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Provisional

President: Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
Ghana	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan	Mr. Ishikane
Malta	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2023/402)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2023/402)

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

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite 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/2023/402, 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*): First of all, I would like to thank the President of the Security Council and the other members of this organ for the opportunity given to me to address them once again. This is clearly a special moment for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), as it coincides with discussions on the renewal of the mandate, as it also is for Mali, which continues to face complex security and other challenges.

The constitutional referendum will be held the day after tomorrow and will mark the first stage of the process leading to the restoration of constitutional order. The voting was originally scheduled to be held on 19 March. Mali's authorities have not yet clarified what could be the impact of the delay that was incurred in holding other referendums on the timetable made public in June 2022, including local, regional and legislative elections planned for June, October and November, respectively. But the authorities have

reiterated their commitment to complete the transition in March of next year, in accordance with the schedule agreed with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Presidential elections are also slated for February next year.

The draft constitution that is the subject of the referendum follows on the national dialogue on the reform process organized in December 2021. The discussions that took place revealed a strong aspiration for reform, in particular with regard to more honest government — something that underpinned many of the recommendations resulting from the national dialogue. As finalized, the constitutional text was the subject of divergent assessments by local stakeholders, whether from the political class, civil society or religious groups. The fact remains that several political parties, including parties that have dominated political life in recent decades, civil society organizations and other actors expressed their support and called for an affirmative vote in the referendum. Those urging a negative vote include political groups and religious organizations. The referendum campaign, which began on 2 June, ends today. The authorities mobilized significant resources for the holding of the referendum, including the Malian air force, which made its contribution by transporting election materials — something that should be welcomed.

In accordance with our mandate, MINUSMA and the United Nations country team provide multifaceted support to the process. That support includes a contribution to transport the material required for the referendum and the personnel involved in the process, including vehicles and equipment; training, including for the benefit of members of the Independent Authority for Election Management; the deployment of 182 officers to assist the Authority in the field; the mobilization of technical expertise; a major effort to raise awareness about the draft constitution in support of the National Transition Council; and support to the Constitutional Court in exercising the responsibilities assigned to it. Our involvement is an extension of the support we have extended to the transition since it began, including in the context of the local committee tasked with monitoring the transition, which also includes ECOWAS and the African Union.

The debates that took place on the draft constitution have shown, if proof were needed, the close links that exist between the transition and the peace processes. In fact, one of the questions that arose in the course

of the debates on the draft constitution concerned the extent to which the text takes account of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process. On 28 March, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Plateforme and some of the Mouvements de l'inclusivité, grouped within the Cadre stratégique permanent pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement, issued a communiqué stating that they did not see themselves in the draft constitution. Other signatories to the Agreement took the opposite position, calling for a yes vote in the referendum.

As a reminder, last December the signatory movements had announced their decision to suspend their participation in the mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the Agreement, citing what they considered a lack of commitment on the part of the Government. Sustained efforts have since been made by the international mediation team to overcome that issue. The visit on 12 May of the Minister for Reconciliation, Peace and National Cohesion to Kidal was an important step in that regard, which should rebuild confidence and facilitate the resumption of direct dialogue between the parties. In that context, we — that is, MINUSMA and Algeria, as *chef de file* — also sought to help the Malian parties overcome their differences surrounding the draft constitution, commissioning international expertise to facilitate a common understanding of the relationship between the draft constitution and the peace agreement. It emerged from that exercise that nothing in the draft constitution stands in the way of the implementation of the agreement, including the legislative and regulatory provisions relating to the institutional framework and territorial reorganization.

It is in that context that the international mediation team, after in-depth consultations with the parties, led by Algeria and MINUSMA, published a communiqué on the situation on 11 June. The text listed the elements on the basis of which the peace process could resume, and asked the signatory movements to facilitate the early voting, which took place on 11 June, by members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces in the areas concerned in the north of the country. It was part of an overall effort to ensure that the constitutional referendum, to be held on 18 June, takes place smoothly throughout Mali. It is regrettable that the call for members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces in the Kidal region to vote was not heeded. I encourage the parties to seek consensus on the issues that divide them, on the basis of the international mediation

team's communiqué of 11 June. As emphasized in that text, the difficulties facing the peace process are not insurmountable, and any path other than that of dialogue will lead only to more suffering for the Malian people and greater instability for the region.

The resumption of the normal course of the peace process will make it possible to address the security situation more effectively. The situation continues to be affected by the pressure that the Islamic State is still exerting in north-eastern Mali in the Gao and Ménaka regions, and by its continued acts of violence against the civilian population. In the centre of the country, terrorist groups and community self-defence militias remain active. One of the incidents during the reporting period was a complex attack on 22 April on a Malian Armed Forces base in the Sévaré area, which was repulsed.

It should be noted that the Malian Armed Forces conducted several operations during the reporting period in various parts of Mali, which are described in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/402). MINUSMA has also been the target of attacks, most recently on 9 June near the town of Ber, about 60 kilometres from Timbuktu. Two soldiers from Burkina Faso were killed and seven others wounded. Since January, five Blue Helmets have died and 31 have been wounded in hostile acts. Malian civilians are also paying a heavy price for this insecurity. The impact of improvised explosive devices, which are a preferred weapon for terrorist groups, is particularly noteworthy. The Mission is conducting several activities to raise public awareness of the danger that they pose, in addition to the close cooperation we maintain with the Malian Armed Forces on the issue.

The ongoing insecurity is clearly having a negative impact on the humanitarian situation. As of May, approximately 375,000 internally displaced people were displaced, with 55 per cent of them in the central regions and 40 per cent in Gao, Kidal, Ménaka and Timbuktu. About 8.8 million people around the country will need assistance this year. It is worrisome to note in that context that as of May, the humanitarian response plan had received only 11 per cent of the \$751 million of funding required.

The Mission also continued to implement its human rights mandate. In that context, we have continued to support training programmes for members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces. At the same

time, we have continued to investigate allegations of human rights violations, the majority of which take place remotely, owing to difficulties of access or in the absence of authorization from the authorities. Our quarterly human rights report for January through March is currently being finalized and should be published around the end of the month, following the usual consultations with the Malian Government. One of the major human rights developments of the period was the publication of the report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Moura incident, whose conclusions elicited a strong response from the Malian authorities, who announced that an investigation would be opened.

With MINUSMA's mandate coming to an end, and with a view to the decision that the Council will have to take, it will be useful to take stock of the past year and draw lessons for our future efforts. I believe three points are important in that regard.

First, despite the complex environment in which it operates and the many constraints it has to deal with, including restrictions on freedom of movement, the Mission has endeavoured to discharge its mandate as effectively as possible. I would like to highlight our support for the ongoing transition process, the role we play as part of the international mediation, led by Algeria, to facilitate the resumption of the peace process, and the action we have taken in support of the parties in maintaining the ceasefire.

It is equally important to note the stabilizing effect of the Mission's presence in urban centres and its efforts aimed at protecting civilian populations; the multifaceted aid provided to initiatives by the Malian State to restore and extend its authority; the many projects carried out for the benefit of civilians in both the centre and the north and the contribution made to infrastructure development. Our response is resolutely multidimensional, with a view to addressing the various facets of the crisis confronting Mali.

Those efforts are certainly crucial and provide invaluable support to many civilians. But let us admit that we can and must do more and better — much better, so that we can meet needs and so that our action responds better to current demands, such as the people's demand for security, which is certainly the issue that is most widely shared in Mali. In that respect, it is impossible to overemphasize the fundamental importance of cooperation with the host country and the relationship

of trust that has been built or should be built with it. It is helpful in that regard to recall the emphasis that the internal strategic review placed on the need for a stable and predictable relationship. There is a legitimate expectation on the part of the Malian people that our action will produce greater results, and the criticisms they have expressed are perfectly understandable. But only closer cooperation and a more trusting relationship can produce that greater effectiveness.

