



# Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

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New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Dang . . . . .	(Viet Nam)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium . . . . .	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China . . . . .	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Dominican Republic . . . . .	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Auväärt
	France . . . . .	Mrs. Gueguen
	Germany . . . . .	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia . . . . .	Mr. Syihab
	Niger . . . . .	Mr. A Barry
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. DeShong
	South Africa . . . . .	Mr. Mabhongo
	Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Baati
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . . .	Mr. Roscoe
	United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Norman-Chalet

## Agenda

### Peace consolidation in West Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2019/1005)

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

### **Expression of welcome to the new members of the Security Council and of thanks to the outgoing members**

**The President:** As this is the first formal meeting of the Security Council this year, I should like to extend my warm wishes on the occasion of the New Year to all members of the Security Council, the United Nations and the Secretariat.

In presiding over this first formal meeting of the Council in 2020, I am happy to welcome the new members: Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam. We look forward to their participation in the work of the Council. Their experience and wisdom will be of invaluable assistance in the discharge of the Council's responsibilities.

I shall also take this opportunity to express the Council's gratitude to the outgoing members — Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, Peru and Poland — for their important contributions to the work of the Council during their terms.

### **Expression of thanks to the outgoing President**

**The President:** I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to Her Excellency Ms. Kelly Craft, Permanent Representative of the United States, for her service as President of the Council for the month of December. I am sure that I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Craft and her team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Peace consolidation in West Africa**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2019/1005)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, to participate in this meeting.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/1005, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

I now give the floor to Mr. Chambas.

**Mr. Chambas:** I am honoured to be here today to brief the Council on the latest report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) (S/2019/1005).

Since my most recent briefing in this forum, in July 2019 (see S/PV.8585), the West Africa and Sahel region has experienced a devastating surge in terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets. The humanitarian consequences are alarming. I will highlight some of these challenges as well as ongoing initiatives to tackle them. I will also address overall political developments in the region, with a focus on forthcoming elections this year.

The West Africa and Sahel region has been shaken by unprecedented terrorist violence in recent months. As I emphasized during my briefing to the Security Council of 16 December 2019 (see S/PV.8685), relentless attacks on civilian and military targets have shaken public confidence.

In Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, casualties from terrorist attacks have increased five-fold since 2016, with more than 4,000 deaths reported in 2019 alone as compared with an estimated 770 deaths in 2016. Most significantly, the geographic focus of terrorist attacks has shifted eastward from Mali to Burkina Faso and the Niger and is increasingly threatening West African coastal States. The number of people killed in Burkina Faso increased from 80 in 2016 to more than 1,800 in 2019. The number of displaced persons has also increased — in this case, ten-fold — to about half a million, in addition to the 25,000 who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

The terrorist attacks are also often deliberate efforts by violent extremists to capture weapons and trafficking routes and engage in other illicit activities, including illegal artisanal mining, in certain areas that sustain their networks.

Terrorism, organized crime and intercommunal violence are often intertwined. This is especially true in

peripheral areas where the State's presence is weak. In those places, extremists provide safety and protection to populations, as well as social services, in exchange for loyalty. For that reason, at the July 2019 High-level Conference on Counter Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism, in Nairobi, the Secretary-General emphasized that counter-terrorism responses must focus on gaining the trust and support of local populations.

Governments, local actors, regional organizations and the international community are mobilizing across West Africa and the Sahel to respond to terrorism and violent extremism. Indeed, many solid frameworks, resolutions and declarations already exist at the strategic level. On 21 December, at its Summit of Heads of State and Government, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a 2020-2024 action plan for the eradication of terrorism in the subregion, following the Community's extraordinary summit in Ouagadougou in September, during which it pledged to mobilize \$1 billion internally. The African Union-Lake Chad Basin Commission Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region is also a regional approach that sets the parameters for early warning and early engagement on all forms of local conflicts.

Now is the time for action. Regional and subregional leaders must follow through on the pledges made, and international partners must lend their full support to the implementation of existing mechanisms. We need to prioritize a cross-pillar approach at all levels and across all sectors to ensure the most effective support for Governments in the region. The United Nations response in the Sahel serves as a template in this approach. UNOWAS also worked closely with the Mano River Union to resuscitate the basin's cross-border security and confidence-building measures.

Farmer-herder clashes remain some of the most violent local conflicts in the region. Close to 70 per cent of West Africa's population is dependent on agriculture and livestock rearing for a living. That is why it is so important to ensure peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders. Climate change, among other multiple factors, is increasingly exacerbating farmer-herder conflicts. The impact of climate change on security also spawns a negative relationship among climate change, social cohesion, irregular migration and criminality in some places.

The all-too-worrying trends in terms of security must not distract from positive political developments in many parts of West Africa and the Sahel. Dialogue with citizens and across political divides is taking place in several countries. For example, the people of the Gambia have successfully concluded the second round of public consultations on a new constitution and peacefully conducted the truth, reconciliation and reparations process. In Sierra Leone, Mauritania, Senegal and elsewhere, encouraging dialogues are under way with a view to promoting national unity.

In the months ahead, the electorates in six West African countries will choose their leaders in democratic contests. In that vein, the people of Guinea-Bissau and their Electoral Commission deserve congratulations for the exemplary conduct of last year's presidential election, which marked an important step forward in Guinea-Bissau's democratic development. The United Nations will continue to support the Government and the people of Guinea-Bissau in their efforts towards consolidating peace and development.

On 22 February, Togo will hold its next presidential election. Following recent electoral and constitutional reforms, it is urgent that any outstanding pre- and post-electoral grievances be addressed using legal channels. Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and the Niger are also preparing for polls later in the year. Unresolved grievances, incomplete national reconciliation processes and the sentiment that institutions and processes are being manipulated carry risks of tensions and manifestations of political violence.

