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Provisional

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Agenda

Peace and security in Africa

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace and security in Africa

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations; His Excellency Mr. Gilberto da Piedade Veríssimo, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States; His Excellency Mr. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States; and Mr. Jose Mba Abeso, Executive Secretary, Gulf of Guinea Commission.

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

I give the floor to Ms. Pobee.

Ms. Pobee: I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Since my previous briefing to the Council on this subject in November 2022 (see S/PV.9198), instances of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea have continued to steadily decline. That decrease, which began in April 2021, is due to the significant efforts of national authorities, who bear the primary responsibility for countering piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region, and the support of regional and international partners. Regular naval patrols by Gulf of Guinea coastal States and the systematic deployment of naval assets by international partners have together continued to serve as an effective deterrent against the actions of criminal groups.

Another key factor that has contributed to that positive trend is the ongoing operationalization of the interregional maritime security mechanism, the Yaoundé Architecture, which was established following the signing of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in 2013. We welcome the steady progress made by the Gulf of Guinea States and subregional organizations, notably the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African

States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, with the active support of international partners, towards operationalizing key pillars of the Architecture over the past 10 years. Specifically, four out of the five Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres have been successfully activated. They comprise all three planned Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres in the ECOWAS maritime space, covering zones E, F and G, and one out of the two projected Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres, in zone D, of the ECCAS maritime space.

The operationalization of the Yaoundé Architecture, although not fully completed, has also significantly increased maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea. More specifically, it has resulted in enhanced information-sharing among all the parties concerned, as well as a simplified process for disseminating actionable maritime security-related information with relevant stakeholders, including with the naval assets of international partners deployed to the region. In addition, it has facilitated the efficient use of limited naval assets through the formation of joint naval task groups. That effective pooling of the resources of Gulf of Guinea States has enabled the bridging of national and regional capacity gaps, while ensuring the interoperability of maritime assets.

As we reflect on the laudable achievements and progress made over the past 10 years, we urge increased support to address the several challenges and gaps holding back the full operationalization of the Yaoundé Architecture. They include insufficient staffing across various layers of the interregional maritime security architecture, including at the Interregional Coordination Centre, as well as a lack of appropriate equipment and logistical support across the structures and a lack of predictable and sustainable financing. Rapidly addressing the challenges that hamper the full operationalization of the Yaoundé Architecture is critical to maintaining current gains, as piracy incidents continue to threaten the safety of maritime traffic in the region. Recent figures already suggest that incidents are steadily shifting from the waters of ECOWAS towards the ECCAS maritime domain.

In the light of those developments and in keeping with resolution 2634 (2022), I encourage ECCAS, ECOWAS, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Interregional Coordination Centre, in their central role as custodians of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, to bolster efforts towards the review of the status of

its operationalization. The review will be essential for galvanizing the further support and inputs needed to accelerate the process. In that regard, we take note that the upcoming fourth annual meeting of senior officials of the Interregional Coordination Centre, to be held in Abuja, with the participation of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, ECOWAS and ECCAS, will include a discussion on the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé process and the way forward.

The United Nations system is committed to providing the necessary political and technical assistance to the Gulf of Guinea States in their efforts to fully operationalize the Yaoundé maritime security architecture. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continues to assist in the implementation of the provisions of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, including through the harmonization of coordination and response mechanisms to maritime insecurity. Technical and logistic support is provided for the conduct of joint patrols in ECOWAS zones E, F and G, in an effort to address challenges associated with the lack of adequate material and other logistical difficulties, which is currently hindering the establishment of the envisioned naval task groups and the conduct of joint patrols.

In line with their respective mandates to enhance regional and subregional partnerships to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security, UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), at the request of the Interregional Coordination Centre, have also developed an interregional project aimed at supporting the Centre to conduct the review of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to assess the status of the operationalization of the Yaoundé Architecture. UNOCA, UNOWAS and UNODC continue to engage and coordinate their efforts with the Group of Seven Plus Plus Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, as well as with ECOWAS, ECCAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, and are committed to further supporting regional initiatives to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct.

In conclusion, I wish to note that any reflection on, and review of, the Yaoundé Code of Conduct must include a focus on three key issues.

The first is the legal framework. The criminalization of acts of piracy and the establishment of universal jurisdiction over such acts under national

law, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, remains necessary to address the threat posed by piracy. It is therefore vital that all signatory parties continue their efforts to update their legal frameworks, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and any other complementary international and regional legal frameworks.

Secondly, there is the importance of addressing the root causes of piracy, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report of November 2022 (S/2022/818). To effectively eliminate the threat posed by piracy and armed robbery at sea, national stakeholders, regional and subregional organizations and international partners should also actively seek to address the underlying social, economic and environmental challenges that underpin the recruitment of individuals into maritime criminal networks. Without traction on that front, the overall progress in curbing that menace will be limited. In that regard, once the review process has been launched it will be important for it to include a focus on prevention. In connection with that, it will first be necessary to consider ways of enhancing more participatory, community-based engagements in the Architecture, and secondly of generating sex-disaggregated data on the impact of maritime crime on women, girls, men and boys in order to better inform policy options and actions.

Thirdly, it cannot be emphasized enough that enhanced coordination between the signatory parties, the Interregional Coordination Centre, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, ECOWAS and ECCAS remains vital. We look to their joint leadership in defining a strategic outlook and road map for the next decade to complete the operationalization of the Yaoundé Architecture. We call on willing partners to provide the requisite support to those regional efforts.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Pobe for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Da Piedade Veríssimo.

Mr. Da Piedade Veríssimo (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for me to address the Council for the second time this June (see S/PV.9338). At the outset, I would like to sincerely thank Ambassador Nusseibeh and the United Arab Emirates, as President of the Security Council for the month of June, for again inviting the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to an important meeting.

The fact that the Council decided to devote today's meeting to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is a clear acknowledgement of the multidimensional significance of the geographic area and the security-related challenges it faces. As an African maritime space in the Atlantic Ocean, the area commonly known as the Gulf of Guinea covers both Central Africa and West Africa. Along the coast of Central Africa, the Gulf of Guinea extends from Angola in the south to Cameroon in the north. It also borders the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe, for a total of seven of the member States of the Economic Community of Central African States.

The Gulf of Guinea stretches over a distance of 3,307 kilometres, with a surface area of approximately 1.225 million square kilometres. It has considerable hydraulic, aviation, mining, trade and tourism potential. It is a source of hydrocarbons for other parts of the world. However, at the same time, the Gulf in Central Africa faces myriad challenges, in particular in relation to issues of delimitation and demarcation, security and monitoring, the protection of marine ecosystems and endangered species, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, climate change and natural and technological disasters and coastal erosion and environmental security.

With respect to security, it is important to recall that above and beyond illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, the region —

Owing to a teleconferencing connectivity failure, there is a 10-second gap in this statement.

On 25 March there was an attack on the *Monjasa Reformer* oil tanker off the coast of the city of Pointe-Noire in the Congo. Overall, 55 maritime security-related incidents were reported in the first six months of 2023 in the Gulf of Guinea's Economic Community of Central African States. However, compared to the period between 2018 and 2020, since 2021 there has been a reduction in instances of piracy and hostage-taking in the Central African region of the Gulf of Guinea. The downward trend can be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that States have ramped up their respective navies, with the presence of international vessels deployed as part of the Coordinated Maritime Presences to counter piracy in jurisdictional waters and on the high seas and, on the other, by greater information-sharing among

States instituted as part of the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Cooperation Forum, established in April 2021.