Lastly, the degree of robustness of the mandate has continued to fuel discussions in Mali. That is obviously a matter for the Council to decide. For my part, I would like to highlight a less debated issue — that of the complementarity between the action taken by the Malian State and by MINUSMA. MINUSMA has undeniable comparative advantages that can and must be used more effectively to support the Malian State. That functional coordination depends on a relationship of trust between the Malian authorities and MINUSMA. It requires a more sustained commitment from the Government, through regular dialogue with the Mission, to broaden the scope of possibilities and take advantage of the many opportunities that exist for the benefit of the Malian people.

In conclusion, and after an almost 10-year presence in Mali, I would like to stress that MINUSMA, like all the other United Nations peacekeeping operations, has a duty to create the conditions that will enable its departure by helping Mali to ensure the security of its population and its territory, and to lay the foundations for lasting stability. It is now more important than ever that we voluntarily dedicate ourselves to that task in a spirit of consultation, cooperation and complementarity.

The President: 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 would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing and to welcome Mr. Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, to the Council.

I would like to begin by paying tribute to the memory of the victims of terrorism in Mali, be they civilians or members of the Malian forces or international forces. France condemns those terrorist attacks, particularly the one that claimed the lives of two Burkina Faso peacekeepers last week. I once again

offer our condolences to their families and to Burkina Faso, and I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all troop-contributing countries.

With the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) expiring on 30 June, the Council is once again seized of the topic. It is an important issue for the entire region as well as Mali. France commends the quality of the strategic review drawn up by the United Nations in January in consultation with all stakeholders and signed by the Secretary-General (S/2023/36). It underlines the major contribution that MINUSMA has made to supporting peace in Mali and acknowledges the remarkable work done by the Blue Helmets over the past 10 years.

The Secretary-General also set clear parameters that must be respected, including for the viability and effectiveness of MINUSMA's action. As we in the Council have often said, peace is sustainable only when it is based on political solutions involving all stakeholders. In that respect, the top priority is the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. There is an urgent need for progress to be made on the ground with the support of international mediation, and we should continue to support Algeria's efforts in that regard. The second priority is the completion of the political transition within the framework agreed between Mali and the Economic Community of West African States, with a return to constitutional order in March 2024. MINUSMA remains ready to contribute to the organization of elections.

MINUSMA has been providing essential support to the people of Mali since 2013. The Mission protects civilians, works to ensure respect for human rights, promote the fight against impunity and guarantee the full participation of women in decision-making processes, and it facilitates humanitarian access. But as the Secretary-General notes in his latest report (S/2023/402), despite the dialogue that MINUSMA is pursuing with the Malian authorities, the Mission is still hampered in its movements. Since the Wagner Group's arrival in Mali those restrictions have only increased, as have the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. That is why MINUSMA's troops need comprehensive support and full freedom of movement in accordance with the status-of-forces agreement. That is why the Secretary-General made several recommendations in his strategic review for adapting MINUSMA's deployment to those

realities. In his report, submitted at the beginning of June, the Secretary-General assessed those parameters for MINUSMA's success and noted some mixed signals. It is therefore a call for all parties to assume their responsibilities, starting with the Malian authorities, as, of course, should the Council, by speaking with one voice and supporting the United Nations so that it can be functional and effective in its support for the people of Mali.

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

We welcome the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on Mali (S/2023/402) and thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, for his important and insightful briefing and for his effective leadership of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We welcome the participation in this meeting of His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

Since the previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.9302), we have witnessed some positive signs in the political situation in Mali. We welcome the gains that have been made, including the announcement of a date for the referendum, the inclusive processes in the drafting of a constitution and the commitment of the Malian authorities to addressing the challenges to the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process. We also acknowledge the accelerated progress towards the restoration of constitutional order, the resumption of cooperation between Mali and neighbouring countries and the diplomatic efforts of the Local Follow-up Committee of the Transition in Mali, made up of the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and MINUSMA.

Alongside those positive developments there are political, security and humanitarian challenges. They include determining the preferred option from those provided by the Secretary-General in his strategic review of MINUSMA (S/2023/36) in view of the Mission's upcoming mandate renewal this month. That is coupled with heightened insecurity following the increasing incidence of terrorist activities, which have

led to loss of life and injury among both civilians and security personnel. We also note with concern the gaps resulting from the withdrawal of troop-contributing countries (TCCs), the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the persisting challenges concerning the protection of civilians.

The A3 condemns all terrorist attacks in the country in the strongest terms. We express our deep condolences to the families and victims of those atrocious acts. The tragic loss of life among civilians and security personnel due to those terrorist attacks is deeply regrettable. It emphasizes how important it is that we move beyond a business-as-usual approach by embracing more robust measures to help deal with the situation. We commend the Malian authorities for their efforts to develop a new security strategy, as well as their huge investment in building military capacity. We encourage more support from donor partners to contribute to their ability to deal effectively with the security situation.

In that connection, the A3 would like to acknowledge MINUSMA's proactive actions in maximizing its limited resources by implementing an integrated plan. We are very concerned about the security gaps that have been created with the withdrawal of some TCCs, as well as about restrictions on the use of air assets for intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance purposes and other logistical challenges that hamper the Mission's effectiveness. We welcome the efforts to expedite the deployment of troops in areas affected by the withdrawals in order to enhance the Mission's effectiveness. We note the Secretary-General's call for streamlining MINUSMA's tasks around a limited set of priorities, with a view to improving its overall effectiveness. However, with regard to that, we share the view that consideration should be given to certain useful elements, among them the Mission's ability to improve the protection of civilians and the safety and security of personnel, facilitate the restoration of State authority in vulnerable areas in order to strengthen confidence and cooperation with the host country's authorities, enhance its presence in all the critical areas of the country to tackle insecurity, support the road map for peaceful elections and promote trust among all the signatory parties to resume dialogue towards the implementation of the peace agreement.

In addition, we should consider elements that would help position MINUSMA to better support regional counter-terrorism mechanisms to address the terrorist

threat. We also encourage the host country's authorities to step up their cooperation with the Mission to enable it to fulfil its mandate, including removing restrictions on their land and air movement. Furthermore, we would like to reiterate our long-standing position that effective regional mechanisms, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force, the Joint Force of Group of Five for the Sahel and the Accra Initiative, are crucial. They can complement the efforts to tackle the protracted insecurity in the country and the region. It is therefore essential that the best elements of those regional mechanisms find space in the forthcoming strategic review by the Independent High-level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by former President Issoufou, as part of a comprehensive approach to dealing with the security challenges in Mali and the Sahel at large. We are mindful of the constraints on resources facing those regional initiatives. We believe more than ever that the Council has to come together to meet its goal of answering the long-standing call for adequate and predictable funding for the regional mechanisms from assessed contributions.

The insecurity in Mali and the Sahel region is also related to the destabilization of Libya, and we are concerned about its adverse impact on the country and the region in general. Coordinated action by the competent national, regional and international actors to prevent the return of foreign terrorist fighters and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons should be prioritized.

