerland condemns the violence and attacks perpetrated since our previous meeting (see S/PV.9251) against Blue Helmets, the Malian armed forces and civilians, and at the outset I would like to express my deepest condolences to the families of the victims.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/236) notes progress in the political transition process. The next milestone will be the timely holding of credible and transparent elections. The seating of the 15 members, including four women, of the *Autorité indépendante de gestion des élections* is a positive development in anticipation of the elections to be held in the first quarter of 2024.

Women's participation in the elections, both as candidates and voters, must be substantial. It is a matter of "winning with women", a motto that was echoed in an initiative supported by Switzerland and the United States Agency for International Development, which enabled the political parties to assess women's representation within their official ranks.

In view of the parameters presented by the Secretary-General in the internal review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), let me highlight three key points concerning the overall situation in Mali:

First, the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali is a critical instrument for peacebuilding. It must remain the central framework in order to avoid a resumption of hostilities among the signatory movements. However, the implementation of the agreement currently appears to be at an impasse. We encourage the Government and the signatory movements that have committed to the agreement to resume regular dialogue through the established mechanisms. Switzerland welcomes the efforts undertaken in that regard by the members of the international mediation, led by Algeria. We remain committed to supporting the implementation of the peace agreement.

Secondly, in order to strengthen security in Mali, the launch of the strategy for the stabilization of the central regions and its 2022 to 2024 action plan is an important step. We support that consolidated approach, which is aimed at restoring peace, security and social cohesion, as well as improving governance and strengthening justice. The challenge now is to implement the strategy without delay, in close collaboration with MINUSMA. In order to combat the current growing insecurity in Mali, all actors must act in a concerted manner. MINUSMA's freedom of movement and increased coordination with the Malian Defence and Security Forces must be guaranteed. Flight restrictions reduce both the safety of the Mission's personnel and its ability to fulfil its mandate for the benefit of Malians.

Thirdly and lastly, international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be respected in all circumstances. In particular, both the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security recently have noted a worrisome trend in Mali. The number of grave violations against children continues to grow, including the cases of their recruitment, exploitation and abduction. Similarly, sexual and gender-based violence is increasing, in particular violence related to armed conflict, in areas in which the humanitarian situation is precarious and armed groups are present. We urge all parties to the conflict in Mali to immediately end such violations and release all children within their ranks. We also call on the authorities to prosecute the perpetrators in order to combat impunity. Without respect for those fundamental rights and for accountability, achieving lasting peace will be impossible.

Over the past 10 years, the Security Council has repeatedly adapted the Mission's mandate to best meet the needs and expectations of the Malian people. The continued support of the Council and the work of MINUSMA are vital for resolving the multiple challenges that threaten the security and the future of Mali. Restoring peace requires, first and foremost, a firm commitment to unconditionally respect human rights and international humanitarian law, implement the peace agreement without delay and take the necessary measures to build mutual trust — and not to undermine it.

**Mrs. Frazier** (Malta): I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing, and I welcome the presence of our colleague the Permanent Representative of Mali at this meeting.

Malta reiterates its full support for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and its work on the ground. We pay tribute to all the brave women and men who have served and continue to serve as peacekeepers, and we unreservedly condemn all attacks made against them.

Malta underscores its continued support for the implementation of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We welcome the mediation efforts under Algeria's leadership as integral to fostering constructive dialogue among the parties. We

also express our support for the Economic Community of West African States in assessing the progress of Mali's transition. As we look forward to MINUSMA's mandate renewal, we shall approach the discussion from three angles: first, the need to achieve political progress towards a democratic transition; secondly, the imperative need for all parties to holistically address the grave security, human rights and humanitarian situation; and thirdly, the need for collective efforts to be made to ensure that MINUSMA operates in an unhindered manner.