Since 2009, ECCAS member States have committed to coordinating their efforts to combat security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea maritime space, through the adoption in Kinshasa of a protocol establishing a security strategy for ECCAS member States with vital interests in the Gulf of Guinea. The protocol also established the Maritime Security Regional Coordination Centre for Central Africa, a specialized institution tasked with coordinating the ECCAS maritime strategy and headquartered in Pointe-Noire. In 2013, in view of the indivisible nature of the Gulf of Guinea maritime space, ECCAS decided to formalize its cooperation and coordination with the Economic Community of West African States and the Gulf of Guinea Commission through the Yaoundé Architecture process. That process gave rise to the Interregional Coordination Centre for the implementation of the regional strategy for maritime safety and security in Central and West Africa, which is based in Yaoundé.

Furthermore, as part of its institutional reform, the basic texts of which were adopted in December 2019, ECCAS organized its first maritime conference, which was held in Kinshasa between November 2022 and February 2023. The conference, which assessed the implementation of the 2009 Kinshasa protocol, led to the adoption of a revised protocol on the safety and security strategy for vital interests at sea and in the shared continental waters of ECCAS member States. That is based on six pillars, namely, Community exchange and management of information; Community surveillance of the maritime space of ECCAS member States in the Gulf of Guinea and shared continental waters; the harmonization of action by the States parties at sea and in shared continental waters; the establishment of a sustainable funding mechanism; the acquisition and maintenance of major equipment to guarantee operational capacity; and the institutionalization of the annual maritime conference of the parties.

As much as the revised protocol I mentioned is anchored in the vision of asserting their sovereignty over their space at sea and in shared continental waters, ECCAS member States also express their desire to strengthen their cooperation with bilateral and multilateral partners interested in supporting them in achieving the goals related to the sovereignty

and security of their maritime spaces and shared continental waters.

I cannot conclude without reiterating our organization's thanks to the President of the Council for once again inviting ECCAS to participate in today's important discussions.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Da Piedade Veríssimo for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Touray.

Mr. Touray: The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission welcomes the opportunity to address the members of the Security Council on this important subject.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has evolved considerably over the past 14 years. The number of attacks by pirates increased significantly from 45 in 2010 to 64 in 2011, with the highest number of attacks being recorded in Nigerian waters, according to the International Maritime Organization. The response of the Nigerian Navy resulted in repulsing the threat from Nigerian waters, but the threat remained real in the territorial waters of the neighbouring region. That explains the increase in pirate attacks in the waters of Benin to 20 in 2011. Of course, that caused serious financial problems for Benin, which saw its revenue from important economic activities, such as port operations, drop by 40 per cent.

The response of the country, the region and the international community consisted of several measures, including joint bilateral maritime operations among countries and the adoption of landmark resolutions by the Security Council. The adoption of those resolutions was followed by the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States and the members of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) on Maritime Security and Safety in the Gulf of Guinea, held in Yaoundé in June 2013.

The Yaoundé Summit adopted the following key strategic documents. The first was the Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of Central and West African States on Maritime Safety and Security in Their Common Maritime Domain. The second was the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa. The third document was

the memorandum of understanding between ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GGC on safety and security in the maritime space of Central and West Africa.

The memorandum of understanding signed by the three regional organizations led to the establishment of the Interregional Coordination Centre, to serve as the coordinating body on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Equally, a governing body comprising the President of the ECOWAS Commission, the President of the ECCAS Commission and the Executive Secretary of the GGC was established to improve and guide the activities and operations of the Interregional Coordination Centre.

Substantial progress has been achieved in member countries as well. That includes the adoption of national maritime strategies by a number of countries and the deployment of critical maritime infrastructure in the area. Indeed, the strategic deployment of critical maritime infrastructure has improved maritime situational awareness in the Gulf of Guinea.

At the continental level, the African Union adopted the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy in January 2014, and the Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa in October 2016.

At the level of ECOWAS, the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy was adopted in 2014. The West Africa Regional Maritime Security Centre was established and inaugurated in Abidjan in 2022. A Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) — zone E — was created and inaugurated in March 2015 in Cotonou. Meanwhile, preparations are in progress for the inauguration of the MMCC zone F in Accra, Ghana, and the MMCC zone G in Praia for 2023. The ECCAS maritime security architecture established the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa in Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo, as well as another zone D in Douala, Republic of Cameroon, and zone A in Luanda.

The establishment of maritime information-sharing networks between ECOWAS and ECCAS has improved information sharing on maritime situational awareness, the conduct and planning of joint maritime operations and exercises with various Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres and national maritime operational centres. That improved information-sharing within our region has led to various arrests and the successful prosecution of pirates who have attacked vessels, including those who attacked the Chinese

fishing vessel *Hailufeng 11* in the Ivorian exclusive economic zone. Similarly, pirates were arrested and prosecuted in July 2021 in Togo. The Global Maritime Crime Programme facilitated the Supplementary Act on the Conditions of Transfer of Persons Suspected of Having Committed Acts of Piracy and their Associated Property and/or Evidence, adopted in Accra in July 2022, for prosecutions among member States. Other coordinated operational activities included a Nigerian naval ship that arrested pirates who attacked a Panamanian oil tanker in the waters of Sao Tome and Principe in coordination with various outfits.

It is important to point out that the international community supported operations and exercises in the region, including the annual maritime exercise led by the United States and the Grand African NEMO exercise led by France. The Safe Domain I operation coordinated by ECOWAS in MMCC zone E, as well as operations in MMCC zone F, were also critical to increasing safety in Gulf of Guinea waterways. Those various initiatives have led to an improved maritime-security situation in the Gulf of Guinea, with a continuing decrease in piracy and armed attacks in the area. According to the International Maritime Bureau, actual and attempted piracy and sea robbery incidents declined from 31 in 2015 to 18 in 2021 and 15 in 2022. In 2023, incidents of piracy and armed attacks have further declined to five incidents in the first quarter of 2023. We would therefore like to see the international community continuing to invest in our region with a view to improving people's economic and social conditions.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Architecture, it will be important to ensure that the governing body of the Interregional Coordination Centre conducts an extensive review of the process's planning and organization. In order to move forward, it will also be important to review the Yaoundé Code of Conduct with a view to transforming it into a legally binding framework 10 years after the 2013 Summit, as provided for in the text. We also need a common maritime strategy for our common maritime domain. It is therefore equally important to critically appraise our institutional responses and challenges. ECOWAS recommends that stakeholders such as the Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, co-chaired by Côte d'Ivoire and Germany, should be involved in hosting the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Architecture. It is equally important to review the activities and operations of

the Interregional Coordination Centre over the next decade in order to ensure that it is provided with the requisite staff and operational means, including financial autonomy.

Let me conclude by reiterating ECOWAS's commitment to working with various partners and addressing the various security threats in the region. We pledge to increase our collaboration and coordination with the various stakeholders involved in ensuring maritime security.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Touray for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Abeso.

Mr. Abeso: On behalf of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, I would like to express our appreciation for the invitation to address the Security Council at this briefing on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

The challenge of ensuring safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea continues to impede important economic activities in the region related to transportation, resource exploration and exploitation and the promotion of the prosperity and well-being of the region and its people. As recently as 25 March, a product tanker was hijacked 140 nautical miles west-south-west of Pointe Noire in the Republic of the Congo, and its six crew members were kidnapped. The incident is a clear illustration of the gap in the efforts that have been made so far in securing the Gulf. The issue of piracy appears to be a recurring decimal in the Gulf, despite Member States' efforts to reduce the threat through a number of mechanisms, including the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, which was held on 25 June 2013 with the encouragement of resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012) of 29 February 2012. The Yaoundé Summit adopted the Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa, in addition to other important documents.