The resumption of dialogue in Guinea, with the impetus generated by the United Nations and partners, has yielded timely results, including the release of political prisoners. The United Nations reiterates its calls on national stakeholders to overcome their differences in the spirit of building consensus in order to ensure the holding of peaceful legislative elections scheduled for February. In the months ahead, UNOWAS will continue working closely with all national stakeholders and regional partners, especially ECOWAS, to promote consensus and inclusiveness in all the elections to be conducted in the region.

In that regard, UNOWAS will also continue to urge Member States in the region to adopt legislation or implement existing laws to promote the participation of women and youth in those important milestone polls. UNOWAS will continue to work in tandem

with regional and other partners to convey consistent and firm messages in that regard, especially as we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) this year, in which, I might add, West African women played an important role 20 years ago.

In conclusion, as I have just outlined, the stakes are high in the region this year, in terms of both security and political developments. As the UNOWAS mandate is renewed, we count on the Council's continued full support to accomplish the tasks assigned to us.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Chambas for his briefing.

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

**Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*):** Allow me first of all to commend the commitment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), who continues to provide outstanding support for the region's efforts in the search for peace and sustainable development. The Niger welcomes his support for inclusive approaches in national dialogues and elections, as well as his assistance in promoting and ensuring respect for human rights and institutional reforms.

Despite the multidimensional efforts that have been made in the Sahelo-Sahara region, the security situation there remains extremely worrisome. The year 2019 saw more than 700 terrorist attacks in the region. Violent non-State actors, including terrorist groups, criminal networks and community and tribal militias, repeatedly carried out attacks on civilians and defence and security forces, in particular in Burkina Faso, Mali and my own country, the Niger. That has undoubtedly constituted an obstacle to achieving regional stability and the Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa and the Sahel.

The Niger reaffirms its support for the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel, whose overarching goal is to complement the Strategy and build on the gains made. While recalling that the Sahel is the lynchpin in the fight against terrorism, the Niger recommends that UNOWAS be given a mandate that enables it to address, with the same level of effectiveness, the challenges facing the Sahel today,

namely, terrorism and intercommunal conflicts, among others. In addition to its role in preventive diplomacy and support for political processes in the region, UNOWAS will need to address the challenges I have just outlined.

It is heartening to note that, aware of the fact that peace, security and stability in the region are a prerequisite for the integration and economic development of their region, the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), over which the Niger currently presides, have committed themselves to strengthening governance and democratic institutions in their countries, as well as promoting respect for the rule of law. In that regard, in addition to Guinea-Bissau, which recently completed an electoral process that was difficult but enjoyed a successful outcome, elections will be held this year in six other countries of the region, as detailed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General earlier.

The progress made in Mali, with the launch in Bamako, on 14 December 2019, of the inclusive national dialogue, which saw the participation of nearly all parties of the Malian nation, must also be noted. Likewise, we must also welcome the progress made in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, emanating from the Algiers process, particularly in the area of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Such progress, which was achieved in a particularly difficult context, deserves to be encouraged and supported.

In addition to national commitments in the fight against terrorism, which varies from 15 to 30 per cent of a given country's budget, mobilizing the region in the fight against terrorism has resulted in the adoption by the ECOWAS Priority Action Plan for 2020-2024, aimed at eradicating terrorism, with a financial package of \$2.3 billion, of which \$1 billion will come from internal resources.

In the same vein, five countries of the region have established the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force, which, although having accomplished successful missions, is still struggling to reach its full level of operationalization due to a lack of adequate financial and material resources. Here too, the international community should help those countries, which are now directly affected by the attacks of armed terrorist groups, to deal with them in the most efficient way by

helping them to secure predictable funding. We wish to express our deepest gratitude to the friendly countries that support our armed forces in these difficult times, through multifaceted support.

The Council will have noted that, while serious security concerns persist, the political prospects in the region are rather encouraging. More than ever, West Africa and the Sahel need the solidarity and concrete action of the international community in order to ensure that the democratic gains achieved are not thwarted by the criminal activities of armed terrorist groups, which undermine the very foundation of the State.

The Niger commends the tireless efforts of the Special Representative, as well as his personal commitment and that of his teams. We are also aware of the difficulties involved in the implementation of his mandate, the scope of which is broadening with the closure of some offices in the region, in addition to the growing security challenges. I take this opportunity to call on the Council, on behalf of the region, to provide him with all the assistance necessary, in terms of both human and financial resources, to enable him to continue his efforts to promote dialogue, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel with the same effectiveness.

**Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on both joining the Security Council and directly assuming its presidency, and to assure you of our full support. I would also like to thank the United States delegation for its presidency in December.

I would further like to warmly thank Special Representative Chambas for his comprehensive briefing. Belgium commends the work that he carries out on a daily basis to promote prevention, mediation, sustainable peace and the rule of law in West Africa and the Sahel.

The precarious security situation continues to be a source of concern for us. I am thinking in particular of the intensification of intercommunal violence in several countries of the region, such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali, as well as of terrorist attacks, which have unfortunately not diminished. That deterioration has a direct impact on the humanitarian situation, causing hundreds of thousands of innocent people to suffer. The persistence of conflicts between pastoralists and farmers deserves special attention, as those tensions are currently a major driver of insecurity in the subregion and even beyond.

I commend the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) for substantially raising awareness of that issue. The task now is to implement the various good practices identified, in particular in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States.

In Burkina Faso, the spread and increase in number of attacks on the civilians and the State of Burkina Faso in the north, east and even south of the country is a particularly alarming development. Those terrorist attacks undermine development and threaten regional stability. We commend the Secretary-General's efforts to adjust the United Nations presence in Burkina Faso in order to support the country in addressing the challenges that it faces. In Nigeria, the persistence of violent attacks by Boko Haram is also a disturbing phenomenon.