On the political front, we commend the Malian authorities for their efforts in setting a date for the referendum. We encourage them to sustain a dialogue with all stakeholders in order to address differences on the draft constitution and, more importantly, the restoration of constitutional order. We welcome the cooperation and support of the Local Follow-Up Committee and development partners towards enhancing the work of the Independent Authority for Election Management. We share the view that such sustained support will help it deliver the peaceful and credible holding of elections for the Malian people. In all of that, the A3's ultimate goal is to ensure the implementation of the peace agreement, which is at the heart of achieving lasting peace in Mali. We welcome the forward-looking proposals by the international mediation team to help address the concerns of all the parties to the agreement. We encourage them to remain engaged and present their responses and views in a

manner that will help chart a way forward. We further call on the parties to remain united in a way that will foster progress in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, including the development of the national strategic plan for 2022 to 2024, which will advance the reconciliation process. Overall, the A3 shares the view that much more needs to be done at the national, regional and international levels to help consolidate the gains made in addressing the situation in Mali.

On the humanitarian front, the heightened level of insecurity resulting from terrorist activities, which has put an estimated 8.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance — an increase of 17 per cent compared to last year — is of great concern and requires urgent attention. Other aggravating factors, including the food crisis and the adverse impact of climate change, continue to persist and must be tackled. It is essential for donor partners to scale up humanitarian support to help meet the 2023 humanitarian response plan's target of \$751.5 million. In that regard, we appeal to donor partners and encourage them to consider increasing their contribution to that worthy cause to help alleviate the situation.

While we acknowledge the efforts being made to tackle the human rights situation, including the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the provision of support by MINUSMA to the Malian authorities to protect human rights, as well as the integration of human rights into the operations of the Malian Defence and Security Forces, the situation remains one of concern. We advocate that all incidents of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, such as abductions, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals, be investigated and the perpetrators held to account. In that regard, we acknowledge the determination of the Malian authorities to address the issue through their ongoing judicial investigation and encourage them to do more in order to deliver justice to the victims of those violations.

The A3 considers it pertinent to scale up interventions that prioritize the governance and development deficits, since they are at the heart of addressing the root causes of instability in Mali. We therefore welcome the introduction of interventions that empower women and young people to contribute to the development and peace processes, and we embrace a whole-of-society approach to include civil-society organizations, the private sector and community and religious leaders.

In our view, the role of the Peacebuilding Commission in supporting the development and peace processes, including by fostering entrepreneurial skills and promoting community-based dispute resolution mechanisms, among other things, is critical and should be sustained.

In conclusion, Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique reiterate their solidarity with the Malian people. We reaffirm our respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mali. We believe that strong cooperation between the host authorities and its multilateral and regional partners, including the United Nations, the AU and ECOWAS, remains crucial in laying a strong foundation for peace in Mali. Going forward, we believe that MINUSMA's continued engagement in Mali, in close cooperation with the Malian authorities, will be essential to consolidating the gains made towards finding lasting peace in that sister country.

The A3 would like to take this opportunity to inform the Council of the successful completion of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in Mozambique. The ceremony marking the final stage of the process took place on 15 June in Vanduzi in Manica province, in the presence of His Excellency President Nyusi and the leader of Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, Mr. Ossufo Momade. The conclusion of the process testifies to the political will of the two leaders to engage in a dialogue to put an end to the conflict in the country. The A3 in general, and Mozambique in particular, would like to extend their profound thanks to the Secretary-General, as well as his Special Envoy and the wider international community, for their staunch support to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in Mozambique.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Wane for his briefing and welcome the participation of Foreign Minister Diop in today's meeting.

We are pleased to see that the Secretary-General has continued to monitor the Malian transitional Government's progress towards full compliance with the four benchmarks included in the United Nations internal review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) (S/2023/36). The benchmarks are clearly defined and fully attainable. They ask the Malian authorities to uphold their existing obligations under the 2015 Algiers

Accord, the status-of-forces agreement with the United Nations and the timetable agreed by the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) for completing the political transition.

We are disappointed that the transitional Government displayed obstructionist behaviour during the reporting period. We are especially frustrated by Mali's ongoing restrictions on MINUSMA's freedom of movement and access, and by the fact that it has denied 170 MINUSMA flight authorization requests in the past three months alone. The transitional Government also denied four out of five MINUSMA requests to conduct investigations into reports of human rights violations and abuses. Despite those restrictions, which are in contravention of Mali's status-of-forces agreement, we commend MINUSMA for conducting dozens of other investigations using widely accepted remote forensic tools.

In the same vein, we commend MINUSMA and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their diligent investigation into and factual reporting on the human rights abuses and violations committed by the Malian Armed Forces and the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group last March in Moura, despite being denied access to the area. The United Nations ability to shine a light on abuses and violations despite such obstructionism reinforces the importance of MINUSMA's mandate to promote and protect human rights in Mali. Statements accusing MINUSMA of espionage for conducting an independent investigation as part of its mandate are unacceptable, and they present a serious threat to the safety and security of United Nations peacekeepers authorized by the Security Council, who deserve nothing less than our full support.

On 25 May, the United States imposed visa restrictions on two Malian military officers who commanded units involved in the human rights violations committed in Moura. We are appalled by the disregard for human life by elements of the Malian Armed Forces in cooperation with the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group in Moura. Never has the destabilizing role of Wagner Group forces and the direct threat they pose to the Malian people and the country's sovereignty been more evident. Council members should also take note of how military operations such as that in Moura, harming civilians in central Mali, are undermining both the efforts to protect civilians and the implementation of a politically focused strategy.

In a more positive development, the United States applauds the transitional Government's robust preparation and planning for the 18 June constitutional referendum. We once again reiterate our support for the transition process and for elections in February 2024, in which neither the transitional Government's President nor its Prime Minister can run for office, as the transitional Government agreed to with ECOWAS. We encourage the transition authorities and the signatory armed groups to demonstrate a similar commitment to the peace agreement by responding to the proposals of the international mediation constructively and in a spirit of compromise.

It is clear that MINUSMA cannot achieve its mandate in the current conditions. We therefore reiterate our rejection of business as usual. Only the transitional Government's fulfilment of the four benchmarks should convince the Council to continue to support MINUSMA's deployment in its current form.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his briefing and acknowledge the participation of Mr. Diop in our meeting today.

Malta expresses its deepest condolences to the families of the peacekeepers who were killed in the attack on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on 9 June. We also pay tribute to the thousands of peacekeepers that bravely carry out their duties despite continuous threats to their safety and well-being, and we wish the injured a full and speedy recovery.

Malta supports a future for MINUSMA, which continues to work with the people of Mali. The strategic review shared earlier this year (S/2023/36) provides us with a solid outlook to this effect. We look forward to the outcome of the constitutional reform, which is a step in the right direction. We thank the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union for their efforts in supporting an inclusive process that places the will of the Malian at the core. We also acknowledge these efforts. We remain firm in our belief that a secure return to democratic and constitutional order, including the presidential elections, is key.

We also urge the Malian authorities and all parties to create an environment conducive for women's rights and their protection. They must strive to ensure the full equal, safe and meaningful participation of women in the political transition and electoral and

peace processes. In this context, we welcome efforts to counter hate speech and violence against women peacebuilders and human rights defenders.

Malta welcomes the meeting between the Minister for Reconciliation, Peace and National Cohesion of Mali with representatives of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Plateforme in Kidal. We also thank Algeria for its efforts in leading the international mediation.

We continue to call for neutral engagement with tangible outcomes in full respect of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, the issues of self-determination, deeper decentralization and local governance. Furthermore, the socioeconomic development for the northern region of Mali remains crucial. Dissipating any existing frictions between signatory parties is a necessity.