In line with the decisions of the Summit, the Interregional Coordination Centre was established in Yaoundé on 11 September 2014 to coordinate all operations related to the suppression of piracy and other criminal activities in the Gulf of Guinea. The purpose of the Centre, commonly referred to as the Yaoundé

Architecture, was intended to serve as a coordination centre for West and Central Africa to work in close collaboration with other regional mechanisms. The Yaoundé Architecture has been reasonably effective, as can be seen in the decrease in criminal activities at sea in recent years, as well as the reports of the Piracy Reporting Centre of the International Maritime Bureau. In the first quarter of 2023, for example, only five incidents were reported, compared to eight incidents in 2022, and 16 in 2021. The concerted efforts of the countries of the region, supported by international partners, have resulted in a more coordinated and effective response to criminal activities at sea.

In addition, cooperation and collaboration among the countries of the region, through information-sharing, joint maritime operations, coordinated naval exercises and capacity-building efforts and technical cooperation and assistance programmes, have strengthened increased presence and response capabilities in the Gulf of Guinea, and those efforts continue to yield significant results, as experienced in the case of *Heroic Idun*, when a vessel attempting to illegally load crude oil in the Nigerian territorial waters was detained in Equatorial Guinea at the request of the Nigerian authorities.

The countries of the Gulf of Guinea region continue to strengthen their legal frameworks and legislation related to maritime security, including through the adoption and implementation of laws that criminalize piracy and armed robbery at sea, as well as the prosecution and punishment of offenders. For example, Nigeria enacted the Suppression of Piracy and other Maritime Offences Act 2019 to prosecute and punish apprehended offenders. The Gulf of Guinea Commission is making efforts to ensure that other Member States legislate similar acts so that offenders can be arrested and prosecuted — either in the State in which the offence was committed or in a neighbouring State — thereby ensuring consistency and enabling efficient cross-border law enforcement.

The countries of the region are continuing efforts to establish a combined maritime task force in the Gulf of Guinea region, as encouraged by the African Union and the Security Council. On 22 May, on the margins of the Presidential Fleet Review, in Lagos, Nigeria, 11 countries of the Gulf of Guinea signed the concept of operations for the establishment of the combined maritime task force in Gulf of Guinea region. It is my hope that the remaining countries will sign this important document for the effective operationalization

of the Combined Maritime Task Force. The Gulf of Guinea Commission would like to avail itself of this opportunity to request the Security Council to kindly consider and endorse and mobilize international support for the combined maritime task force in the Gulf of Guinea.

On its own part and in line with the mandate it received during the third Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held in Accra, Ghana, on 25 April, the Executive Secretariat of the Gulf of Guinea Commission remains seized with the promotion and strengthening of measures regarding expansion of the membership of the Commission for the purpose of bringing the broadest base of stakeholders in the Gulf of Guinea under one maritime safety and security regime.

In the light of that, please allow me to turn our attention to the challenges in the Gulf of Guinea. For example, in spite of its many achievements, there are a number of challenges still that continue to impede the full implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. One of the key challenges is its limited implementation by Member States. Some countries have been slow to adopt and incorporate the Code's provisions into their national legislation. That hampers effective enforcement and coordination among nations in combating maritime crimes. Not all countries have ratified the Code, and some that have ratified it have not fully implemented its provisions. That hampers greatly the effectiveness of the agreement in achieving its objectives.

The Interregional Coordination Centre, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, is also hampered by lack of resources, funding, equipment and personnel, which poses a significant gap in the implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. There is the need for support in funding the Interregional Coordination Centre. It is therefore important that mobilization of resources be prioritized to ensure the effective operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre. In order to review progress and challenges of the ICC, the regional organizations ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Gulf of Guinea Commission will be organizing the fourth Annual Meeting of the Heads of Institution of the Interregional Coordination Centre in the third quarter of 2023.

The main objective of the meeting is to review the operations of the Interregional Coordination Centre,

the progress and challenges in the implementation of programmes designed within the framework of the Yaoundé Process and the funding of the activities of the Interregional Coordination Centre.

While addressing the problem confronting the maritime domain, it is important to engage with non-State actors, such as criminal networks and armed groups. Maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea region are often linked to underlying socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty, unemployment and lack of alternative livelihood opportunities. Addressing these socioeconomic factors is essential for long-term solutions and the reduction of piracy and armed robbery at sea.

In addressing these challenges and gaps, a concerted effort from Member States, regional organizations and international partners is required. Such measures as strengthening implementation, resource allocation, capacity-building, information-sharing and regional cooperation are key areas that need attention in order to enhance the effectiveness of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in combating maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea.

The countries of the Gulf of Guinea region should be encouraged to ratify the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and fully implement its provisions, while regional and international stakeholders should engage in efforts to promote the importance of the Code and provide assistance to countries to overcome any barriers to its ratification and implementation. This will greatly facilitate progress and strengthen the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct in combating piracy, armed robbery against ships and illicit maritime activities in the Gulf of Guinea,

In addition, providing training programmes, technical assistance and resources for naval forces, coast guards and law-enforcement agencies, and strengthening their capabilities to undertake routine patrols and investigations and respond to incidents are other areas where the Gulf of Guinea countries could benefit from support to enhance their capacity to address maritime crimes. Regular evaluation and review of the Code's provisions and strategies are essential to adapting to emerging threats. Lessons learned from previous incidents should inform updates to the Code and the development of new measures to counter evolving maritime crime trends.

In the light of the challenges elaborated heretofore, the Gulf of Guinea Commission will continue to support its Member States by encouraging them to cooperate and collaborate on issues of maritime security. From time to time, the Gulf of Guinea Commission will be organizing awareness-raising workshops and outreach activities on topical issues relating to maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Abeso for his briefing.

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

Ms. Opong-Ntiri (Ghana): I thank the United Arab Emirates for convening today's briefing on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Ghana welcomes the briefings by Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobee of the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations; His Excellency Mr. Gilberto da Piedade Veríssimo, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States; His Excellency Mr. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States; and His Excellency Mr. Jose Mba Abeso, Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, and, as we celebrate this milestone, we acknowledge the significant progress made by the region in tackling piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. The adoption of resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012) laid the foundation for the adoption of the regional mechanism in 2013.

While welcoming the decline in maritime insecurity in the region in recent times, we note that that did not happen by chance. This positive development can be attributed to a number of factors, including strong concerted action in strengthening cooperation among stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels, increased naval presence and intelligence-sharing, and strengthened judicial processes that have led to the prosecution and conviction of pirates. These efforts need to be sustained.

Despite the modest gains made, we note that the region is not yet out of the woods, as we continue to witness vestiges of piracy, armed robbery and illegal fishing in the region, all of which threatens the maritime space. Other aggravating factors, including

climate change and environmental degradation, are also of concern. The decade-long existence of the regional mechanism provides us with an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved so far and what needs to be done now and in future to ensure the mechanism's effectiveness.

It is against that backdrop that Ghana believes the following actions need to be taken to help win the fight against the menace. First, we need to prioritize the implementation of regional instruments designed to tackle maritime insecurity; secondly, we need to take on the root causes of piracy and armed robbery at sea; thirdly, a whole-of-society approach that includes the private sector, local communities and civil society organization participation should be adopted; and fourthly, we need to leverage partnerships.

On the issue of regional mechanisms, it is important for States Members of the United Nations to renew their commitment to implementing the Yaoundé Code of Conduct since it is at the heart of dealing with the menace in a sustainable manner. However, we note the operational, logistical, funding, technical and capacity-building gaps hampering its implementation, and we welcome efforts to address them. To help fight the menace, we also need to encourage Member States that have not yet enacted legislation that criminalizes piracy to the full extent set out in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to do so.