We acknowledge the relative progress made in the political sphere through the formal launch of the strategy for the stabilization of the central regions, in line with MINUSMA's main priorities, which is a decisive step towards the reopening of schools, accessing basic and social services, improving working conditions and enhancing women's participation in policy formulation. Malta also acknowledges the consultative process towards the drafting of a constitution, in particular its references to elements within the peace agreement, while recognizing the need for further deliberations. It is crucial that timelines for the holding of the referendum be established and respected. However, we are deeply concerned about the ongoing grave security threats emanating from persistent terrorist threats in the region, which also serve to further exacerbate the cycle of violence. Malta commends the cooperation provided by MINUSMA to the Malian armed forces in that regard.

It is crucial that all ancillary acts are conducted with respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law. We condemn all violations and abuses committed against civilians by armed groups and State and non-State actors, as well as private military companies such as the Wagner Group. We call for accountability and stress that the perpetrators must not go unpunished. As we remember the hundreds of civilians killed in the deplorable massacre in Moura last year, we urge for a thorough investigation and for those responsible for the atrocities to be held to account.

As Mali grapples with an alarming humanitarian crisis precipitated by conflict, climate and food insecurity, an estimated 8.8 million people will require assistance in 2023 — a number that is up 17 per cent from 2022. Conflict continues to drive large-scale displacement, both within and outside Mali's borders. Concerns about protection, especially those related to conflict and gender-based violence, continue to be an

unacceptable feature of the conflict. In that regard, we urge the Malian authorities to create a conducive environment that protects and empowers women and girls while ensuring that any violence against them is addressed promptly. Malta remains concerned about the grave violations that have been reported against children in Mali and will continue working with the Malian authorities to address the matter.

As we recognize the critical work of MINUSMA, we call for the lifting of any restrictions on the movement and access of the Mission. Any hindrance to its work constitutes a violation of the status of forces agreement.

In conclusion, Malta underscores that political dialogue remains central to our collective efforts in Mali. Mutual trust and respect among all stakeholders are critical. Malta remains engaged in supporting the work of the Special Representative and MINUSMA as they support Mali in its journey towards peace and stability.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative Wane for his briefing and underscore our appreciation for the hard work and courage of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) peacekeepers.

When the Council last met to discuss Mali (see S/PV.9251) we had just received the Secretary-General's review (S/2023/36). It established four parameters against which progress was needed for MINUSMA to remain effective and relevant. There are clear indications in the latest report (S/2023/236) that such progress has not been made. In fact, the trajectory seems to be worsening in several respects.

First, ground and air movement restrictions continue to hinder peacekeepers, with almost a quarter of flight requests rejected by the authorities during the reporting period. That impedes the protection of civilians and puts peacekeepers at risk.

Secondly, MINUSMA's human rights director was expelled following the dangerous criticism directed at the civil-society representative who briefed the Council in January. That reflects a worrisome disregard for the Mission's mandate. We count on the Mission's continued commitment to investigating and reporting on human rights. In that regard, we urge the release, without further delay, of the United Nations report on the alleged massacre of civilians in Moura by

Malian armed forces and Wagner Group personnel in March 2022.

Thirdly, tensions persist between signatories to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The United Kingdom, along with the wider international mediation representatives, stands ready to provide support. We urge the parties to engage with the international mediation proposals presented last week and aimed at relaunching the peace process. While all the parties need to show a willingness to engage on concrete implementation measures, it is the Malian authorities that ultimately have the primary responsibility to implement the agreement. We urge them to take the first step.

Fourthly, the timely transition to constitutional rule by March 2024 remains imperative. Electoral and constitutional reforms should not be allowed to impede that.

The Council will be faced with some difficult decisions in June. With few visible signs from the Malian authorities of a commitment to meeting the Secretary-General's parameters, the June renewal of MINUSMA's mandate cannot be seen as business as usual. We should be ready to adapt and refocus the Mission, reviewing any support that carries risks to the credibility and reputation of the United Nations.