Malta recognizes the urgent need to address the ongoing security, humanitarian and human rights situation in Mali, which are both a cause and a product of years of conflict in the region. The people of Mali are facing increasing humanitarian needs and displacement compounded by the effects of climate shocks, deep poverty and acute malnutrition, with 8.8 million people requiring humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian operations continue to face multiple access-related challenges, due to insecurity and instances of criminality. We call on all parties to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and live up to their obligations under international law. Although relatively less severe when compared to the east, we are very alarmed that extremist attacks are now also reported in the west and south of Mali.

Malta calls for an immediate end to ongoing human rights violations and abuses. We are alarmed by the hundreds of incidents of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls recorded in April. Perpetrators must be held accountable, cases must be investigated, and victims must be given effective and prompt protection.

We are also alarmed by the other grave violations against children, including recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and attacks on schools, which continue to occur at a high rate. Child protection capacities in MINUSMA need to be strengthened. Additionally, we remain deeply concerned with the bleak conclusions that emerged from the Moura report.

MINUSMA's capacity to deter violent extremism by being present on the ground should not be underestimated. We continue to call for greater cooperation from the authorities to guarantee the required freedom of movement for the Mission. We also commend the work of the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, which continues to assist an enabling and inclusive environment for women peacekeepers in MINUSMA.

Malta will continue to support the Mission's crucial presence in the region and the work of the Special Representative as they support Mali in their course towards peace and stability.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, for his briefing. I welcome His Excellency, Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

Switzerland condemns all the violence and attacks perpetrated against peacekeepers and civilians since our last meeting (see S/PV.9302). I express my deepest condolences to the victims and their families. I would also like to acknowledge the losses suffered by the Malian Armed Forces.

In the face of insecurity, population displacement and an alarming humanitarian situation, the efforts of the United Nations and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) remain crucial to peace, stability and sustainable development in Mali. In view of the renewal of the mandate, I would like to highlight three key points.

First, as we have just heard and read in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/402), MINUSMA's ability to fulfil its mandate effectively and predictably is being hampered. A complex operational context combined with the vast perimeter of the zone of intervention and the lack of personnel make this mission particularly arduous. Adjustments are therefore necessary. Indeed, we need to reconcile the Mission's tasks with current realities, while leaving it the necessary flexibility to use the resources at its disposal. MINUSMA's effectiveness will also depend on better cooperation with the Malian authorities and their progress on the four parameters identified by the Secretary-General last January (S/2023/36), including freedom of movement. Yet the Mission continues to face restrictions, including the non-authorization of reconnaissance flights.

Secondly, we are concerned by the persistence of allegations of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law committed throughout Malian territory. We were deeply concerned to learn of the report published by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the events that took place in Moura in March 2022 as part of a military operation. Switzerland strongly condemns all these violations, some of which could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. It calls on all parties to the conflict — State, non-State and private, Malian and foreign — to respect their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. Violations must be impartially, independently and effectively investigated and prosecuted. Switzerland is convinced that impunity is an obstacle to lasting peace and continues to fuel cycles of violence in Mali.

Thirdly, the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement remains as crucial as ever. Despite delays in its implementation and ongoing blockages, it has made it possible to maintain the ceasefire since 2015. We cannot and must not lose the benefits of nine years of work, dialogue and efforts towards national reconciliation. Switzerland calls on all parties to resume dialogue by establishing concrete confidence-building measures, with the support of international mediation. Diligent implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in its entirety would enable a united front to be forged against the new threats. We reiterate the importance of a peaceful political transition, enabling credible and transparent elections to be held on schedule and leading to a stable, democratic and civilian Government. We welcome the constitutional referendum scheduled for Sunday, and we hope that it will be held throughout Mali.

In the face of multiple challenges, the Security Council's continued support for Mali and MINUSMA is crucial. Switzerland believes that the Mission's priorities remain relevant, which is why we reaffirm our full support for its important mandate, in particular the protection of civilians and the implementation of the peace agreement.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his briefing. I welcome the participation of Foreign Minister Diop at our meeting today.

I want to underline our unwavering support for the hard work and courage of the peacekeepers of the United

Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and other United Nations staff. On behalf of the United Kingdom, I pay tribute to the two Burkinabe peacekeepers killed and the seven injured in the recent attack in the Timbuktu region.

No one can deny the scale of the challenges facing the Malian people — severe security and humanitarian threats, political instability, a fragile peace agreement. Malian civilians and armed forces have paid a heavy price. Through the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and other United Nations agencies, as well as bilateral security, development and humanitarian efforts, we have made huge investments in pursuit of the stable, prosperous, democratic society the Malian people deserve. That has come at great cost over the past decade — not just financial, but also in terms of human lives, many of them United Nations peacekeepers.

MINUSMA still has an important role to play in supporting the Malian people. Following the Secretary-General's review, we stand ready to adapt the Mission to improve its impact. But for the Mission to function properly, the four parameters set out in the review must be met.

Those parameters are not unreasonable. They are not imposed upon Mali from outside. They are commitments that have been made by the Malian transitional authorities to their people, their neighbours and to the international community — to deliver a timely political transition, to implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, to uphold United Nations freedom of movement, in accordance with the status-of-forces agreement and to respect the mandate set by the Council. Against those four parameters, we would like to make several remarks.

First, we urge progress on a timely and peaceful transition to constitutional order by March 2024. We call for the full participation of civil society in this Sunday's constitutional referendum and in presidential elections next February.

Secondly, urgent efforts are needed to revive dialogue between the signatories to Mali's faltering peace agreement, building on the International Mediation proposals.

Thirdly, restrictions on MINUSMA's movements — on which there has been no improvement — need to be lifted.

Fourthly, obstruction of MINUSMA's mandated human rights tasks must end. The tragic massacre, in Moura, of more than 500 people by Malian forces and the Wagner Group is deeply concerning. There must be accountability for those crimes. MINUSMA must be allowed to fulfil its human rights mandate without fear of reprisals. Ultimately it is for the Malian transitional authorities to choose its partners. But let us be clear — the Wagner Group, whether operating autonomously or under the direct control of Moscow, is not the answer in Mali or anywhere else.

The United Kingdom, with most members of the Council, remains committed to supporting MINUSMA's efforts to help build the future Mali's people deserve. We sincerely hope that the Malian transitional authorities will live up to their responsibilities and allow the United Nations Mission to fulfil its mandate. That is a choice that only they can make.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): My delegation thanks Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his comprehensive briefing and welcomes Minister Diop to this meeting.

We received with dismay the news of the terrorist attacks against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in Ber on 9 June. We regret the deaths of two peacekeepers from Burkina Faso and offer our sincere condolences and solidarity to the Government of that country, to the families of the victims, as well as to MINUSMA.

Brazil reiterates once more its firm condemnation of terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations. There is no justification for such acts. The security situation in Mali remains unstable and continues to take a heavy toll — not just on MINUSMA, but also on civilians. Although the numbers improved slightly in that respect, we must renew our efforts to protect the most vulnerable.

In order to carry out that task effectively, it is essential to ensure MINUSMA's freedom of movement. In that vein, we regret that no solution for the resumption of unmanned intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) flights has been reached, despite the fact that MINUSMA adopted the measures agreed with the Malian transition Government. The safety and security of peacekeepers should be a top priority. We call on the Malian authorities to work with MINUSMA on the review of the procedure for drone ISR flights, as well as on the lifting of ground movement restrictions.

The Council has just started discussions on the renewal of MINUSMA's mandate. My delegation believes it is crucial to ensure that the Mission is duly equipped 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 the Malian State authority across the country.

Regional cooperation is a key factor to help Mali pave the way towards a successful transition process. In that regard, Brazil reiterates its support to the current engagement with the Economic Community of West African States and hopes that the dialogue with the Malian transitional authorities will lead to further collaboration on the development and implementation of a transition plan conducive to the restoration of constitutional order.