With regard to the root causes, these can be effectively addressed if we prioritize non-security investments aimed at building resilience and resolving increasing levels of poverty, high unemployment, especially among the region's youth, and other aggravating factors, such as climate change and the disproportionate impact of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the region. We should also embrace a multidimensional and whole-of-society approach, integrate gender perspectives into maritime security strategies and recognize the intervening role of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in providing self-sustaining support in such areas as, inter alia, building entrepreneurial skills and agricultural self-employment. At the national level, investing in research, capacity-building, strengthened inter-agency collaboration and media reportage on maritime-security issues are all useful tools that could help to comprehensively deal with the issue.

On partnerships, we share the view that in addition to regional mechanisms, we should leverage the tools available in the multilateral system and strengthen cooperation under such continental initiatives as the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy with critical agencies in the United Nations family, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Maritime Organization and the Office of Counter-Terrorism. Enhanced cooperation should also include continued engagements with such key stakeholders as the European Union, the Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, and the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and its Shared Awareness and Deconfliction group.

Lastly, we also need to take a cue from the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General issued on 1 November 2022, which called for the need

“to undertake a comprehensive review of the status of implementation of the Yaoundé Architecture to identify challenges, define the most optimal use of available resources, and outline a strategic vision for the next decade” (*S/2022/818, para. 57*).

While encouraging countries of the region to demonstrate strong political will and commitment in carrying out that recommendation in the report, it is important for the international community, including the Security Council, to lend its support to the region in carrying out that very important review to help ensure the mechanism's effectiveness.

As Council members may recall, Ghana and Norway, in 2022, facilitated the adoption of resolution 2634 (2022) to assist Member States in dealing with the menace. Ghana appreciates the unity demonstrated by the Council on this thematic issue then and hopes it will be sustained. We also commend the Peacebuilding Commission for focusing on the issue during its last meeting and for its continuous support of regional efforts, including its forward-looking recommendations contained in its advisory note provided to the Council in November 2022.

In conclusion, I wish to assure Council members of Ghana's commitment to the implementation of the regional instrument and encourage others to do the same while recognizing that deeper cooperation with and among international partners and Member States is key in the fight against the menace.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee, His Excellency Mr. Da Piedade Verissimo, His Excellency Mr. Touray and Executive Secretary Abeso for their insightful briefings.

It has been 10 years this month since the signing of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and just over a year since the Security Council adopted resolution 2634 (2022). Japan appreciates the initiative by the presidency along with Ghana to convene this timely meeting.

As a maritime nation, Japan places great importance on promoting free, open and stable seas upheld by a maritime order based on the rule of law.

We are pleased to see that acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea have continued to decline in the Gulf of Guinea, down to just a handful of incidents in the first quarter of this year. That success is due to strengthened national efforts and to increased regional cooperation, naval patrols and piracy convictions. Now that progress must be sustained.

Today Japan wishes to highlight the importance of continued national ownership and partnerships and the need to respond not just to the maritime insecurity but also its root causes.

The coastal States should maintain ownership in their efforts to criminalize acts of piracy and other forms of maritime crime in their respective national laws, to establish prosecution procedures and to improve enforcement capabilities. All efforts to tackle piracy and armed robbery must comply with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which is the legal framework within which all activities in the ocean and seas are carried out.

Continued partnerships are also key. Regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, have provided support, as have INTERPOL and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime through their initiatives such as a piracy database and the Global Maritime Crime Programme. Further assistance and cooperation among those and other stakeholders, including international financial institutions, the private maritime sector and the whole United Nations system, will help the region strengthen and fully operationalize the Yaoundé Architecture. Japan, for its part, has been providing regional countries with maritime-law-enforcement-

related equipment, counter-piracy capacity-building and maritime-economy training programmes, including through support for peacekeeping training centres in Ghana and Nigeria. Japan will continue to be the region's reliable partner.

As noted in the Secretary-General's report last year (S/2022/818), the successes of law enforcement and naval patrols may have driven criminal groups to invest in other forms of maritime criminality. In the long term, maritime crime can be effectively addressed only by tackling its root causes, including poverty; unemployment, especially for young people; and a lack of access to basic public services.

The adverse effects of climate change are also exacerbating the insecurity. In that regard, it is important to assist efforts for economic development that would benefit the vulnerable, notably through human resource development. Furthermore, democratic and responsive governance that reflects the voices of various stakeholders, including women and youth, together with resilient and accountable institutions based on the rule of law, will be key.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Japan's commitment, as a member of the Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, to continue to cooperate with its colleagues, the coastal States and other stakeholders to further improve and strengthen maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Mr. Moretti (Brazil): I thank our guests for their insightful and informative briefings.

Brazil has long paid close attention to the international security implications of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. As a founding member of the zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZPCSA), it is our priority to strengthen the ongoing counter-piracy efforts and to prevent the spread of piracy to other regions. In the most recent ministerial meeting of ZPCSA, held in April, its members reaffirmed their determination to prevent and eliminate piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, in accordance with international law.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is one of the areas where positive results have been achieved in Africa in recent years. That is, first and foremost, an accomplishment by the States directly concerned, as they have the leadership and bear primary responsibility for countering piracy and armed robbery in the region.

In supporting their efforts, regional cooperation and naval capacity-building — particularly in the context of the Yaoundé Architecture — remain key.

Brazil welcomes and encourages the cooperation of the States in the region and relevant African organizations with United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

In spite of the positive achievements and the reduction of maritime crime in recent years, there must be no room for complacency. As we approach the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Architecture, the recent uptick in maritime crime shows that the joint efforts by States and organizations must continue. Otherwise, hard-won gains risk being reversed.

There is a pressing need to strengthen the maritime-security-enforcement capabilities of the States in the region. That should include cooperation and more effective accountability under national law for acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Brazil welcomes the adoption by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Heads of State and Government of a revised protocol relating to the strategy for the safety and security of vital interests at sea and in continental waters of ECCAS member States. The protocol relating to the strategy for the development of the sustainable blue economy in Central Africa is also a very significant step.

As we have repeatedly pointed out, there is a direct relation between peace and development. That means that addressing the root causes of piracy and maritime crime, mainly through income generation, is as essential as improving security. At the same time, addressing piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea prevents disruptions to shipping, trade and transportation and avoids the loss of much-needed Government revenue.

As a member of the Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea and of ZPCSA, Brazil has supported countries in the region through cooperation and joint naval operations, such as Operation Guinex, Obangame Express and Grand African NEMO. In that regard, Brazil has already started preparations for

Operation Guinex III, due to take place next August and September. It is aimed at strengthening the partnership between the Brazilian navy and the navies and coastguards of Gulf of Guinea countries. The region and the world can continue to count on Brazil to address the challenges posed by illicit activities, as well as some of their root causes.

Mr. Olmedo (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to join others in thanking all the briefers for their presentations today. France also welcomed the formal adoption on Monday of the historic Agreement on biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (A/CONF.232/2023/4), designed to protect marine resources and biodiversity on the high seas.

We welcome the significant decrease in acts of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's most recent report on this issue (S/2022/818). France calls for continuing and strengthening the efforts that contributed to that outcome. I am referring primarily to the actions taken by countries in the region through both security and legal and judicial measures to criminalize acts of piracy, conduct investigations and facilitate prosecutions. Cooperation frameworks have also been put in place, foremost among them the Yaoundé Architecture, which is marking its tenth anniversary, and which we should continue to operationalize. The Security Council should remain engaged in that regard and continue to monitor maritime security issues in the Gulf of Guinea closely. Recent incidents, including, as one of our briefers mentioned, the attack on an oil tanker on 25 March off the coast of the city of Pointe-Noire in the Congo, have reminded us that the threats are constantly evolving. We should also remain vigilant with respect to any links between organized crime and terrorism. That issue is particularly urgent at a time when countries on the coast are under increasing security and humanitarian pressure from terrorist groups in the Sahel.