Belgium commends the courage and sacrifices of security forces throughout the region in their fight against terrorists. It is crucial that this fight be carried out in accordance with human rights and international humanitarian law. Otherwise, the successes of the security forces will be only ephemeral and jeopardize reconciliation and a lasting end to the crisis.

Moreover, as the Secretary-General points out in his report (S/2019/1005), the response to the challenges in West Africa cannot be solely security-based. A holistic approach is needed to deal with violent extremism, with emphasis also on good governance, the fight against impunity and sustainable and inclusive development.

The efforts of several countries of the region, such as the Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone, deserve our support. National reconciliation, post-conflict reconstruction and security sector reform are major challenges for those States, the democratic institutions of which are in the process of consolidation. The political will to entrench good governance, democracy and human rights will be decisive in order to sustain the gains made and ensure sustainable development.

In that regard, I wish to underscore the important role played by the Peacebuilding Commission in supporting those countries by maintaining dialogue among all interested parties. Likewise, the activities carried out by the Peacebuilding Fund remain essential to meeting specific needs. Belgium welcomes its approach focused on prevention. Those efforts must be based on the new structure of resident coordinators in an integrated approach common to the three pillars of

United Nations action: peace and security, humanitarian development and human rights.

UNOWAS also plays a leading role in studying the impact of climate change on security as part of a conflict prevention approach. That is crucial work, and I encourage the Special Representative to pursue such efforts.

In conclusion, I would also like to stress the key role played by regional and subregional organizations. I commend their close coordination with UNOWAS and encourage them to maintain it in the future.

**Mrs. Gueguen** (France) (*spoke in French*): France commends the Special Representative and the team of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) for their work. West Africa is an area of strategic importance for France and the European Union. The region faces myriad challenges and is one where our common future is largely at stake, whether in terms of security, economic development, freedom and democracy, the development of young people, the preservation of nature or the ability to work together.

Progress has been made in recent years, in terms of both human development and democracy. Several elections in the past year have led to democratic changeovers, notably in Mauritania in August and in Guinea-Bissau in March and December, which is to be welcomed. With regard to human rights, the launching of the work of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission in the Gambia is also a major step forward.

However, the region faces significant challenges. In the Sahel, the security situation continues to deteriorate, with serious humanitarian consequences, particularly for the most vulnerable civilian populations, and repercussions for the entire subregion, especially with regard to the increase in the number of forced displacements. France reiterates its call for the urgent mobilization of all of us to help the countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) combat terrorism, curb organized crime and address the root causes of instability. The President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, will in fact meet with the Presidents of the countries of the G-5 Sahel and multilateral partners on 13 January — next Monday — in Pau, to reaffirm our collective commitment and define a common road map.

Presidential elections will be held in no fewer than eight West African countries in 2020 and 2021. These

processes could be a source of tension. We encourage the Special Representative to make active use of his good offices and convey strong political messages. It is particularly useful for the United Nations to provide electoral assistance when countries request it.

In view of the legislative and presidential elections, we believe that it is important that efforts be continued in Guinea, which the Special Representative visited at the end of November. Tensions between the Government and the people remain high in that country. Several people lost their lives during demonstrations last year. An in-depth dialogue among political leaders is essential to ease tensions. Next month's legislative elections will be crucial for an ongoing political process in Guinea, and it is important that they be conducted in a transparent, credible and consensus-based manner.

The Council must renew the UNOWAS mandate this month. France supports the strengthening of the Office in order to enable the Special Representative to deploy his good offices to the maximum extent possible. Moreover, the United Nations has many tools at its disposal on the ground, including its agencies, funds and programmes, which must work with synergy towards the same goal. That is why France believes that it would be appropriate to give UNOWAS a greater role in coordinating the work of the United Nations in the region, in line with an integrated approach that incorporates security and development. Based on that approach, we call on UNOWAS to promote the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, which must produce concrete results in the area of development.

Lastly, it is essential that UNOWAS present in its reports security-risk analyses of the impact of climate change, as well as recommendations for action to prevent the realization of these risks. We are of the view that the priority given to fragile countries and countries in transition is relevant, as are capacity-building activities, partnerships with regional and subregional actors and the promotion of good governance, the rule of law and human rights. We also stress the importance of the commitment of UNOWAS to the Lake Chad basin region, in cooperation with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa. We support the mobilization of the two Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on the issue, which deserves a high level of attention, at a time when the security and humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate.

The work of UNOWAS is diverse and extensive, commensurate with the challenges in West Africa and the Sahel. In this regard, and in conclusion, we believe that the United Nations should be better equipped to enable it to be more effective in the region.

**Mr. Singer Weisinger** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we thank Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas for his briefing.

The Dominican Republic commends the peaceful electoral processes in some countries of West Africa and the Sahel. At the same time, we acknowledge the considerable efforts made by countries of the region and regional and international actors to address the ongoing deterioration of the political and security situation in the Sahel, in particular in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. These countries face recurrent attacks, which cause mass displacement of people, instability and poverty.

We condemn intercommunal violence and terrorist attacks against humanitarian actors and civilians, in particular women, and the numerous casualties suffered by the security and defence forces of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. We hope that those responsible will be brought to justice and that the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) will receive the necessary resources and training for enhanced joint cross-border operations.

It is important that the memorandum of understanding between the Economic Community of West African States and the G-5 Sahel be implemented in order to deepen their cooperation on security and development issues and strengthen the implementation of the G-5 Sahel and INTERPOL security coordination platform. The high number of deaths and clashes between farmers and cattle breeders keep a region that is already affected by mass displacements of innocent people on edge. There are reports of serious human rights abuses, food insecurity and an adverse impact on education and health services. Communities are also deeply affected by the effects of climate change and must be assisted in building a strong resilience to the many adverse factors.

With regard to women, we agree with the fact that their role in politics should not be limited to mobilization and support functions. We therefore expect more inclusive and meaningful participation of both women and young people in peace and decision-making processes.