**Mr. DeLaurentis** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Wane for his briefing.

We are pleased to see that the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/236) focuses on the four parameters included in the United Nations strategic review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) (S/2023/36). They are essential benchmarks for assessing the continued viability of the Mission. We urge the transition Government of Mali to demonstrate immediate progress on the political transition, the implementation of the Algiers accords and MINUSMA's freedom of movement and ability to implement the entirety of its mandate, including its human rights provisions.

I have to say that it is unacceptable that the Malian authorities denied nearly 300 flight requests during the reporting period. That threatens the safety and security of the peacekeepers serving in Mali and hinders their ability to implement their mandate. While we fully support MINUSMA's efforts to resolve those restrictions, we emphasize the transition Government's

obligations, under its status-of-forces agreement, to ensure MINUSMA's freedom of movement and access.

We are gravely concerned about the transition Government's decision to expel MINUSMA's human rights chief. We condemn the continued obstruction of the United Nations human rights mandates in Mali and reject the assertion that human rights are being politicized. The Council has mandated MINUSMA to report impartially on the human rights situation in Mali, and interference with its ability to carry out that mandate is unacceptable. We urge the Mission to ensure that all information-sharing arrangements are in full compliance with the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. We are also greatly concerned about the fact that the Malian transition Government did not issue visas to the Panel of Experts of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017). Without on-the-ground reporting from the Panel, the Sanctions Committee is affected. We call on all members to cooperate with the Panel of Experts and facilitate their travel.

As we recognize the one-year anniversary of the civilian massacre in Moura, we are disappointed that the United Nations has not released its report on the incident. The Malian people deserve an honest and transparent account of it and of all allegations of human rights violations and abuses within their borders. Furthermore, the Council needs to have all the facts to hand before entering into negotiations to renew MINUSMA's mandate.

While we are concerned about the postponement of the 19 March constitutional referendum, we nonetheless commend the preparations and progress made by the transition authorities on fulfilling an ambitious timeline for elections. We offer our full support to MINUSMA and its United Nations partners as they provide critical technical assistance and capacity-building support to ensure that Malians can safely go to the polls and see constitutional rule successfully restored.

The lack of progress on resuming the normal functioning of the implementation mechanisms of the Algiers accords is of significant concern as well. The tireless efforts of MINUSMA, the Algerian Government and the international mediation to revitalize those mechanisms are commendable, but the responsibility for overcoming the impasse lies with the signatory armed groups and the transition authorities. Parties should demonstrate their renewed commitment to the Algiers

Agreement. As the Secretary-General wrote in his review of the Mission, MINUSMA's success hinges on the full cooperation of the Malian authorities. It would be irresponsible of the Security Council to continue to deploy peacekeepers in conditions in which they cannot succeed. We urge the Malian transitional Government to end its restrictions on MINUSMA and demonstrate that it will carry out its political commitments.

**Mr. Ishikane** (Japan): I thank Special Representative Wane for the insightful briefing, and I also welcome the participation of the representative of Mali in today's meeting.

Japan expresses its sincere condolences to the families of the peacekeepers who lost their lives in the service of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), including the three Senegalese peacekeepers killed in February. Japan appreciates and fully supports the work of MINUSMA.

I would like to start by reiterating Japan's determination to stand by the people of Mali and their desire for peace and stability. We must keep their aspirations foremost in our minds as we discuss the issue here in the Security Council. The best way forward towards establishing lasting peace is to strengthen cooperation among all stakeholders, domestically, regionally and internationally, including the Council and MINUSMA.

Japan notes the progress made towards a return to constitutional order. Securing a safe, political and civic space for all parties concerned to express their views and engage in political dialogue is essential as the country prepares to conduct free, fair and transparent elections to complete the democratic transition in Mali by March 2024.

The 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali is the only existing framework for achieving durable peace and reconciliation, and its implementation should go hand in hand with the democratic transition. The role played by the international mediation is ever more important, including through efforts such as those announced last Friday, aimed at relaunching the implementation of the peace agreement.

For a stable, prosperous society, civil society plays an important role. It is also imperative that the Council hear the diverse voices of a variety of actors, including

civil society. No one should experience intimidation before or after briefing the Council.