The international community should support capacity-building in the countries of the region and the efforts of the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the Yaoundé Architecture, the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Accra initiative. Some of those regional initiatives should be provided with sustainable funding, including through compulsory contributions to the United Nations.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report and by today's briefers, the European Union is the only partner deploying a continuous maritime presence in support of the States of the Gulf of Guinea, thanks in particular to the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept, an effort in which France is proud to participate. France will pursue its commitment alongside the responsible States that have chosen to combat terrorism and to respect stability and coexistence among communities.

Finally, there is a clear link between our discussion today and our exchanges last week on climate and security (see S/PV.9345). The Secretary-General's report highlights the links between piracy, climate change and illegal fishing. We should therefore take a broad approach in responding to this issue, including by addressing matters of governance, development, support for local communities and ecosystem preservation.

Mrs. Ngyema Ndong (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Martha Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, for her informative briefing on the state of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea. I also thank Mr. Gilberto da Piedade Verissimo, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and Mr. Omar Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for their briefings on the regional challenges and issues linked to maritime piracy. I followed the briefing by Mr. Jose Mba Abeso, Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, with great interest.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa. We therefore welcome the opportunity that the United Arab Emirates has given us today to examine the state of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. As we pointed out last year (see S/PV.9198), the Yaoundé Architecture that resulted from the signing of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in 2013 has enabled real progress over the past 10 years and produced concrete outcomes, particularly in terms of cooperation on maritime security. The States of the Gulf of Guinea are now able to ensure better coordination in the surveillance of maritime waters. There has also been a significant increase in naval patrols and a clear improvement in information-sharing.

That progress has led to a decrease in acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region. Indeed, the Gulf of Guinea, once considered the epicentre of global maritime piracy, has made considerable progress in countering it. Reports from the International Maritime Bureau have shown a downward trend in 2022 and the first quarter of 2023 in acts of maritime piracy worldwide and in the Gulf of Guinea region in particular. Only five incidents were reported between January and March, compared with eight in the same period in 2022 and 16 in 2021.

The support of our international partners is commendable, and the support provided by the international community for the Yaoundé Architecture and the States of the region is significant, particularly in the form of the joint patrols conducted by the coastal States and international partners, which have had a deterrent effect. Initiatives of the European Union, such as the Gulf of Guinea Interregional Network, Yaris and Support Programme to the Maritime Security Strategy in Central Africa have added undeniable value on the ground.

Despite that significant progress, the risks associated with maritime piracy remain and their impact on the way of life of coastal populations continues to grow, especially since they frequently have to adapt to the impact that the increase in violent extremism, terrorism and the adverse effects of climate change has on the way local communities earn their livelihoods. In recent years, piracy activities were limited to attacks on oil tankers and the seizure of cargoes. However, today we are seeing the focus of those criminal activities shift to kidnappings for ransom, which are more lucrative. Gabon, which for a long time was relatively unscathed, has for some time now been the victim of acts of piracy involving hostage-taking, sometimes with fatal results. On 2 May a ship was attacked by pirates less than eight kilometres off the coast of Gabon. Fortunately, the vessel was rescued by Gabonese army patrol boats. A similar incident occurred on 25 March off the coast of the Congo, as the President of the ECCAS Commission mentioned. Those incidents call for extreme caution.

Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea is a continuing threat that deserves the full vigilance of the Security Council and the entire international community. If we are to maintain the gains of the past 10 years, we must strengthen our efforts, with a focus on strengthening the technical and material capacities of the ECCAS and ECOWAS States. The

two regions have very limited operational capacity at sea, with coastguards and national navies that are often underequipped. In addition, there are also difficulties concerning the funding of the regional architecture and the slow pace of national reform.

Beyond the security dimension, the fight against piracy must also be accompanied by socioeconomic development measures. Most of our efforts so far have been focused on security strategies, controlling maritime space and reducing insecurity at sea. Our response can be effective and deliver the desired outcomes only if we also tackle the root causes, which include poverty, social inequality, extremism, youth unemployment, inflation and the effects of the climate crisis on the income of coastal populations. The precariousness of local communities is a breeding ground for the development of mafia networks and the recruitment of young people. In that regard, the support provided to the States of the region should include helping them find solutions to the root causes of maritime insecurity, with a view to providing a comprehensive and sustainable response.

Holding the perpetrators of acts of piracy to account and prosecuting them is another important aspect of the fight against this problem. We must therefore help States to acquire the necessary legal tools and promote the harmonization of such legal frameworks at the regional level. As a State party to the Yaoundé process, Gabon has adopted the recommendations of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct. To do that, we established a legal framework tailored to the local situation and set up Action de l'état en mer, or State Action at Sea, a structural and organic platform, as well as improving our ongoing surveillance of the maritime domain. Moreover, to better counter illicit activities at sea, my country now has an arsenal of legal texts in line with international conventions, aimed at regulating the coordination and distribution of tasks among all departments involved in maritime safety. On 30 June 2020, Gabon adopted Act N006/202, criminalizing acts of piracy in our criminal code. At the operational level, Gabon has an internal platform that is connected to the entire network of Gulf of Guinea maritime operations centres and strategic partners. That tool, equipped with surveillance sensors, enables us to monitor activities at sea in real time.

While regional counter-piracy cooperation faces many obstacles, Gabon continues to believe firmly in the relevance of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and the African Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and

Development in Africa, the Lomé Charter. We welcome the major role played by the African Union and regional organizations, such as ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, in resolving and preventing piracy and other maritime crimes. Regardless of structural or operational difficulties, the local navies of the States of the Gulf of Guinea are ready to play their full role in the fight against maritime piracy. They should not be relegated to a secondary role, because they are part of the solution. They should be properly equipped, trained and supported by the international community, within a well-defined framework of sovereignty and territorial integrity. For its part, together with the countries and partners of the region, Gabon will remain committed to building on the gains made and implementing the recommendations of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct.

Mr. Eckersley (United Kingdom): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General and our three eminent briefers for their participation and very helpful contributions to the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct Concerning the Prevention and Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Illegal Maritime Activities in West and Central Africa. I also thank Ghana for its initiative.

Piracy and armed robbery have long been a threat to regional security in the Gulf of Guinea and have had a real human cost, from their disruption of trade to the use of kidnapping for ransom. We welcome the focus of our African partners on the Council on tackling that very real problem. We would like to make four brief points.

The first is that the international efforts are having a positive impact. We are pleased to note that there has been a continued decline in incidents of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea that is largely thanks to the strength of regional cooperation in tackling the issue. We are also proud of our own collaboration with partners to promote security and stability, following on from our presidency of the Group of Seven, including the visit by *HMS Trent* last year to deter attacks on maritime trade.

The second is that as we have heard, the Yaoundé Code of Conduct has provided a crucial framework that underpins that increased regional cooperation. We would urge its signatory States and relevant regional bodies, all represented here today, to continue to enhance their collaboration.

Thirdly, it is of course vital that any efforts to tackle piracy and armed robbery comply with the

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which is the legal framework within which all activities in the ocean and seas are carried out. In that context, I should add that it is unfortunate that the Peacebuilding Commission was not able to reach consensus on its written advice for today's meeting.

The final point is the most important. As the representative of Gabon just said, the drivers of piracy remain complex and multifaceted. We encourage a continued focus on the impact of poverty, youth unemployment and environmental degradation in creating the conditions for that criminal activity. Engagement is needed at all levels, including community-based responses, and the United Kingdom will continue to work closely with partners in support of a coherent and integrated approach to tackling insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I too welcome and thank all the briefers for their insights today. As we mark the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct Concerning the Prevention and Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Illegal Maritime Activities in West and Central Africa, Albania welcomes the discussion on this important issue and the need to reflect on the gains achieved so far and the challenges ahead. The adoption of resolution 2634 (2022) was a significant step forward, reaffirming our commitment to safeguarding the maritime domain and promoting regional stability.