We hope that the holistic approaches and measures put in place by countries to alleviate political and security tensions will be supported by all actors in society and lead to changes in political, governance, development and human rights trends. Such changes are necessary to ensure that pending electoral processes and other challenges are conducted and overcome smoothly and that progress is made in creating better opportunities for West African societies. The lack of opportunities exposes populations to recruitment by armed groups. It provides the ideal scenario for such groups to expand their operations and increase the number of attacks against civilians and the military in order to exercise control.

There is an increasing need for greater cooperation in advancing the battle against the threat of terrorist and criminal groups. At the same time, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) must be strengthened with the necessary resources and clear and realistic mandates for working with regional partners on cross-cutting threats to peace and security in the region. We commend the good offices and continued efforts of UNOWAS in the quest for peaceful solutions to the various challenges faced by West African countries.

In conclusion, only by developing coordinated actions aimed at resolving the root causes of fragility, inequality and poverty in the region and by providing the military with sufficient resources and training will it be possible for State authorities to obtain a greater presence in the affected areas and create opportunities to achieve the human development index needed for the sustainable development of their peoples.

**Mr. Auväärt** (Estonia): As this is the first time Estonia is taking the floor in the Chamber as an elected member of the Security Council, allow me to congratulate Viet Nam on assuming the presidency of the Council for the month of January and thank the United States for its presidency in December.

Allow me to express Estonia's support for Special Representative Chambas and for all of the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) over the most recent reporting period. The work on mediation and good offices in West Africa and the Sahel play an important role in supporting overall United Nations efforts in the region.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/1005) draws attention to the worrisome trends in the

security situation in the wider West Africa and Sahel region. Estonia remains concerned about the negative developments in the region, such as the spread of violent extremism and organized crime. The most recent terrorist attack, which took place just this past Saturday in Burkina Faso on a bus carrying students, leaving 14 people dead, must be condemned in the strongest terms. Each one of these terrorist attacks is simply unacceptable.

Considering the transnational nature of the threats, cross-regional collaboration is of key importance. We highly commend the cooperation efforts of the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States and encourage the exchange of good practices between UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa. We hope to see this collaboration strengthened and coordination enhanced.

We note positively that the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel — together with the French-led Operation Barkhane, to which Estonia also contributes — has been conducting successful counter-terrorist operations. However, considering the growing number of violent attacks, including against civilians, we need to further stress the role played by the States of the region. Full political ownership and effective State presence, including an adequately trained military presence, are of key importance here. All perpetrators of violence need to be held accountable.

Addressing the root causes and long-term drivers of conflict and violence are at the core of the peacebuilding activities of UNOWAS and of preventative diplomacy. We commend the engagement of UNOWAS in promoting the meaningful participation of women and youth in the political process, but it is clear that greater efforts from all relevant parties are needed. In this regard, we would like to stress the need for an integrated gender perspective in the design and implementation of comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of the crisis.

Finally, the effects of climate change on people's livelihoods throughout West Africa and the Sahel, which are especially severe in the Lake Chad Basin, need to be taken into account. It is important to track the roots and impacts of climate-related tensions and support key stakeholders in finding alternatives for those most affected.

**Ms. DeShong** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): First, allow me to extend my warmest congratulations to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. Our thanks also go to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, for his insightful briefing. We express our support for the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), which continues to make valuable contributions to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, sustainable development and cooperation in the subregion.

My country takes this opportunity to commend some of the positive advances witnessed in the subregion, particularly the commitment made by members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), along with Chad and Mauritania, to enhancing their engagement and cooperation in responding to terrorism. We also welcome the political dialogues in Liberia and Senegal, the progress made by Gambia on constitutional reform and transitional justice, and the successful electoral processes in Mauritania and Guinea-Bissau. Notwithstanding this progress, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is troubled by the terrorist threat, the insecurity and the humanitarian and development concerns that persist in the subregion.

In our opinion, UNOWAS is strategically placed to ensure synergy and complementarity among the security plans of various countries, thereby guaranteeing that a comprehensive vision exists to tackle the festering cells of violent extremism and organized criminal activities. Additionally, we recognize the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the Economic and Social Council, which adopted a resolution last year on the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. We would like to encourage this coordination among United Nations organs.

One of the main objectives of pursuing a lasting and sustainable peace in the subregion is to enhance people's lives. Unfortunately, we have learned from the reports of the Secretary-General, for example, his most recent report (S/2019/1005), and the briefing by Special Representative Chambas, that millions of people continue to be negatively affected by instability in the region in the form of displacement, food insecurity, the risk of acute malnutrition and a lack of basic services. We commend the entities and people who continue to engage on the humanitarian front despite the challenges

and risks involved. We further encourage the support of the international community to take the necessary measures to sustain their noble work.

Any solution to the instability that plagues various areas across West Africa and the Sahel region must meaningfully recognize and target the root causes of those conflicts. Strategies must therefore be comprehensive, incorporating elements of sustainable development, climate adaptation and resilience measures, along with human rights protection and promotion in line with national laws. We welcome the continued analysis of the link between climate and security made in the report of the Secretary-General, as well as any future further collaboration similar to that being pursued by ECOWAS and various United Nations offices on this issue of critical importance.

The report of the Secretary-General contained in document S/2019/1005 makes reference to the adverse consequences of climate change in the Lake Chad basin and parts of the Sahel. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is gravely concerned about the impact of climate change in West Africa and the Sahel. In the immediate term, we need to mobilize to support climate adaptation in the region. Member States must do all that we can to lessen this threat multiplier by supporting adaptation measures as a matter of urgency and by realizing our collective responsibility to reduce our carbon emissions for the sake of future generations and a lasting and sustainable peace. In that vein, it is important to note that young people comprise 65 per cent of the population of West Africa and the Sahel.