As we pointed out in previous discussions with regard to the drafting of a new constitution, the return to democratic normalcy is a collective endeavour that must include women, youth and ethnic and religious minorities. We hope that the efforts of the Malian authorities to add more voices to that exercise will reflect on a more inclusive and peaceful constitutional referendum on 18 June.

In addition, we welcome the ongoing cooperation between MINUSMA and the Independent Authority for Election Management, with a view to coordinating the technical and logistical support for the elections and the provision of capacity-building to civil society organizations on gender promotion in electoral processes, to name just a couple of examples. These are encouraging concrete steps towards more inclusivity and participation in the polls.

While the developments on the transition process and constitutional reforms I mentioned are commendable, they are not sufficient to lay the ground for durable peace without the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We therefore wish to voice our support for the leadership of Algeria in the mediation process to overcome the present impasse and urge all Malian political forces to remain engaged in dialogue and to redouble efforts aimed at the full implementation of the peace agreement.

Before I conclude and in view of the dire humanitarian situation, my delegation would like to seize this opportunity to underscore once again the need to address the root causes of conflict. That notion should be at the core of our work throughout the mandate renewal talks.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Representative Wane for his briefing. I also welcome Foreign Minister Diop to today's meeting.

Recently, Mali has made active efforts to maintain the country's stability and development, promote the political transition and combat terrorism and has made significant progress in that regard. The political and peace process in Mali is now at a critical stage. Mali's cooperation with the international community and the United Nations has also entered a crucial phase. Foreign Minister Diop's presence at this meeting will help the Security Council to better understand Mali's position and concerns on relevant issues.

I would like to stress the following points.

First, the constitutional referendum is an important step for Mali in advancing the transition process and maintaining lasting stability. China welcomes the positive progress achieved by Mali in such areas as drafting the constitution, preparing for the referendum and building electoral institutions. We encourage all parties concerned in Mali to resolve any potential differences through dialogue and create favourable conditions for the constitutional referendum. The constitutional referendum is an internal affair of Mali, and the international community should respect Mali's sovereignty and ownership in that regard.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) should be available to provide Mali with logistical and technical support on the ground based on its actual needs. China encourages relevant regional organizations to strengthen their communication with the Malian Government and play a constructive role in supporting Mali's political transition.

Secondly, China commends the Malian Government's active efforts in counter-terrorism operations, which serve as a deterrent to terrorist forces. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/402), in the past 10 months the number of civilian casualties caused by terrorist attacks decreased significantly compared to the previous period. Mali is at the forefront of counter-terrorism in the Sahel and West Africa and has made considerable efforts to curb the spread of terrorism. The international community should fully recognize those efforts and step up the provision of funding, equipment, intelligence and logistical support to help Mali strengthen its security sector capacity-building.

Some colleagues referred to the issue of human rights in counter-terrorism operations. It should be noted, without a doubt, that human rights need to be protected. It should be noted too that terrorism endangers people's lives and security. Eliminating that threat through counter-terrorism efforts is in itself a means of protecting human rights. China has consistently opposed the politicization of human rights issues. The reports on the human rights situation of MINUSMA and relevant United Nations bodies should be based on facts, and any allegations should be verified against facts. We must not adopt double standards on counter-terrorism. More important, we must avoid stigmatizing counter-terrorism operations, which would only play into the hands of terrorist forces.

Thirdly, peacekeeping operations are an important means for the Security Council to fulfil its mandate of maintaining international peace and security. Experience has shown that peacekeeping operations must follow the basic principles developed in practice over a long period of time, in particular the principle of consent of the parties concerned. Missions should maintain communication with the Governments of the countries concerned and maintain a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation, which is a prerequisite for smooth peacekeeping operations. As the political and security situations in the countries concerned evolve, the mandates of peacekeeping operations must be adjusted and optimized accordingly in a timely manner. In that process, the sovereignty of the countries concerned should be respected, the views of the Governments should be fully heeded and the real needs of the countries should be prioritized. The past experience of successful peacekeeping operations shows that clear and focused mandates and a timely formulation of time-bound exit strategies are important ingredients in the recipe for their success.

MINUSMA has been deployed for 10 years with a great deal of investment. In June 2022, the Security Council adopted resolution 2640 (2022) requesting an internal review of the Mission to analyse new developments and optimize and streamline the Mission's mandate.

The current mandate of the Mission is due to expire at the end of this month. China looks forward to the Council members fully listening to Mali's views and concerns, having a constructive and responsible discussion on the future arrangements for the Mission and conducting their discussions and

making a decision grounded in broad consensus. In that process, we encourage the penholder to maintain close communication with Mali and the Council members.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Special Representative Wane for his insightful briefing. I also welcome the participation of Foreign Minister Diop.

First, I wish to pay tribute to the personnel of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) who are working in one of the most dangerous United Nations missions in the world. We honour those who have perished in the line of duty, most recently the two peacekeepers from Burkina Faso.

Today I want to highlight three points.

First, long-term stability cannot be achieved without a return to constitutional order. The support MINUSMA provides for the electoral process is essential. We join the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union in welcoming the constitutional referendum to be held this Sunday and commend the efforts made by the Malian transitional authorities in that regard. We expect all stakeholders to take advantage of that important step in the transition timetable and continue to make every effort to hold inclusive, transparent and peaceful elections.

The second point concerns the stalled implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The agreement is the only existing framework to achieve durable peace and reconciliation. We call on the transitional authorities and the signatory parties to expeditiously resume talks. Strengthened dialogue and steady implementation of the Agreement will build mutual trust which is essential for stability. We appreciate the work of the international mediation and encourage them to accelerate their efforts to build confidence in the process.

Thirdly, we are deeply concerned about the security and humanitarian situation. Terror attacks continue unabated, as do human rights violations, including conflict-related sexual violence and crimes against children. Japan notes the Malian-led stabilization efforts and the support provided by MINUSMA, including on joint patrols, the protection of civilians and securing access for humanitarian organizations.

Nevertheless, military efforts to tackle insecurity, whether by Malian Defence and Security Forces or foreign security forces, must respect human rights. We

are deeply disturbed by the findings in the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, published on 12 May, on the events in the village of Moura from 27 to 31 March 2022, and echo the Secretary-General's call to the transitional authorities for an early completion of a credible and transparent investigation and a swift publication of the results in order to hold perpetrators accountable.

In order to achieve sustainable peace and stability, building people's trust through establishing democratic governance with resilient and accountable institutions and providing basic social services is key. To achieve that, the points I have highlighted today — a return to constitutional order, advancing the peace process and addressing the security and humanitarian situation — must proceed together.

MINUSMA has been playing a crucial role in the efforts to advance all three points. At the same time, we are cognizant of the difficulties the Mission is facing. We reiterate our request to the Malian transitional authorities to further cooperate with MINUSMA to enable it to execute its mandate without undue restrictions or constraints.

Japan believes that MINUSMA's work remains highly relevant and important to the people of Mali as the country strives for sustainable peace and stability. Since we on the Council are tasked with the Mission's mandate renewal this month, we need to assess and candidly discuss the best way forward in order to contribute to the stability that Malians deserve. We need to give MINUSMA a clear and realistic mandate in a united voice and provide robust support with a concerted message. Japan remains committed to engaging with our colleagues and all stakeholders, with the best interests of the Malian people at heart.

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), for his important briefing. I acknowledge the presence in this meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali.