Albania commends the actions taken by the Gulf of Guinea countries and international partners in the past decade, and the advancement of interregional cooperation between the Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic Community of West African States and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Those combined efforts have led to a steady decline in incidents. The Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2022/818) highlighted that positive trend. We must seize this opportunity to consolidate the gains made by enhancing regional cooperation, strengthening maritime security and promoting the rule of law.

The countries of the Gulf of Guinea should continue their efforts to combat piracy and maritime crime. That requires a holistic approach addressing their root causes, including the adverse effects of climate change, the lack of employment opportunities for young people and deficits in governance, while engaging all actors, particularly local communities and civil

society. The Yaoundé Architecture, led and owned by the States of the region, has been effective in tackling maritime insecurity, but those States must provide further strategic guidance through regional structures, strengthen cooperation to disrupt and dismantle criminal networks, improve intelligence-sharing and leverage the private sector.

Finally, Albania emphasizes the need for maritime security efforts to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides a comprehensive framework for establishing peace, good order and the security of coastal States. We remain resolute in our commitment to that cause with a view to strengthening maritime security, fostering regional stability and promoting the prosperity of the region.

Ms. Zabolotskaya (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobeë, Mr. Veríssimo, the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Mr. Touray, the President of the Economic Community of West African States, and Mr. Abeso, the Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, for briefing us on the maritime security situation in the Gulf of Guinea.

Today's meeting clearly shows that as we focus on new and emerging threats and challenges we must not lose sight of old issues such as piracy and armed robbery at sea. These twenty-first century freebooters are well organized and well equipped. Their actions are audacious and their tactics sophisticated. In the Gulf of Guinea, they attack ships mainly in order to take hostages for ransom. That poses a serious threat to the lives and health of seafarers and affects the safety of maritime navigation, international trade and the economic prosperity of coastal States. In general, piracy in the region increasingly resembles a well-established criminal business.

The attacks on ships in the Gulf of Guinea have specific features. The majority of them take place close to shore, often in the territorial waters of coastal States. In those cases, that is not piracy, which by definition can take place only on the high seas, but armed robbery at sea. Using the correct legal designation helps to determine the most effective response. Where preventing and countering armed robbery at sea is concerned, the coastal States and regional associations should play the leading role. We welcome corresponding efforts and initiatives, including those aimed at establishing

mechanisms for effective coordination. The Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum, established in 2021, which serves as an informal platform for expert coordination in countering piracy on the high seas, is especially significant in that regard.

Turning to the role of the international community, it should focus on providing assistance to coastal States in capacity-building for coastguard services to improve their technical equipment and help organize joint patrols and the regular exchange of operative data. Such assistance should be provided at the request of interested States and take into account their national approaches, priorities and specific features. We believe that the United Nations can help coordinate the relevant efforts and facilitate the mobilization of the necessary financial resources. Our country is increasing its contribution to countering piracy and armed robbery at sea off the west coast of Africa. Russia's annual voluntary contribution to the Global Maritime Crime Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime provides technical assistance to States in the region, including Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sao Tome and Principe, focusing on capacity-building for national maritime security structures. Given our active assistance to States in the region, we would be interested in contributing to the activities of the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and hope to receive an invitation from the Nigerian chairpersonship. We stand ready to share our extensive experience gained in the field of maritime security.

It is important to bear in mind that countering piracy and ensuring the safety of navigation in the Gulf of Guinea is possible only through the coordinated efforts of the entire international community, working together. We are focused on seeking the most effective solutions, including within the Security Council. Given that piracy and armed robbery at sea are often linked to other forms of criminal activity, we continue to advocate the establishment of a specialized structure under the auspices of the United Nations to coordinate efforts to tackle the entire spectrum of issues related to maritime crime.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): We welcome today's discussion, particularly since this year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Yaoundé Architecture, and I thank Ghana for its initiative. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General and the other briefers for their valuable insights and important briefings.

Malta commends the ongoing work of the coastal States of the Gulf of Guinea, as well as the African Union (AU), in taking concrete steps to address the issues of piracy, other organized crime and maritime security in the region. In that regard, we would like to remind the Council of the AU Peace and Security Council's communiqué of 19 December 2022 on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. That ambition must be maintained and strengthened as we enter the second decade of that cooperation. We must build on lessons learned and on the analysis of current weaknesses. In that regard, a comprehensive review of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct Concerning the Prevention and Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Illegal Maritime Activities in West and Central Africa should be led regionally by the Gulf of Guinea States and regional organizations and structures, with the involvement of international partners and other relevant stakeholders such as regional think tanks, civil-society groups and the private sector. Enhanced coordination is required. The exchange of information and shared strategies are essential to helping coastal States protect their national waters.

The Yaoundé Architecture should also be underpinned by sustainable funding. That includes financing from the States and structures of the region, as well as international partners, sufficient to supporting the Architecture's full operationalization.

The Gulf of Guinea countries should also strengthen their efforts to introduce robust legal frameworks to prosecute the perpetrators of piracy, armed robbery, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and other crimes that damage maritime security in the region. Without an effective legal framework, there can be no deterrence for the crimes committed. In that regard, we strongly commend the efforts of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and welcome the agreement reached by the members of the Economic Community of West African States on the Supplementary Act on the Conditions of Transfer of Persons Suspected of Having Committed Acts of Piracy and Their Associated Property and/or Evidence.

The gains of the Yaoundé Architecture will not benefit coastal communities unless they are sustainable. The drivers of piracy and other crimes are complex and are affected by situations on land. They include multidimensional factors such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate access to public services, security threats, legal and jurisdictional deficiencies

and corruption. Nor should the effects of climate change and other environmental threats be underestimated. In that context, we also welcome the recent adoption by consensus of the agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. Our response to those drivers must be multidimensional, through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is only by adopting a comprehensive, holistic and inclusive solution that we can sustainably address the problem. Education and economic opportunities, including for the women and young people of coastal communities, are essential.

The European Union (EU) has adopted a strategy for the Gulf of Guinea that reflects long-lasting engagement at all levels on the need to address socioeconomic development, institutional and legal frameworks and defence and security aspects. Besides the various projects under way, including on maritime domain awareness, the EU has increased its naval presence through the Coordinated Maritime Presences tool, with the constant presence of at least one ship in the Gulf of Guinea throughout the year.

Before concluding, I want to reaffirm Malta's strong belief that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, is an essential tool for achieving maritime security, including the repression of piracy. Ensuring full respect for UNCLOS is critical, because it lays down rules for the mutual benefit of all States. The free and peaceful use of the seas and oceans and their sustainability are essential to us all.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I appreciate the valuable information provided on the state of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The progress achieved since 25 June 2013, when the Yaoundé Code of Conduct Concerning the Prevention and Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Illegal Maritime Activities in West and Central Africa was adopted, is undeniable. It deserves the recognition and support of the international community in addressing the remaining challenges related to maritime cooperation and security in the Gulf of Guinea, such as the relocation of criminal activities. In his most recent report on Central Africa (S/2023/389), the Secretary-General referred to those challenges and pointed out that the fact that such incidents have continued shows

that maritime security enforcement capabilities must be strengthened, in particular by criminalizing acts of piracy and establishing universal jurisdiction over such acts in national legislation, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as we also heard about from Assistant Secretary-General Pobee.