The words of the late Vincentian poet, Daniel Williams, are apt in this context: “[O]nly the future is ours to desecrate. The present is the past, and the past our fathers’ mischief”. These words remind us of the weight we collectively bear in our quest to secure a bright and prosperous future for succeeding generations. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is committed to this goal and looks forward to engaging constructively to this end.

**Mr. Wu Haitao** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam to the Security Council as its new elected members. We appreciate the work of the United States as President of the Council in December and congratulate Viet Nam on assuming the presidency of the Council this month. China will

actively support its efforts. China also thanks Special Representative Chamba for his briefing.

At present, the region of West Africa and the Sahel is enjoying overall political stability, sustained economic growth and notable successes in self-empowerment through unity. At the same time, some countries are still being confronted with severe security threats, including violent extremist and terrorist activities, transnational organized crime and intercommunal conflicts. Such security risks have given rise to a grave humanitarian situation. The international community needs to increase its support and assistance for countries in the region.

I wish to share the following thoughts.

First, we must step up cooperation in a joint response to conflicts and challenges. As we speak, certain regions and countries in Africa remain in the grip of unrelenting wars, conflicts and clashes. China supports African countries in finding African solutions to African problems and supports regional and subregional organizations in their good offices. The Economic Community of West African States, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), the Multinational Joint Task Force for combating Boko Haram, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Mano River Union, among others, have all undertaken robust endeavours to tackle regional challenges and made important contributions to international and regional peace and security. The international community must support the United Nations in securing the necessary financial support for relevant regional efforts. Since its inception, the China-United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund has provided financial support to a growing number of peace and security programmes in Africa.

Secondly, we must intensify efforts to more aggressively counter terrorist threats. This requires us to assist the countries of the region in beefing up their counter-terrorism and deradicalization capacities, as well as in tackling more prominent issues such as the movement of foreign terrorist fighters, the investigation of terrorist financing and the collusion between terrorist organizations and organized-crime networks. China has set up the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund to support Chinese-African cooperation in peace and security, peacekeeping and the maintenance of stability. The first consignment of aid materials, worth ¥200 million, has arrived in Africa to support the

development of the African Standby Force and Africa's capacity for immediate crisis response. In addition, we have provided ¥300 million in aid to counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel and the development of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force.

Thirdly, it is essential to accelerate development so as to eliminate extreme poverty and underdevelopment, which are the root causes of insecurity and instability. That entails continuing to fully back regional efforts towards economic and social development and assisting countries in the region to build up their governance capacity with more sufficient resources and means. It is also important to invest more in Africa, enhance trade and make an all-out effort to eliminate poverty, with a particular focus on creating educational and employment opportunities for youth. China is actively engaged in assisting countries in the region develop their infrastructure in order to increase connectivity. Moreover, efforts such as offering scholarships for study in China and establishing educational and training centres are under way to provide educational opportunities and vocational training to a vast number of African youth.

China supports greater coordination across all United Nations agencies with a view to working in synergy. The country teams, the United Nations Development Programme and other entities should put forward their respective strengths and increase coordination and cooperation with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel in order to jointly play a constructive part in regional peace and stability. China will continue to support the active work of Special Representative Chambas and his Office.

**Mr. Roscoe** (United Kingdom): May I join others in welcoming you to the presidency, Mr. President, and also in welcoming Viet Nam and the other four elected members to the Security Council. We look forward to working with them.

In the context of this briefing, we also welcome particularly the delegation of the Niger. We know from last month that the Niger has suffered first-hand the consequences of violence in the region. It has our condolences for the losses to its armed forces.

It is also very good to see Special Representative of the Secretary-General Chambas back in the Chamber to brief us. We welcome the very productive role that the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) has played in the region. In particular, we

welcome the role that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General plays through his good offices. People do not always see the result of that work because it is, by its very nature, diplomatic and quiet. But we know it goes on and we know it makes a difference, so I thank Mr. Chambas and his team for that.

We are also very grateful to the Secretariat and the Secretary-General for their report on the trends in the region (S/2019/1005). As others have said, those trends continue to be of significant concern, particularly on the security side — but also on the humanitarian side — because the security situation is so bleak and is seriously affecting the broader development opportunities in the region.

We wanted to cover three areas today. The first is security, which I will talk about in a little more detail. The second is elections, which we have heard a bit about already today. The third is the underlying causes of conflict and what we can do to address those once the security situation has been addressed.

On the security and humanitarian sides, as I have said, we remain concerned about the damaging cycles of violence we are seeing — I think Mr. Chambas called them unprecedented — and the spike between the year before last and what we saw last year was exponential. They are a real cause for concern, particularly the deterioration in central Mali, an area of which the Council is separately seized, and in northern Burkina Faso since the latest report. The increased violence is exacerbating an already perilous humanitarian situation, particularly in central Mali and Burkina Faso. The United Kingdom has just released a further £20 million in additional humanitarian funding for the Sahel, on top of the £15 million we are already spending to help address the situation. We all need to think again about whether we are doing enough in the region to look at the humanitarian situation.

As others have said, it is also worth noting that we and States in the region need to ensure humanitarian access for those who deliver the humanitarian response. We need to ensure that they are able to reach the regions they need to reach and are given the protection they need, in both legal and security terms. The main point is that security needs to be the Council's principal focus. We cannot help those who urgently need assistance unless we can help the States that they are in to bring the security situation there under control. Like many others in this Chamber, we heard the African Union

talk in mid-December, when we last touched on this issue, about the variety of regional initiatives that we now have on the security front (see S/PV.8685). One thing the Council might want to consider is whether we can help bring some coherence to those initiatives, to look at how we map them and at whether the current initiatives are addressing our concerns and whether they are duplicative or complementary. That is something we can consider in due course in line with African Union advice.