The worsening security situation, which now also prevails in the south, is alarming. We recognize the efforts by Malian forces to address the situation. At the same time, Japan echoes the Secretary-General's view, stressing that efforts to foster social cohesion, address structural fragility, deliver basic services and ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law must accompany security operations.

Japan commends the continued commitment by MINUSMA to fulfil its mandate despite facing difficulties, including restrictions on its freedom of movement, which not only constrain its work but also threaten the safety and security of its peacekeepers. We stress the importance of enhanced cooperation between the Malian transitional authorities and MINUSMA. As the Council discusses MINUSMA's mandate renewal in the coming months, Japan will continue to work closely with the members of the Council and all other stakeholders, while taking into consideration various elements, such as the four parameters identified by the Secretary-General's internal review, the significant role that MINUSMA plays in ensuring peace and stability in Mali and the humanitarian and development needs of the Malian people.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho** (Brazil): Let me start by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his comprehensive briefing and welcoming the delegation of Mali to today's meeting.

The security situation in Mali remains unstable and continues to take a heavy toll on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). In that vein, we regret the casualties of three peacekeepers near Songobia on 21 February and offer our sincere condolences and solidarity to the Government of Senegal and to the families of the victims.

Brazil reiterates its firm condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. There is no justification for such acts or for the attacks against schools and hospitals. We note with deep concern an increase in such attacks. We also find the reported rise in the use of and recruitment of child soldiers alarming. We must redouble our efforts to protect the most vulnerable.

As rightfully noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/236), insecurity hinders the presence of State authority. Therefore, we should continue to 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 north of Mali. We note with concern that no solution for the resumption of unmanned intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) flights has been reached to date, despite the fact that MINUSMA adopted the measures agreed with the Malian transitional Government. The safety and security of peacekeepers should be a top priority. We call on the Malian authorities to work with MINUSMA without delay on the review of the procedure for drone ISR flights, which are essential to ensure MINUSMA's freedom of movement.

In June, the Council will discuss the renewal of MINUSMA's mandate. Brazil considers it essential to ensure that MINUSMA have the necessary means to support the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and the political transition, as well as to protect civilians and support the restoration of Malian State authority throughout the entire country.

We believe that regional cooperation can be equally beneficial in helping Mali pave the way to a successful transition process. In that regard, Brazil fully supports the current engagement with the Economic Community of West African States mediator, Goodluck Jonathan, and hopes that his dialogue with the Malian transitional authorities will lead to closer collaboration on the development and implementation of a transition plan that is conducive to the restoration of constitutional order.

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. We commend the Malian authorities for the conclusion of that phase and for adding legitimacy to that exercise by including women, trade unions, political parties and civil society representatives in the work of the drafting commission.

At the same time, we welcome not only the cooperation established between MINUSMA and the Autorité Indépendante de Gestion des Elections with a view to coordinating the technical and logistical support for the ballot, but also the provision to civil society organizations of capacity-building on gender promotion in the electoral process and preventing election-related

violence. Those are encouraging, concrete steps towards more inclusivity and participation in the poll.

While the developments I mentioned with respect to the transition process and constitutional reforms are remarkable, they cannot establish a sound foundation for durable peace without an agreement for peace and reconciliation in Mali. Therefore, we wish to commend Algeria's leadership of the mediation process to overcome the current impasse, and we urge all Malian political forces to remain engaged in dialogue and redouble their efforts aimed at the full implementation of the peace agreement.

Before I conclude, and in view of the dire humanitarian situation, my delegation wishes to seize this opportunity to underscore again the need to address the root causes of conflict. This notion should guide our collective endeavour to adjust and review the tasks of the Mission in the upcoming mandate-renewal talks.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, for his briefing and welcome the Permanent Representative of Mali, Mr. Issa Konfourou, to today's meeting.