The situation in Mali remains complex, especially thanks to the precarious security situation affecting the entire Sahel region and the activities of terrorist groups, which have a direct impact on civilians, displacing them and forcing them to flee, and causing an

unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Ecuador rejects the scourge of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Terrorism continues to gain ground through the use of misinformation and disinformation, improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks. Combating such campaigns must be a priority, particularly when they jeopardize the safety of MINUSMA personnel and make it impossible for MINUSMA to carry out its mandate to protect civilians.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/402) reflects the position of the transitional Government regarding the fact-finding mission by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights into the Moura massacre. My delegation hopes that the transitional Government will accept the recommendations for an independent investigation. We again call for the lifting of restrictions on the Mission's movement and for respect for the status-of-forces agreement. MINUSMA's security and the need for greater openness and cooperation are essential to its ability to conduct activities related to the protection of civilians, which is seriously affected when a quarter of its requests are denied.

Ecuador is concerned about the deadlock in the peace process. We commend the efforts of the Algiers process international mediation team and the visit to Bamako by Algeria's Minister for Foreign Affairs at the end of April, which resulted in a renewed commitment by the transitional Government to implementing the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The process must start with a resumption of the work of the monitoring mechanisms, which has been at a standstill since December.

Mali's return to the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, and its close cooperation with regional organizations such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, will help to stabilize the region. We look forward to seeing the electoral process develop further and to the adoption of a new constitution on 19 June, with a view to achieving a political transition. We support MINUSMA's efforts in the electoral process and in the broader political process, providing training for women from civil society in order to increase their participation.

The Council must take decisions on the future of the Mission, which has worked intensively on the political transition and on the efforts to fully implement the peace agreement, as well as on training programmes and on consolidating peacebuilding. The worsening

humanitarian situation in Mali, including in the areas of food insecurity, malnutrition and fresh displacements in some regions, requires sustained contributions to the 2023 humanitarian response plan. It also requires protection for humanitarian workers to ensure the delivery of that vital aid. Ecuador therefore believes that the preferences set out by Mali on the future of MINUSMA should be accompanied by cooperation in building capacity and ensuring delivery of the Mission's mandate. That would create openness, which would help ensure that States continue to contribute troops and thereby enable further implementation of the peace agreement, which is essential to building trust among all actors.

In conclusion, we have heard the concern regarding the need to avoid the politicization of human rights. That is why my delegation reiterates its view that the only way to protect human rights is to agree that their application must be governed by the principles of universality, indivisibility and interdependence.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his informative briefing and honour the brave peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the line of duty, including most recently in Ber. We also welcome Foreign Minister Diop, who is with us today. Albania commends the dedicated peacekeepers and personnel of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), who operate in a very challenging environment. The situation in Mali continues to deteriorate, with civilians bearing the brunt of increased violence, a lack of protection and a dire humanitarian situation. I would like to address three key areas of concern.

First, the political transition is at a crucial phase. We hope that this weekend's referendum will be conducted peacefully, and that it will take place all over the country and allow all who wish to vote to do so. At the same time, we stress the need for the political transition to be transparent and inclusive, taking into consideration the concerns of all stakeholders and civil society. Additionally, the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali remains instrumental to stabilizing the north. We commend the international mediation team's efforts to engage with the signatories. However, the transitional authorities and signatory groups must demonstrate their commitment to cooperating and to implementing the agreement, while refraining from escalating tensions.

Secondly, the security situation poses increasing challenges. The escalating tensions between terrorist groups in Gao and Ménaka are threatening regional stability, as those groups are expanding their presence, gaining territorial control and causing forced displacement. We condemn the violence against civilians and call for enhanced protection measures. We are deeply concerned about the dramatic increase in violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, which have risen following the involvement of the Wagner Group. We call on the transitional authorities to act on the recommendations of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights following the investigation of the Moura atrocities. It is imperative that counter-terrorist operations comply with international obligations.

Thirdly, we commend MINUSMA for its efforts to implement its mandate and support the stabilization of Mali. However, we remain deeply concerned about the restrictions on the Mission's freedom of movement, which impede its full implementation of its mandate and pose a significant risk to peacekeepers' safety and security. During the internal review, the Secretary-General outlined four parameters for MINUSMA's continued operation. It is regrettable that progress on those fronts has been limited. MINUSMA has a crucial role to play in documenting violations of human rights and international law, and the Mission should not be hampered in carrying out its assigned mandate.

In conclusion, as Mali prepares to restore constitutional order by March 2024, several crucial tasks need to be addressed to ensure credible elections. The restrictions imposed on MINUSMA have posed significant barriers to the Mission's effective and safe operation, leaving the Council with critical decisions to make regarding the mandate's renewal. It is important to emphasize, as the Secretary-General highlighted, that maintaining the status quo is neither viable nor desirable. It is therefore imperative that the Council take action to navigate through the evolving situation and steer Mali towards a stable and peaceful future.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General El-Ghassim Wane for his briefing, and we welcome the participation in today's meeting of Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

The situation in Mali remains complicated, to say the least. The subversive activities of the terrorists of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin have noticeably increased. Attacks on civilians, the Malian Armed Forces and United Nations peacekeepers continue unabated, as do armed confrontations between extremist groups.

The intensifying terrorist threat is further exacerbating the humanitarian situation. According to the United Nations, almost 9 million people in Mali are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. The grave humanitarian situation has been worsened further by the chronic underfunding of the humanitarian appeal for Mali. We call on Bamako's international partners to refrain from politicizing the issue of donor assistance, which has resulted in cuts to aid programmes in Mali. It is civilians first and foremost who are suffering from such decisions. For our part, we are providing food aid both bilaterally and through the World Food Programme.

The Malian authorities are making significant efforts in difficult circumstances to restore constitutional order to Mali in accordance with the provisions agreed with the Economic Community of West African States. The transitional road map is being implemented, the country's new territorial division has been approved and the Independent Authority for Election Management has been formed. Voting by the military in the referendum on the new constitution, the main date for which is 18 June, is already under way. We wish Bamako every success in organizing the free and democratic expression of the will of its citizens.

The Malian leadership has also continued to demonstrate its commitment to implementing the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process, which is the basis for ensuring lasting peace and national reconciliation. In that context, we should not fail to mention the visit to Kidal in May by the Minister for Reconciliation, Peace and National Unity of Mali, Mr. Ismaël Wagué. Despite the suspension of the Local Follow-up Committee to monitor the implementation of the agreement, the Tuareg movements are still committed to reaching an agreement with the authorities. It will be important for the signatories to the peace agreement to show flexibility and a willingness to compromise in the national interest.

Given the security vacuum in Mali following the inglorious withdrawal of the French Operation Barkhane and the European Union's Takuba Task Force,

the Malian Government has been developing legitimate partnerships with international partners who can help to ensure security and protect the population. Thanks to support from Russia, among others, the Malian Armed Forces have been able to significantly increase their capacity to combat terrorism and convert it into real results on the ground. For example, from February to March this year, the army carried out 59 successful operations against terrorists in the centre of the country. In addition, the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/402) noted that one of the results of the Malian army's efforts was a drop in civilian casualties.

The sharply negative reaction of some countries to the strengthening of the cooperation between Russia and Mali is a manifestation of neocolonialist attitudes and double standards. What needs to be done is to provide the Malian authorities with effective support rather than putting a spanner in the works, which is unfortunately what Paris and its allies continue to do, including by leveraging multilateral structures. From that point of view, the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published in May this year on the events in Moura in March 2022 looks like yet another politically motivated attempt to discredit Bamako's efforts to combat terrorism. And clearly, as the Malians themselves have officially stated, the report is blatantly biased. At the very least we should wait for the results of Mali's national investigation.