Turning now to elections, again, it is useful to hear that there has been progress in the region and that there have been some upsides over the past year on the political and election fronts. We agree with the emphasis Mr. Chambas is placing on helping States deliver credible elections over this next period. From our perspective, the freedoms of assembly and expression are essential to that; therefore, we hope in particular that Mr. Chambas will send that message to States in the region. In the context of the deteriorating security situation we have already touched on, we have to help States avoid the elections becoming flashpoints for violence or enabling abuses of power, as that would only further exacerbate conflicts and violence. Citizens must be able to exercise their democratic right to vote without fear of intimidation or retribution. We stand ready to do what we can, with Mr. Chambas's advice, to support the elections.

In terms of the underlying causes, the immediate humanitarian and security efforts to support the elections and the wider region are obviously critical. But we must also do what we can to address the root causes of the conflicts and violence. One of the interesting things that we see in the report is that there is growing recognition in the countries themselves of the need to address those underlying issues. However, it is very difficult to do so in the absence of proper security. Nevertheless, States can do something. They can work to address long-term governance issues by reducing abuses by security forces. We can help Governments to build their legitimacy by providing inclusive and accountable basic services where they are able to do so. That is something I think we should focus on more, and it is good to see the report looking at giving UNOWAS the ability to help the United Nations in the region think about the development assistance that it can provide and when it can provide it. Those kinds of interventions will help build the foundations for the stability the region so desperately needs.

We thank Mr. Chambas and his team. It is an incredibly important region, and they have a challenging year ahead, but they also have our full support.

**Mr. Syihab** (Indonesia): Let me at the outset join others in welcoming Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam to the Security Council. Allow me also to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency for the month of January. I would also like to thank the United States for successfully presiding over the Council during the month of December 2019.

My delegation would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mohamed Ibn Chambas for his comprehensive briefing and his team for the work that they have been doing in the region.

We welcome some commendable progress in the region, including political dialogues in several countries and advances in transitional justice mechanisms and in security sector reform. We note with concern, however, the election-related tension in some countries that has led to violent confrontations, and we would like to reiterate the importance of peaceful political processes. Notwithstanding the positive developments, we remain deeply concerned at the spread of terrorism and criminal activities and at intercommunal violence resulting in human and material losses. In that regard, I would like to highlight three points.

First, the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) remains crucial. We take note of the strategic review of UNOWAS based on the assessment that stakeholders found the Office's activity to be useful and that it has effectively carried out its mandate in preventive diplomacy in the subregion. As we consider the renewal of the mandate of UNOWAS, we view several areas of focus to be of particular importance. UNOWAS should continue performing its mediation and good offices roles to support countries in the region in the context of electoral and peace processes. Regional analysis, including with regard to political and security trends, threats to peace and security, as well as root causes of instability in the subregion, is also necessary. UNOWAS should enhance synergy and complementarity with the United Nations country team and regional and subregional organizations based on their respective mandates and capacities.

Secondly, we must combat terrorism and transnational organized crime. As stated in the

Secretary-General's report (S/2019/1005) and in his Special Representative's briefing, terrorist attacks, maritime crime and drug trafficking are increasing in the subregion. Terrorist groups continue to expand their areas of influence and inflict harm on security personnel as well as civilians. It therefore remains crucial to support the countries in West Africa and the Sahel to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime. Collective initiatives such as the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and the Multinational Joint Task Force should be continuously supported. In addition, the limited presence of State authorities contributes to insecurity in the region. As a result, strengthening State capacity and institutions is key to ensuring the security of the population, the provision of basic services and the building of community trust.

Thirdly, it is important to address the root causes of instability. Our security approach must be part of a wider strategy. Countries in the subregion must intensify efforts to address poverty, inequality, marginalization and the lack of basic and social services. International partners should continue to support the implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, the G-5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme, the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel.

In conclusion, building lasting peace and stability in the subregion requires political will, national and regional efforts and support from the international community. Ensuring political stability, combating terrorism and organized crime and addressing the underlying causes of instability are key to enabling peace to take root in the subregion, which will pave the way to sustainable development.

**Ms. Norman-Chalet** (United States of America): At the outset, I would like to join my colleagues in welcoming you, Mr. President, and the other incoming members to the Chamber, and to extend our congratulations on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We look forward to working closely with all Council members.

I thank Special Representative Chambas for his remarks. We commend him and his Office for promoting long-term stability and peace in West Africa and the Sahel. The United Nations Office for West

Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) is the region's leader in preventive diplomacy and, as the security situation deteriorates and political challenges mount, its work is more important than ever. We hope the ideas and the focus that emerged from last month's intercommunal violence and terrorism briefing (see S/PV.8685), which we co-hosted with Côte d'Ivoire, will support his efforts in 2020.

We also note, in the Secretary-General's report (S/2019/1005), a long list of the Special Representative's tireless travel in the region, as well as the use of good offices to ease tensions and unify and sustain peace. As the Security Council considers the mandate renewal of UNOWAS in the coming weeks, the United States supports his team and is committed to ensuring that he can conduct his work as effectively as possible.

Let me now turn to the Secretary-General's most recent report on UNOWAS. The United States is deeply concerned that violence spurred by extremist activity and criminal networks has spiked in the Lake Chad basin and border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. Ambassador Abarry, present today in the Council, and his country have experienced that directly. We again extend our condolences to him for the loss of life that his country has experienced and condemn those terrorist attacks.

We are troubled by increased displacement and continued limitations on humanitarian access across the Sahel, where there are 25 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. We must all work together to ensure that they receive it. UNOWAS is essential to regional stability, but it cannot maintain stability on its own. We call upon the affected West African nations to increase efforts to ensure that all their citizens have access to education, health care and greater employment opportunities. Improving the scope and quality of services can turn despair into hope for many, which will go a long way in countering violent extremism and criminality in the region. Serious efforts to address basic needs will also further convey to local populations that their Governments are responsible democratic actors.