The Malian Government is undertaking systematic efforts to normalize the situation and to lay the groundwork for holding elections at all levels within the agreed time frame. It is implementing the road map for the transitional period and taking measures, such as drafting electoral laws, conducting territorial-organization reforms and discussing a new draft constitution on a national level.

On 10 March, the Government of Mali announced a postponement of the constitutional referendum, apparently for valid reasons: it had to ensure that a maximum number of Malian citizens could cast their votes freely and safely. Currently, the absolute priority is ensuring security in the country, especially given the entire withdrawal of the French Barkhane force and the European Union Takuba Task Force. The Malian Government has also affirmed its commitment to the Algiers peace agreement, which remains the basis for attaining lasting peace and national harmony in the country.

As part of the work of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, steps are planned to accelerate development



in the northern territories to restore the institutions and integrate former combatants into the national armed forces. The negotiation process is complicated. It is important for signatories of the peace agreement to be flexible and willing to compromise for the sake of peace and unity in Mali.

Without normalization in Mali, stability in the Sahel region is not possible. On a large swath of the Malian territory, terrorist groups affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaida continue to be active, and they engage regularly in raids on the civilian population as well as units of the Malian army and United Nations peacekeepers. Despite these real difficulties, however, the Malian armed forces have shown that they are capable of effectively combating terrorists.

We welcome the launch of the national strategy for stabilization in the centre of Mali. We believe that the Malian Government is focused on doing all it can to overcome the challenges currently facing the country, especially when it comes to ensuring security and political stability. We support the work of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in assisting Bamako and the country's population in resolving their current problems. We note the efforts of the Mission in facilitating stabilization in Mali. We understand the dangers that peacekeepers face when serving in this country, and we pay tribute to those peacekeepers who have laid down their lives for peace and stability in Mali.

The key to achieving the Mission's goals is close coordination with the host country and respecting Mali's sovereignty. At the same time, it is important to focus on implementing key elements of the Mission mandate, especially the protection of civilians and supporting the Malian security and defence forces to this end. MINUSMA should also strictly adhere to its mandate when it comes to human rights, especially with regard to support for the Malian Government in carrying out investigations.

It is unfortunate that a number of troop-contributing countries have decided to end or suspend their participation in MINUSMA. In terms of options for reconfiguring the peacekeeping presence, we believe that any option for revising the modalities of the Mission's work should be aligned with the main challenges the country is facing, be agreed upon

in advance with Bamako and be based on the host country's in-depth views.

Russia is providing the Malian army with comprehensive assistance, including with regard to increasing its combat readiness and training soldiers and law enforcement agents. Our bilateral cooperation is taking place at the request of Bamako, in strict accordance with applicable norms of international law. Thanks in part to Russian support, the Malian armed forces have been able to significantly increase their capacity to counter terrorism and convert the potential into real results on the ground.

We have once again heard a negative reaction from Western colleagues to the growing Russian-Malian cooperation. We find it unfortunate that they cannot set aside their geopolitical rivalry. In essence, their claims have nothing to do with concern for Mali's well-being. On the contrary, the Malians' views are of no interest to them and never have been. Everyone knows that the need for stabilization of the Sahel — and Mali in particular — is the result of Western countries' irresponsible military actions in Libya. No tangible results have emerged from the many years of presence of Western countries in this part of Africa.

In that regard, we call on our colleagues in the Council to acknowledge their mistakes and renounce their neocolonial habits. This region does not belong to them. Let the Malians and people of neighbouring countries in the region take the wheel and resolve their own problems, with help from partners that they themselves have chosen.

We have received no complaints from our African partners with regard to the parameters of our cooperation with them. We believe that, under these circumstances, we should effectively assist Malian authorities in overcoming urgent problems instead of telling them how to behave, as certain countries tend to do.

We call on Bamako's international partners to refrain from politicizing donor assistance, which has led to the suspension of financing of Malian development-assistance programmes. These decisions could lead to a further exacerbation of an already dire humanitarian situation, especially in the light of the chronic underfunding of the humanitarian plan for this country.