For its part, the Security Council, in its resolution 2634 (2022), expressed concern about the destabilizing and negative impacts of transnational organized crime, oil and cargo theft, illicit trafficking and diversion of arms, drug and human trafficking, illegal trade and smuggling; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and piracy and armed robbery at sea. Those challenges and criminal acts transcend borders, and tackling them requires joint international action, as exemplified by the Yaoundé Architecture, a successful initiative that should therefore be supported with greater international cooperation. In that regard, we welcomed the fact that the third Extraordinary Meeting of Heads of State and Government of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, held on 25 April, requested the development within three months of a strategic framework for reviewing the current systems and structures, maintaining those that work well and exploring mechanisms to strengthen the areas that need it. We look forward with optimism to the outcome of that mandate. We also appreciate the support provided by the Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, which adds to the efforts of the countries in the region. We hope that the downward trend in piracy incidents observed since 2021 will be sustained until they are fully eradicated.

At a Peacebuilding Commission meeting in May on a topic related to the subject of our current discussion, Ecuador called for maintaining and improving collaboration on maritime activities in the Gulf of Guinea among United Nations entities, including the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, while always maintaining respect for the principle of national ownership and consultation with the countries directly concerned and regional organizations.

In conclusion, we reiterate that call today and encourage deploying the necessary means to build on the Yaoundé Architecture, while never losing sight of the fact that strengthening institutions and the rule of law is the basis for the sustainable development needed to anchor stability and security in the region.

Mrs. Chanda (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission for their briefings.

We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General's most recent report on the situation in the Gulf of Guinea (S/2022/818) notes a decline in incidents of piracy, thanks in particular to the significant commitment of the States of the region. We encourage them to pursue their joint actions and reaffirm our full support for the implementation of current initiatives and resolutions. We also welcome the Security Council's role in addressing the issue, including through resolution 2634 (2022). At the same time, we also take note of the most recent report of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, which documents troubling incidents of piracy and armed robbery. With a view to building on some hard-won gains, I would like to underscore three points.

First, the operationalization of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa remains vital to strengthening maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Architecture provides an opportunity to assess the progress made in the implementation of the Code of Conduct and to conduct an in-depth review. We encourage the countries of the region to continue expanding their collaboration, particularly in the areas of justice and information-sharing. Regional organizations such as ECOWAS, ECCAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission play an essential role in ensuring the region's maritime security. Their cooperation is key to making progress in that domain. The Regional Offices of the United Nations and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime can also provide support in that regard.

Secondly, the development of a sustainable blue economy will be crucial to tackling the root causes of piracy and maritime crime and reducing the vulnerability of coastal populations. It involves providing young people with the economic opportunities that they deserve and that will lower their risk of being lured into illicit activities. It is also important to acknowledge the growing role of women in artisanal fishing, as highlighted in the Secretary-General's report. Illegal

fishing leads to substantial economic losses, with a disproportionate impact on women. Climate change and environmental degradation also weigh heavily on development and security.

Thirdly, maritime space and trade require clear rules and structures. In that regard, I underscore the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. All activities involving the sea and the oceans should be addressed within that legal framework. We therefore encourage all States of the region to adopt laws making piracy a crime. The maritime economy is at the heart of global value chains, as underscored by Switzerland's first-ever maritime strategy, published a few weeks ago. With its globally oriented economy, Switzerland depends on maritime trade and its logistics chains and on the shipping industry's compliance with international regulations. However, all the links in that chain must be firm in order to ensure safe, efficient and sustainable maritime logistics. Investment in port infrastructure is also essential.

The States of the Gulf of Guinea bear the primary responsibility for ensuring maritime safety and combating piracy. In order for their efforts to have sustainable results, accelerating the implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in close collaboration with one another will be crucial.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): I would like to start by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe for her important and insightful briefing. We also thank Mr. Gilberto da Piedade Veríssimo, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Mr. Omar Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Mr. Jose Mba Abeso, Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, for their valuable briefings. We would particularly like to thank Ghana for its important initiative and leadership in this area.

Piracy and armed robbery at sea are serious crimes and a threat to international navigation, security and free trade among nations, and therefore represent a grave threat to international peace and security. As a maritime nation by nature and destiny, Mozambique recognizes the importance of secure waters for the economic and social progress of the country, the region and the entire world. That is why we believe it is important to participate in this debate marking the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Code of

Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa. Among other things, our interest is illustrated by the fact that the Mozambique Channel, an 1,800-kilometre-long waterway between Madagascar and East Africa, carries around 30 per cent of global tanker traffic annually and is an important shipping route for the world. The terrorism that began to affect our country in 2017 also constitutes a clear and present danger to security in the Mozambique Channel. In that context, the example of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct is of critical importance to us. It is highly commendable that according to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/818), entitled “Situation of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea and its underlying causes”, there have been positive developments in the region, as the number of cases of piracy and armed robbery at sea has dropped in recent years. Those positive developments are due in part to the combined efforts under the maritime security architecture laid out in the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, signed in 2013, and the regional and international cooperation.

Notwithstanding all positive developments, maritime insecurity remains of great concern to the region, as it threatens regional and international trade, peace and security. It is a menace to the territorial integrity, sovereignty and socioeconomic development of the countries affected. As such, maritime security threats demand a collective response that takes into consideration their nature and occurrence in a vast maritime area, with respect to the sovereignty of States and in accordance with international law. It requires coordinated and coherent approaches, with appropriate financial, logistical and legal support. While recognizing the primary responsibility of coastal affected States in curbing maritime insecurity, it represents a global threat to peace and security. Therefore, concerted and multilateral coordination is of the utmost importance.

The report of the Secretary-General estimates that, in recent years, the financial resources dedicated to counter-piracy initiatives is around \$524 million annually.

On 31 May 2022, the Security Council adopted resolution 2634 (2022), on piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. That was the second resolution since the February 2012 resolution 2039 (2012), which urged countries in the Gulf of Guinea to convene a summit and develop a common strategy to combat

piracy. Resolution 2634 (2022) renewed the attention on this issue and mobilized greater support to mitigate the maritime security threat.

The Council, in particular, and the international community, at large, need to continue their support for a regional strategy to combat piracy, armed robbery and transnational organized crime in the Gulf and beyond. In that regard, Mozambique is of the view that, to effectively combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, the following elements are indispensable, interconnected and mutually reinforcing — first, addressing the root causes of maritime insecurity, including poverty and unemployment, especially among the youth; secondly, ensuring effective implementation of the existing international, regional and national legal frameworks; thirdly, supporting the operationalization of the Yaoundé Architecture envisaged in the Yaoundé Code of Conduct; and fourthly, enhancing national and regional capacity-building and cooperation.

We wish to reiterate our conviction that ensuring safe water and preventing acts of piracy, armed robbery and other illicit activities across the West African and Central African maritime domain is a collective security imperative. As the organ responsible for the maintenance of peace and security, the Council should remain engaged in supporting regional efforts to ensure and maintain maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The defence of the global commons or parts thereof entails global responsibility and responsibility-sharing.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa; Mr. Verissimo, President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Mr. Touray, President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and Mr. Abeso, Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, for their briefings.

China welcomes Ghana’s initiative to convene this meeting. The Gulf of Guinea is the shared maritime home of the countries of the region. A decade ago, the regional leaders signed the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in order to build consensus on maintaining common maritime security. Over the past 10 years, the countries of the region have worked together to build the Yaoundé maritime security architecture, step up anti-piracy escort and patrol, strength legislation and accountability and conduct joint law enforcement. Recent years have seen a year-on-year decline in piracy incidents and a continued improvement in the maritime

security environment of the Gulf of Guinea. China appreciates the countries of the region for their efforts.

The Gulf of Guinea is a shipping route of global importance. Safeguarding its maritime security is the shared responsibility of the countries of the region and the international community, at large. China encourages the Security Council to duly attend to the difficulties and challenges faced by coastal countries and to bring more attention and input to bear on this matter.