We note the efforts of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and are aware of the threats that serving in the Mission poses to peacekeepers. We honour the memory of the peacekeepers who have given their lives for the sake of peace and security in the country and express our condolences to the Government of Burkina Faso, which lost two Blue Helmets as a result of the attack on 9 June, as well as wishing the wounded a speedy recovery. We believe that close coordination with the host country and respect for Mali's sovereignty are vital to MINUSMA's successful fulfilment of its tasks.

In the light of the discussion that has already begun in the Security Council on the renewal of MINUSMA's mandate, we would like to remind members that the Malians have expressed their dissatisfaction with the options proposed by the Secretary-General in his strategic review for the reconfiguration of the Mission (S/2023/36). The fact is that the primary issue is not the number of peacekeepers but the functions they

perform. One of the Malian Government's key tasks is combating terrorism, which does not come under the Blue Helmets' mandate. The fundamental element in the existing mandate is the protection of civilians and the provision of appropriate assistance to Mali in that regard. An excessive focus on internal political aspects and a shift to the protection of human rights in the peacekeepers' activities are undermining their core task of maintaining peace and security in the country.

In the context of discussing the possible options for reconfiguring the Mission, we believe that any proposals for changing the modalities of its work should be based on the opinion of the host country. Russia will continue to provide Mali with comprehensive assistance, including to enhance the State's ability to respond to security challenges. Our bilateral interactions take place at Bamako's request and in strict compliance with the applicable norms of international law. We will also continue to constructively promote the normalization of the situation in Mali within the Security Council, which is in the direct interests of achieving lasting peace and stability throughout the Sahel-Sahara region, which is still suffering from the consequences of the events in Libya in 2011. We nevertheless firmly believe that the leading role in stabilizing the country belongs to the Malian people themselves.

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

I want to begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his valuable briefing today and welcoming the presence of Foreign Minister Diop in this meeting.

The United Arab Emirates is committed to supporting Mali in this challenging period in full complementarity with the aspirations of the Malian people. We took careful note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/402). In that respect, I would like to make three points.

First, we must maintain a resolute focus on a sustainable political transition in Mali. The electoral timeline over the next 12 months will be crucial, including the constitutional referendum in two days' time and the presidential elections set for February 2024. The United Arab Emirates firmly believes that those political processes should be inclusive, in order to shape the right approach to sustainable conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The

full, equal and meaningful participation of women is critical to achieving that. A welcome step in that direction would be the effective implementation by the Malian authorities of the country's national action plan on women and peace and security. Also, in a country where roughly 50 per cent of the population is under the age of 15, the perspectives of the country's young people should be part of that process. Dialogue is the cornerstone for overcoming difference and fostering trust. In that context, the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali remains essential, and we encourage the parties to engage openly with international mediation efforts.

Secondly, the myriad security threats facing the country have clearly intensified. Among them, terrorist attacks, including transnational outbreaks, are the most pressing. We offer our condolences for the lives lost. Burkina Faso and Mali accounted for 73 per cent of terrorism-related deaths in the Sahel in 2022 and 52 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. The escalation in violence is meanwhile spreading to neighbouring countries. Therefore, coordination on a national level alone is not enough. Domestic efforts must be complemented by bilateral and regional approaches. And, to be successful, they must be developed with the views of the communities most affected in mind. It is clear that those security challenges feed into the devastating humanitarian situation across the country, which I will now turn to.

Thus far this year, 8.8 million Malians need humanitarian assistance and protection across the country — a 17 per cent increase from last year. As always, women and girls are hardest hit. Women-headed households are twice as likely to suffer from food insecurity. In May, the overall displaced population was nearing 400,000 people. We are particularly concerned about levels of insecurity in central Mali, Gao and Ménaka, where the most intense fighting is occurring, and the numbers of those internally displaced continue to grow. The absence of adequate action and basic services renders the dire situation even more fragile and undermines confidence in the State. The international community must continue to collectively support Mali's efforts to increase State presence to ensure the protection of all civilians.

In that increasingly challenging security and humanitarian environment, climate change is acting as a risk multiplier. The United Arab Emirates has consistently flagged the connection between climate

change and peace and security. Mali is a place where we see those circumstances writ large. Increased desertification and reduced rainfall is shrinking the already-scarce food and water supplies in the country. That hinders seasonal agricultural work, leaving Malians without food, employment and other basic needs, rendering them increasingly vulnerable to recruitment into Mali's armed groups. In that regard, we reiterate the need to ensure that the Secretary-General's reporting on Mali include data and analysis on how the adverse effects of climate change could drive conflict or instability in Mali. In the same vein, we welcome Mali's launch of a new project, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, aimed at enhancing climate security and the sustainable management of natural resources for consolidating peace.

Thirdly, the United Nations work on the ground through the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) remains essential to creating and maintaining a stabilizing environment in Mali. We therefore believe that it is imperative that the Council renew the MINUSMA mandate and support its work on the ground. The best chance of success for the mandate will come about if Malian authorities and MINUSMA build a stronger relationship based on cooperation. Greater dialogue between the United Nations and Malian authorities is an opportunity to have their security concerns met and for deeper cooperation to emerge. This would be welcome to the United Arab Emirates. It will also help combat the problem of disinformation and misinformation that we have witnessed there. This week, the Security Council adopted resolution 2686 (2023) to that effect, condemning misinformation, disinformation and incitement to violence against United Nations peacekeeping operations as harmful to peace and security. Mali is a case in point. By capitalizing on resolution 2686 (2023), MINUSMA can better monitor data related to hate speech, racism and acts of extremism that might affect peace and security and lead to increased threats against peacekeepers on the ground. The United Arab Emirates remains committed to ensuring a safer, more peaceful future for the people of Mali.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to extend the United Arab Emirates' congratulations to Mozambique for its successful completion of its disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

Mr. Diop (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I thank everyone for their kind words to us. First of all, I would like to congratulate the United Arab Emirates on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. The Government of Mali takes note of the report of the Secretary-General before us (S/2023/402) and thanks Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), for his briefing and updates. The detailed observations of the Government of Mali are contained in the memorandum transmitted to the Security Council.

For my part, I would like to make the following main observations.

I will begin with the political situation, in particular developments in the transition process. Council members will recall that one of the priority tasks conferred upon the transitional Government was to carry out political and institutional reforms that would guarantee a better future for our people by achieving lasting institutional stability. That legitimate demand made by our compatriots is on the verge of becoming a reality. Indeed, within the framework of an inclusive and broadly consensual process, the transitional Government has taken strong and irreversible steps towards a return to a peaceful and secure constitutional order within the agreed time frame. The transitional Government has set about working towards the successful holding of the referendum on a new constitution for Mali, scheduled for 18 June, in line with the aspirations of the Malian people, which have been voiced through the national dialogue on the reform process. The process of publicizing the issue of the draft constitution and the related electoral campaign have proceeded smoothly, and this augurs well for the peaceful and credible holding of the referendum.

With regard to the security situation, I recall once again that, since the military intervention in Libya in 2011, the people of my country, Mali, and of the Sahel region have truly been living in upheaval. Unfortunately, our countries and populations continue to wait, and have been waiting for more than a decade, for an international response commensurate with the resultant threat and its worrisome humanitarian

consequences for the region. In the specific case of my country, Mali, as only one example, I must say that international responses, including those provided by MINUSMA since its creation in 2013, have shown their limits. How else can we explain the fact that the security situation in Mali in 2013 was so much better than it is today? The reality of the situation forces us to acknowledge the failure of MINUSMA, the mandate of which does not meet the security challenges.