Russia intends to provide further support the normalization of the situation in Mali, using the Security Council as a platform, and by providing comprehensive assistance to Bamako on a bilateral basis. We are working on ways to provide additional assistance to Mali in the food and energy sectors. We believe that effective assistance to the Malian Government for ensuring security and overcoming the crisis will foster lasting peace and stability in the entire Sahelo-Saharan region. We believe that a leading role in stabilizing the Sahelo-Saharan region should be played by the peoples of the region themselves in according to the principle of “African solutions to African problems”.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Mali.

**Mr. Konfourou** (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin by extending to you, Mr. President, the warm congratulations of the delegation of Mali on the assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April 2023 by your country, the Russian Federation, a country that is a friend and strategic partner of Mali.

The Government of Mali takes note of the report of the Secretary-General under consideration (S/2023/236), and I commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), for his briefing and for the updates since the publication of the report.

The detailed observations of the Government of Mali are contained in the memorandum transmitted to the Security Council yesterday. I would now like to make a few remarks on the issues raised in the report of the Secretary-General and on Council members' comments, to which I have listened carefully.

First, on the political level, I am pleased to note that the Secretary-General has recognized the immense progress made in this area. Indeed, in addition to the consequences of the military intervention in Libya, the effects of which continue to be felt, the transitional authorities in Mali remain well aware of the other causes that have accentuated the multidimensional crisis that the country has been going through for over a decade.

That is why the Government is working, within the framework of a transparent and inclusive process,

to implement the political, institutional and electoral reforms necessary to rebuild the Malian State. In that regard, His Excellency Colonel Assimi Goita, President of the Transition and Head of State, approved the final draft of the new constitution of the Republic of Mali on 16 March and presented it to the country's political stakeholders on 20 March. The referendum planned for that purpose has been postponed in order to introduce a secure biometric national identity card to prevent the risk of fraud, create the conditions for the effective participation of all citizens in electoral consultations and reduce the time needed to operationalize the *Autorité indépendante de gestion des élections* so as to meet the transition deadline. The Government is currently raising awareness regarding the draft constitution among the Malian populations.

Regarding the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process, notwithstanding some difficulties related to the unilateral decision of the *Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad* and the *Plateforme* to suspend their participation in the Agreement Monitoring Mechanism, I can affirm the Government's commitment to continuing its effective and judicious implementation, in particular with the *Mouvements de l'inclusivité*, also signatories to the Agreement, while waiting for our other brothers to join us in the peace process.

Part of that dynamic is the territorial reorganization and the adoption by the Council of Ministers on 29 March of draft decrees aimed at improving the functioning of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and the National Commission for Integration. I recall that, to date, 2,750 ex-combatants have been reintegrated into the Malian Defence and Security Forces.

Furthermore, following the submission of the final report of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission at the end of 2022, on 1 March the Council of Ministers adopted the texts relating to the establishment of the authority managing reparations for crisis victims since 1960. Those relating to the centre for the promotion of peace and unity are in the process of being adopted.

I would like to express our thanks for the international mediation efforts, particularly their leader, the sister Republic of Algeria. We take note of the recent proposals of the mediation efforts to relaunch

the peace process, and we reiterate our readiness to work with it to restore peace and stability in my country.

At the security level, the Malian Defence and Security Forces are continuing their offensives against terrorist organizations and obtained very encouraging results. Several dozen terrorists have been neutralized, their sanctuaries destroyed and large quantities of war materiel seized and destroyed. Also, during the reporting period, several dozen terrorists were arrested and brought to justice, in parallel with the voluntary surrender of many terrorists in the central regions. As the report of the Secretary-General emphasizes, those actions have also made it possible to strengthen the State presence on the territory, lift the blockade and the terrorist hold on certain localities in the north and central regions and promote the supply of basic social services to the populations, including the reopening of some schools in areas still affected by insecurity. Those operations are being carried out in strict compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law, in accordance with our traditional human values and as a duty to our populations.