In that regard, I would like to emphasize the following three points.

First, we must deepen regional cooperation. The Gulf of Guinea covers a vast sea area, involving a large number of countries, and piracy in that region is highly mobile and secretive. Sporadic incidents of piracy have occurred very recently. Stepping up regional cooperation is imperative for an effective response. The countries of the region should embrace the concept of common maritime security, leverage the leading role of regional organizations such as ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, and advance the development of regional anti-piracy strategies. It is essential to fully operationalize the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, with a focus on addressing the financial, logistical and technical issues involved in building the maritime security architecture and thus providing effective institutional guarantees for regional anti-piracy operations. Combating piracy involves the maritime sovereignty of coastal States and bear on their internal affairs, including judicial systems. Countries outside the region should respect the sovereignty and leadership of the coastal States and play a constructive role in regional anti-piracy operations.

Secondly, we must step up anti-piracy capacity-building. The coastal States in the Gulf of Guinea are at the forefront of the fight against piracy. The Security Council adopted resolution 2634 (2022) in May last year, spotlighting support for regional anti-piracy capacity-building. The international community needs to help coastal States strengthen capacity-building within their maritime law enforcement agencies and navies and improve the efficiency of anti-piracy operations. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Maritime Organization, INTERPOL and other agencies should act according to their respective mandates and expertise to scale up their support in such

focused areas as information-sharing, early warning, maritime search and rescue and logistical support. In recent years, China has provided many batches of anti-piracy materials and equipment to countries of the region and conducted joint anti-piracy exercises. China is willing to draw on existing success stories and modalities from the international community and, on the basis of adequate consultation with coastal States, explore cooperation modalities, such as joint law enforcement and joint escort, in order to sustain a robust suppression and deterrence of piracy.

Thirdly, due attention must be paid to the root causes of piracy. The report of the Secretary-General issued last November (S/2022/818) called attention to the employment and livelihood issues of coastal communities in the Gulf of Guinea and the importance of eliminating the breeding grounds for piracy. With a greater sense of urgency, the international community should support the development of coastal States, help guarantee and improve people's livelihoods, and enhance the sense of gain and security of coastal communities, in particular among the youth.

Over the years, China has engaged in pragmatic cooperation with countries in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. In December last year and in January this year, the container terminals in the port of Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire and Lekki sea port in Nigeria, both constructed by Chinese contractors, were completed and entered into operation one after the other, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs locally. China has also actively worked with Sierra Leone and Senegal, among other countries, in such areas as fishing-harbour construction and agriculture and fishing processing, for the benefit of local communities. China is ready to work with the international community to jointly support the region and develop the blue economy and exploit maritime resources, thus turning the Gulf of Guinea into a gulf of peace, stability and prosperity.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I thank the briefers for their excellent and informative briefings.

We congratulate Member States on progress made towards implementation of the Yaoundé Architecture during the 10 years since its creation. As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, we look to the Yaoundé Architecture as an important example of regional maritime architecture for the world.

The United States is committed to the lawful international navigation in and the security and sustainable development of the Gulf of Guinea region, and indeed the entire Atlantic Ocean basin. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is essential to maintaining a safe and prosperous Atlantic, both for Atlantic nations and those that depend on its waters for their livelihoods.

We reaffirm our commitment to assisting States in the region to counter piracy and armed robbery at sea, to holding perpetrators, facilitators and key figures in criminal networks accountable, and to addressing other related destabilizing and illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea. The United States also commends the efforts of the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic Community of West African States, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and their partners in their coordination to enhance cooperation on maritime security and to further operationalize the Yaoundé Architecture.

I want to underscore the importance of resolution 2634 (2022), on piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. The United States is wholly committed to supporting our partners as they address the grave and persistent threats posed by piracy, armed robbery and transnational organized crime in the Gulf. We further highlight the aim to criminalize and prosecute acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea and emphasize the need to support national, regional and international efforts to counter piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea.

We concur with the fact that, through the collaborative efforts of many nations, the frequency of piracy has dramatically decreased. We encourage the region to continue its efforts to maintain this progress. The United States will continue to be a close partner to that end. Such challenges as piracy, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, transnational organized crime, climate change, pollution and environmental degradation all remain serious threats to our livelihoods and shared security. The United States has pledged to increase our collaboration and coordination with nations across the Atlantic so that we can jointly face these most pressing security threats in the Gulf of Guinea and beyond.

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

At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Martha Pobe, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa and the other briefers for their valuable briefings and to express our appreciation to Ghana for its efforts to ensure that the subject of today's meeting remains at the forefront of the work of the Security Council.

I would also like to emphasize that the discussion of an issue as important as that of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea will be comprehensive and meaningful only when we listen to regional perspectives. Actors from the region are most acquainted with the aspects of this issue. That requires the international community and the Security Council to support the regional initiatives developed to enhance maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and which have proven their potential to reduce maritime crime.

As we heard, this month marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of Yaoundé Architecture, which was a turning point in consolidating cooperation among Gulf of Guinea States to combat piracy and enhance maritime security. We therefore have an opportunity to reflect on this initiative and its role in enhancing stability in one of the most strategic regions on the continent, which is home to approximately 20 commercial ports and represents 25 per cent of African maritime traffic.

We commend the progress made in combating incidents of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea in the past decade, which was evident, for example, in the decrease in the number of those incidents by 70 per cent in the first quarter of this year as compared to the same period in 2021. We look forward to continuing to build on that progress, which has demonstrated the efficiency of the collective efforts of coastal States, regional organizations and international partners in maritime security.

We stress that maintaining security in common maritime areas will contribute to supporting the security, stability and development of the entire region. That means scaling up efforts by all relevant stakeholders to combat security threats in the Gulf of Guinea, especially such criminal activities as arms smuggling and the illegal trafficking in natural resources, in which non-State actors engage as a source of finance and profit. In that context, we are concerned about the repercussions of those criminal activities on the livelihoods of the population and their economic and social conditions, which continue to be exploited

by pirates and criminals in order to continue their illicit activities.

Seafarers must also continue to be protected. Despite the significant decrease in acts of looting and robbery, the region remains unsafe for seafarers. States of the region, coastal response agencies and independent navies must therefore continue to work together to combat piracy on a regular basis, which also requires consistent international support.

That issue has become more pressing since transnational terrorist groups carry out criminal activities in the Gulf of Guinea to finance their operations, including by exploiting porous borders. That is why we believe that, in order to address the illicit activities of piracy and robbery at sea, it is important to work towards addressing environmental degradation exacerbated by climate change and the increasing incidence of illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing by foreign industrial vessels. Those challenges must be addressed with sustained solutions.

Eliminating piracy and robbery at sea will not be possible without close coordination among all actors, with priority given to locally led solutions. The next 10 years will be decisive in making more innovative, effective and coordinated efforts and in keeping pace with challenges that have become very complex in the region, especially with the increasing mobility of criminal networks within territories and

its consequences for the stability of societies. Such efforts would also contribute to improving information exchange and supporting regional frameworks to achieve the goals for which they were set. In that regard, we note the importance of building on the region's experience in confronting piracy during the past decade and benefiting from the experiences of other regions in Africa, while ensuring that they are adapted to the local context of States in the Gulf of Guinea.

In conclusion, States of the region have shown a clear commitment to strengthening maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, and the international community must remain steadfast in supporting these efforts, including by continuing to build the capacity of those States to address the various security, social and economic challenges they face. We do not want to leave a vacuum that leaves room for piracy and criminal acts. The leading role of the Security Council and its support for regional efforts, including through the implementation of resolution 2634 (2022), adopted last year on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, is essential for building upon such efforts.

I now resume my function as President of the Council.

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

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.