The situation in Mali continues to be especially concerning for the United States, given its impact across the Sahel. We hope that all Council members join us, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in urging the signatory parties of the Algiers accords to meet the implementation benchmarks in resolution 2480 (2019). That would substantially bolster efforts to

stabilize Mali and the Sahel. Governments must also continue to align humanitarian, peacebuilding and development goals, with the assistance of UNOWAS, to address more effectively the root causes of violent extremism. Ensuring full and equal participation by women in decision-making and peace processes is just one important way to do that. We also encourage the Security Council to further prioritize adequate and predictable humanitarian financing, and other donors to increase contributions to humanitarian response plans.

This year, 2020, is critical for the future stability of West Africa and the Sahel. Citizens will exercise their right to choose their leaders as Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, the Niger and Togo hold presidential and legislative elections. Additionally, the United States is encouraged by the presidential elections that took place in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau in 2019, and by the ongoing work of the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission in the Gambia. However, we remain concerned about efforts in some West African countries to restrict fundamental freedoms of political expression. To that end, the United States urges Governments to create peaceful and open political environments, respect the freedom of expression and assembly and facilitate the full participation of media, civil society and opposition groups in public life. We encourage all actors to use dialogue rather than violence to address their differences.

In conclusion, as the Special Representative said earlier, the time for action is now. The United States encourages him to redouble the Office's efforts with stakeholders in order to take concrete steps towards long-term stability in the region. That stability is within reach and it is what the people of West Africa both need and deserve. He has our support.

**Mr. Mabhongo** (South Africa): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Viet Nam on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I also wish to welcome all the new members that have just joined the Council. I also wish to thank Special Representative Chambas for his briefing today and would like to take this opportunity to commend his efforts and those of his team in efficiently discharging their mandate in an increasingly challenging environment, as we heard from his briefing.

South Africa wishes to express its full support for the role of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in the West African region

and the Sahel. We support the renewal of the mandate of that important Office, on which the Council will deliberate during the course of this month.

We commend the efforts of UNOWAS to strengthen national and regional capacities for conflict resilience and to promote an environment conducive to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the region. That is imperative, as continued efforts to improve such capacities — in tandem with security strategies — pave the way for peace and stability.

South Africa remains concerned about the continued terrorist attacks against civilians, security and defence forces, as well as peacekeepers in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and countries of the Lake Chad basin, which have resulted in many fatalities. It is disturbing that the terrorist attacks are spreading to other countries in the region that were previously not affected.

We are also deeply concerned by the increase in intercommunal violence, which is increasingly becoming a security threat and exacerbating the security and humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel. Effective measures need to be devised to resolve the farmer and herder disputes as well as intercommunal violence. In that context, we welcome the collaboration of UNOWAS with the Peacebuilding Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund in supporting national and cross-border programmes to address tensions associated with conflicts related to transhumance, prevent violent extremism and empower young people and women in peacebuilding processes and conflict-prevention mechanisms.

We are encouraged by the initiatives undertaken by countries in the region to improve the security situation. The decision taken by the extraordinary summit on terrorism of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held in September 2019, is indicative of the determination and political will of African leaders to collectively address the security challenges in the region. The region's resolute determination should be equally matched by the intensified support of the international community so as to assist in successfully implementing the stabilization strategy for countries affected by Boko Haram, the priority investment plan of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. We believe that the implementation of those plans, envisioned in

the aforementioned strategies, will contribute towards addressing the challenges faced by the region.

The partnership between UNOWAS and regional and subregional bodies, including the African Union, ECOWAS, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Multinational Joint Task Force and the G-5 Sahel, as well as the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, to strengthen coordination efforts towards the implementation of regional strategies is of paramount importance.

The continuation of consultation processes and national dialogues to address election-related issues by countries of the region is commendable in preserving peace and stability. In that context, we encourage UNOWAS to continue to pursue collaboration with ECOWAS, its mediation missions and its good offices, especially in view of the planned elections in many countries of the region over the course of 2020.

We welcome the commitment of countries in the region to implementing the women and peace and security agenda, in line with resolution 1325 (2000). We are particularly pleased with the recommendation emanating from the annual consultations of the Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel held in October 2019 regarding the organization by UNOWAS of an annual regional forum for women and young people. That recommendation resonates with the call made in resolution 2493 (2019) encouraging regional and subregional groups to consider convening meetings in the lead-up to the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) with the participation of Governments, relevant stakeholders and civil society to review the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda.

We also commend the efforts made to improve gender parity in countries of West Africa through the adoption of relevant legislation, which will increase the number of women appointed to senior positions and improve the involvement and meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes.

In conclusion, we reiterate our position that a comprehensive approach that includes addressing the root causes of insecurity and instability is very important for the realization of sustainable peace in West Africa and the Sahel.

**Mr. Heusgen** (Germany): Let me add my voice to those who have congratulated you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank our United States friends for their very effective presidency, which allowed us to have the last 10 days of 2019 without Council meetings, and I welcome the new members of the Council.

Allow me to start by congratulating Mr. Mohamed Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa, on his briefing and by expressing appreciation for the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/1005). Germany fully subscribes to what Mr. Chambas said and to the content of the Secretary-General's report. I am very impressed by the many positive words spoken around the table. For our part, it was very significant to hear the Ambassador of the Niger speaking so positively about the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and its staff, since his country is one of the most affected. We also support those, such as my French colleague, who said that they support UNOWAS and want to strengthen it materially and financially given the fact that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, as mentioned in the report, takes an integrated and holistic approach — a formula that was first used today by our colleague from the Dominican Republic, as well as by others. We agree with what Mr. Chambas said with regard to such an approach being crucial to conflict-prevention.

By way of a few examples of the Special Representative's efforts, I would highlight the facilitation of national dialogues, assistance regarding institutional and constitutional reforms, the promotion of human rights and the inclusion of the gender perspective in his work.