In the same vein, on 17 March, the Prime Minister and Head of Government officially launched the strategy for the stabilization of the centre, the implementation of which is a priority for the Government.

On the issue of human rights, through the State's gradual return to localities liberated from terrorist influence, the Government is working to reduce human rights violations, which, it must be recalled, are perpetrated mainly by armed terrorist groups.

In that respect, the institutional mechanism has taken a crucial step, with the establishment on 1 February of the National Human Rights Commission, which, among other things, is responsible for coordinating public policies on human rights and ensuring the implementation of measures to prevent violations and abuses of human rights.

At the same time, the Government is working to fight against impunity, as shown, if it were needed, by the 24 January sentencing by the Bamako Court of Assizes of a person found guilty of an attack that claimed the lives of five peacekeepers and a civilian on 22 January 2019.

I can therefore affirm that the Government will continue to work tirelessly for the protection and promotion of human rights and respect for international

humanitarian law on our territory. However, Mali will stand firm and just as resolutely against any use of that issue for political or destabilization purposes.

First, the Council just heard the representative of France speak with resolve about the human rights situation in Mali. I would simply like to say that he had a selective memory, particularly when speaking about the Moura incident. The French Ambassador will recall that several paragraphs of the report of the international commission of inquiry for Mali are devoted to human rights violations against the Malian people by the French forces. I would have liked to have seen him mention that with the same resolve.

Secondly, if he did not have such a selective memory, I would have liked the Ambassador of France to have told the Council that, in January 2021, the French forces transformed a wedding ceremony in Bounty into a national tragedy. If he did not have such a selective memory, I would have liked him to tell us about the efforts made in follow-up to the report on that incident, to give just two examples.

Around this table, I heard several interpretations, including from my neighbour from Ecuador. I would like to say to him that Mali has very few, if any, lessons to learn from a country that has also been guilty of human rights violations. Freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and the persecution of journalists, prosecutors and judges are equally as widespread in his country. Let us not have a selective memory regarding human rights. They apply to everyone. I just want to reaffirm that we remain resolved to work with the Council to improve the human rights situation, but we are against politicization and stigmatization on that specific issue.

Despite the immense efforts made by the Government of Mali, the humanitarian situation is contingent on certain external factors, such as armed terrorist groups, as well as the humanitarian situation and climate change. Only one third of the funding needs are covered, while the price of basic foodstuffs is constantly rising on the world markets.

For its part, the Government of Mali is committed to redoubling its efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of our compatriots in vulnerable situations, including internally displaced persons and refugees, in accordance with the National Humanitarian Action Policy, hence my call for greater international solidarity for Mali.

On the operational challenges, according to the figures provided by the Secretary-General, 75 per cent of MINUSMA's requests for movement have been met. Thus, contrary to what is being said, there is no desire to restrict MINUSMA's movements, as the Mission's unauthorized requests for movement simply did not respect the procedure agreed between the two parties. We therefore call on MINUSMA to work more closely with the competent Malian authorities through the agreed framework set up for that purpose in the interest of the security of all.

Turning to the future of MINUSMA, I would like to draw the attention of Council members to the fact that the conclusions of the report on the internal review of MINUSMA (S/2023/36) do not meet the expectations of the Government and the people of Mali. However, the Government remains open to discussions on that specific issue. Similarly, I want to underscore that in its letter of 1 March addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/161, annex), the Government of Mali explicitly requested a change of penholder on all files concerning Mali in the Security Council, owing to the many documented incidents in which France has been guilty of misdeeds vis-à-vis my country. I know that I can count on the wisdom of the Security Council in meeting Mali's expectations and thereby facilitating our commitment, especially during the negotiations on the renewal of the MINUSMA mandate, which will begin very soon.