For its part, the transitional Government has never lost sight of the fact that the primary responsibility for defending the nation and protecting the people and their property lies, above all, with the Malian State. That is why the Government has prioritized capacity-building for and the equipping of the Malian Defence and Security Forces to enable them to carry out their noble mission. Thanks to that judicious decision, the Forces continue to decisively prevail over armed terrorist groups, which has met with acknowledgement and gratitude on the part of the Malian people. I know that the increase in the strength of the Malian Defence and Security Forces has given rise to much discussion and even hostile disinformation and destabilization campaigns, to which Mali has unfortunately been subjected since 2021, including through the instrumentalization and politicization of the issue of human rights, which others have brought up around this table.

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to certain comments and statements concerning the report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the events in Moura. It was common knowledge that the town of Moura and its surrounding villages had been under siege by terrorist groups for many years. During that time, no force, not even the international forces that had been deployed, had access to the location, which meant the people were left to their sad fate. I wonder, in passing: where were the voices that are being raised today, when terrorists were inhumanely treating and degrading our defenceless civilian populations, stoning women, burning villages and crops and carrying off livestock, which happened in Ogossagou, Sobane Da and Diallassagou, to name but a few?

Based therefore on reliable and detailed intelligence indicating the presence in Moura of major terrorist leaders seeking to benefit from extorting the population and to organize and plan large-scale attacks, the Malian Defence and Security Forces decided to carry out an air-land operation commensurate to that threat

in order to put an end to our people's suffering. The first units deployed by our airborne resources, as well as their reinforcements, came under fire, confirming the terrorist presence. Clashes ensued in and around the town of Moura, resulting in the neutralization of 203 terrorist fighters, the seizure of a large quantity of weapons and ammunition, the destruction of more than 200 motorcycles and the arrest of several suspected terrorists and their transfer to the courts. Sadly, eight of our valiant soldiers also died in battle during this operation, which liberated the people of Moura from the yoke of the terrorists.

Following the allegations of abuses, the competent authorities immediately launched investigations. A judicial team comprising the Mopti and Bamako public prosecutors, investigators from the gendarmerie and the forensic police and a forensic pathologist arrived on the scene. The investigations are continuing in accordance with the prevailing procedures and deadlines. Their conclusions will be made public.

The Government firmly rejects the hasty conclusions of the biased report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We see in that biased report a real desire on the part of certain States to use our common Organization to harm or even punish Mali for its sovereign choices. Moreover, what credence can be given to a report that desperately seeks to make people believe that the Malian Defence and Security Forces are targeting the very civilians they are protecting in accordance with their mandate? Furthermore, the report includes images apparently obtained from satellites without the knowledge of national authorities — a classic case of espionage. We must show humility and understand that nobody loves Mali more than the Malians, and nobody loves the Malians more than the Malian authorities.

The Government is in fact not alone in rejecting the fictitious conclusions of that report. A number of residents of Moura, including women, have travelled to Bamako to disprove the contents of the report. The testimonies of the inhabitants of Moura, documented and widely available, clearly disprove the unfounded accusations contained in the report and, what is more, they denounce the methods employed by the investigators. Those residents have testified that the Malian forces targeted terrorists only.

In the same vein, and as soon as the first allegations were made in April 2022 by certain States and human

rights organizations, the President of the Tabital Pulaaku association categorically rejected accusations that were levelled against the Malian Defence and Security Forces, in particular the accusations of rape of women. In addition, the President of the Malian Human Rights Association strongly denounced the methodology and conclusions of the inquiry. Those firm, freely expressed positions deserve to be noted, as they come from organizations and individuals who lived through the events or received credible, verifiable information about them.

We reiterate our firm opposition to any attempt to instrumentalize or politicize the issue of human rights and to address this problem in a lopsided manner. In that regard, it is paradoxical to note how quickly the fact-finding mission was set up, while, at the same time, Mali had lodged its complaint with the Security Council, on 15 August 2022, about France's serious acts of aggression against Mali's sovereignty and territorial integrity for the purposes of destabilization.

Regarding the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process, despite the unilateral decision of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Plateforme to suspend their participation in the Agreement's follow-up mechanisms, I hereby reaffirm the Government's commitment to continuing its effective and judicious implementation, in particular through the Mouvements de l'inclusivité. We remain open to dialogue with our brothers in the signatory movements — all of them — as demonstrated by the Minister of Reconciliation's visit to Kidal on 12 May.

My main observation concerns MINUSMA. At a time when the members of the Security Council have begun the negotiations to renew MINUSMA's mandate, I would like to briefly review the evolution of the Mission from its establishment to the present day.

First, allow me to pay tribute to all the civilian and military victims who have fallen in Mali, including our recently fallen brothers from Burkina Faso, for whom we express our deepest sympathy.

The rationale behind the establishment of MINUSMA in 2013 included supporting the Malian authorities in stabilizing the situation in Mali's northern regions, averting threats and actively taking steps to prevent the return of armed elements to those areas, particularly through the re-establishment of State authority throughout the country. After several years

of deployment of MINUSMA forces on the ground, the security situation, which had once been a matter of concern in the north of the country, has gradually deteriorated in other regions of Mali, in particular the centre. For the Government of Mali, the facts are clear: MINUSMA has not achieved its core objective.

Today the people of Mali are happy to see the Malian Defence and Security Forces carrying out missions with complete autonomy to ensure the security of people and goods; combat crime, organized crime, and human and drug trafficking; escort transport vehicles; ensure security at weekly markets in sensitive locations; and secure borders through strengthening the security and defence toolkit, in line with the vision of His Excellency Colonel Assimi Goïta, President of the Transition and Head of State.

Mali is fully aware that the fight against terrorism is not part of the doctrine of peacekeeping operations, but we have always called for a change in MINUSMA's posture to enable it to carry out its mandate properly and strengthen its support to the Government's efforts. Mali has always cooperated with the United Nations in good faith. An example of that constructive approach was our full engagement with the Secretariat in the context of the internal review of MINUSMA in order to strengthen its operational capabilities with a view to supporting Mali's stabilization efforts.

I regret to reiterate today that the options proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on the internal review of MINUSMA do not respond to the concerns and expectations repeatedly expressed by the Government and people of Mali. We have no choice but to come to the objective conclusion that, given the track record of MINUSMA's ten-year-long presence, the Mission has failed to provide adequate responses to the security situation in Mali, and that the future outlook

of its operations does not meet the security needs of the Malian people. Neither the Secretary-General's proposals, nor — and even less so — the draft resolution currently being negotiated by the members of the Council provide an appropriate response to Malians' expectations. The content of this draft resolution is so hostile to Mali that it justifies France's recusal as a penholder.

Beyond security, which we are now ensuring through our own resources, we legitimately expected MINUSMA to be a mission that would assist and support the Government's efforts. Unfortunately, MINUSMA seems to have become part of the problem, fuelling inter-community tensions exacerbated by extremely serious allegations that are highly detrimental to peace, reconciliation and national cohesion. The situation is creating a feeling of mistrust among the Malian population towards MINUSMA and causing a crisis of confidence between the Malian authorities and MINUSMA.

In view of all of the aforementioned, the Government of Mali calls for the immediate withdrawal of MINUSMA. However, the Government is willing to cooperate with the United Nations in that regard.

In conclusion, I would like to express the gratitude of the Government and people of Mali to all our partners, both bilateral and multilateral, who are helping us to shore up the efforts involved in rebuilding Mali. The Government of Mali remains ready to cooperate with partners who respect its sovereignty, its strategic choices and the interests of the Malian people. Faithful to our tradition of hospitality, the *diatiguiya*, Mali remains, of course, open to all countries and peoples of the world.

The meeting rose at noon.