In conclusion, I would like to say that while Mali is undeniably facing many challenges, the Malian people, with their great capacity for resilience, have decided to stand up, take their destiny into their own hands and avoid the mistakes of the past in order to restore their former cohesion and the stability needed for their sustainable development. Proud in the support of the Malian people, the Government remains committed to ensuring the successful execution of the political and institutional reforms under way, including the holding of the referendum and the general elections, with a view to ending the political, institutional and security instability that our country has known for several years. At the same time, the Malian Defence and Security Forces are stepping up their offensive operations to defend the country and protect the population and their property. I hope that our partners — including Council members — will show greater understanding and support for the sovereign choices of the Malian people and their Government, which remains willing

to cooperate with all who are willing to do so, provided that they respect the guiding principles of Mali's foreign policy. I sincerely thank all Mali's bilateral and multilateral partners for their meaningful support in its efforts to end this crisis.

Lastly, I bow in tribute to all the victims of the Malian crisis — civilian, military, Malian and foreign — who have fallen on the field of honour. My thoughts go out especially to our Senegalese brothers who recently lost their lives in Mali in helping us achieve peace.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): The representative of France has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I will be brief. I obviously have no intention of arguing with the representative of Mali. Anything excessive is unimportant, and what he just said about my country was excessive and therefore unimportant. I would just like to point to three things.

First, at the beginning of 2013 — when in my previous role I was involved in those decisions at every stage — France intervened in Mali at the request of the Malian authorities. At the time, Mali was dealing with an offensive inside its borders by Al-Qaida, whose forces were advancing towards the capital and would have taken full control of Mali within a day or two. Whether one would prefer to admit it or not, at the beginning of 2013 it was the French army that preserved the independence of Mali, which otherwise would have fallen into the hands of the terrorist group Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and its partners.

Secondly, since the beginning of 2013, 50 French soldiers have died in Mali in defence of its territorial integrity and sovereignty and to bring about peace in the country — and for no other reason. That is a fact.

Thirdly, everything that the representative of Mali said about the incidents he brought up is entirely inaccurate, starting with the accusations relating to the marriage that took place in the village of Bounty. I myself was able to meet with the Secretary-General and show him the images recorded at the time to explain what had happened. The first assessments and reports of the United Nations were unfortunately entirely inaccurate and unfounded. Let us therefore base our remarks on facts and help the United Nations do its job. Let us hope that it will be able to continue to investigate human rights abuses. Let us wait patiently for the report

on Moura, where 300 people died in March 2022 and for which we are still waiting for the report of the Human Rights Council. For its part, France will continue to help Mali and the Malian people who are suffering and are in need of peace and, I believe, democracy.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): The representative of Ecuador has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

**Mr. Pérez Loose** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Likewise, it is not my intention to argue with the representative of Mali. I simply want to clarify a few points.

First, I did not intend to pontificate or give lessons to the Government of Mali on the subject of human rights. Human rights should not be politicized. They are the concern of all humankind and not the property of any one country. I was struck by the remark made in reference to Ecuador. The people of Ecuador today live under a democratic regime. No journalists, prosecutors or judges have been persecuted. The representative of Mali may be unaware of the fact that the Government of Mr. Correa ended more than four years ago.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I should point out that our discussion has taken on an interactive aspect.

The representative of Mali has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

**Mr. Konfourou** (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I will be very brief. I do not want to engage in a polemic either. I

would simply like to say that the human rights situation in Mali is a major source of concern for the Government, and we are working to improve it. It is closely linked to the country's security situation and that is also why we are focusing on the security situation. On the other hand, with regard to the French representative's comments just now, I completely disagree with what he said concerning the various reports. Those documents exist, are available and tell the story of what happened. I refer him to those documents.

Secondly, we requested a special Security Council meeting to discuss the repeated violations of our airspace and the acts of espionage to which we have been subjected. If the representative of France will agree to it, I believe that now would be the time to end the refusal to hold such a meeting. We would be able to express our views. Once again, our major concern is ensuring the security of the Malian people and accomplishing the work of political and institutional reform, which is what we are doing. I remain open to discussion with my friend from Ecuador and with the representative of France. We certainly have the space to reach an understanding. But let us stop politicizing the issue of human rights.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): There are no more speakers on my list. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at noon.*