With regard to the situation in West Africa, it is not necessary to repeat what has already been said in that regard. There have been positive developments in some countries, such as the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Liberia, including with regard to elections and other issues. However, there has also been a significant increase in the number of lives lost. The figures given by the Special Representative, including with regard to displaced persons, were tragic.

In December we discussed the root causes of conflicts and violence in Africa (see S/PV.8685). In my intervention, I would like to highlight the most important

points from our perspective. The first factor, which has been highlighted by many speakers around the table, is climate change and its security implications. Climate change leads to an increasing scarcity of resources and scarce resources lead to conflicts between herders and farmers, as was highlighted in the report. Scarce resources create a breeding ground for violence, violent extremism and terrorism and cause migration.

The second factor is gender inequality. In that regard, I would like to commend my colleague from South Africa, who has just made a very passionate appeal for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Progress has been made in the work on gender parity. I would also like to highlight the African Women Leaders Network initiative, which, in my view, does very important work. Progress has been made in some countries, including the Niger. Gender equality and women's participation are not goals in themselves. The effective and equal participation of women in decision-making processes increases the possibilities for sustainable peace and security, and there are statistical studies in that regard.

The third issue is human rights violations, which occur far too often at the hands of terrorists as well as in the context of counter-terrorism measures. In that connection, like Mr. Chambas, I too would like to cite the Secretary-General saying that counter-terrorism measures must gain the trust and support of local populations, which I see as key. In counter-terrorism measures disrespect for human rights drives marginalized peoples to violent extremism.

My fourth point concerns school closures. Terrorists often target schools in their actions and schools are closed for security reasons. That is one of the saddest developments that we have witnessed in the Sahel region and beyond. Education is key to combating the root causes of radicalization, violence and poverty. Depriving children of their right to education is at the root of future problems.

Let me conclude. We need to take an integrated approach, as is being done, and we are very much in favour of strengthening UNOWAS. We also believe, as my British colleague said, that we have to see how the efforts of all the United Nations agencies can be streamlined so that they can work together in the most effective way. In that context, I see the Resident Coordinators as having a very important task. We need collaboration, as is being undertaken, and I would

highlight collaboration with regional partners, the Economic Community of West African States, the Group of Five for the Sahel and so on. Here I would point to my South African colleague who just stressed that issue.

I would also like to take up one point made by my Belgian colleague, Marc, with regard to the exchange with the Peacebuilding Commission and support for the Peacebuilding Fund, which I also see as very important.

Finally, primary responsibility for all development in the region lies with individual Governments. They have to build trust in their State and in State institutions; provide basic social services to their population; ensure the rule of law and respect for human rights; engage with civil society; and, in particular, integrate women and young people.

**Mr. Baati (Tunisia)** (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, which is your first month as a member of the Council. I would like also to congratulate your delegation and to express our readiness to work with you and the other members of the Council with a view to ensuring the discharge of the tasks entrusted by the Charter of the United Nations to the members of the Security Council.

Allow me also, through you, to convey my thanks to other colleagues and to the Secretariat for facilitating the work of my delegation here in the Council. I want also to thank the United States delegation and Ambassador Kelly Craft for her successful presidency in December.

I would like to sincerely thank Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, for his insightful briefing on the activities of his Office and his assiduous efforts to achieve peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel, in cooperation with international and regional partners.

Since I am taking the floor for the first time on the African issue, I wish to emphasize that, given the importance of Africa to our identity and policies, security in the Sahel and West Africa and the security of Tunisia and the Arab Maghreb region are inextricably linked.

In my statement I will touch on three points.

First, concerning the role played by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), my country's delegation appreciates the Office's pivotal role and its comprehensive approach to addressing the growing challenges ravaging the region. We also commend its approach to communication, national dialogue and mediation efforts as well as to prioritizing prevention. All of this contributes to ensuring an environment conducive to the elections that are slated for several countries of the region in 2020. That approach has proved effective and important in preventing conflicts and crises and has enabled UNOWAS to play a pivotal role in enhancing national and regional capacity and strengthening democracy and good governance while empowering women and achieving greater gender equality through laws that strengthen women's presence and participation in decision-making.

My country supports the strategic review that was completed on strengthening the mandate of UNOWAS, and it is our hope that the consultations under way will conclude in the approval by Security Council members of expanding and enhancing the tasks that are conducted by the Office.

Secondly, regarding the security and humanitarian situations, Tunisia has been following with great concern developments in West Africa and the Sahel. We have reviewed with great interest the content of the report of the Secretary-General on this issue (S/2019/1005), especially concerning the increase in the number of terrorist and criminal attacks and the worsening of organized transnational crime.

The increased capacity of criminal and terrorist groups to move about and even exercise control over territory and inhabitants in certain regions and to take advantage of the public authority vacuum and the lack of basic services is for us a cause of great concern. The conflicts and clashes witnessed in this region between herders and farmers because of natural resources, in addition to the increase in religious and ethnic conflict, constitute a serious threat to security and stability and create a breeding ground for terrorist groups and extremists.

Terrorist attacks have led to major population displacement and resulted in many internally displaced persons moving from one region to another because of the lack of security and the worsening humanitarian situation. That has led to the closure of health-care

facilities and schools because of the total absence of national and local authority.

Thirdly, pertaining to the endeavours to achieve security and peace in the region, we support the efforts of the countries that participate in the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force in addressing existing challenges. We believe that it is necessary to support the countries of the region in strengthening their capabilities to deal with emerging threats, meaning that we must stress a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that takes into consideration security and political aspects, including good governance, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union vision of silencing the guns on the African continent.

We wish here to underscore the importance of ensuring support for political and security approaches in conjunction with development approaches so as to tackle the root causes of conflict and instability in West Africa and the Sahel. It is our view that the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel is a key means of assisting the countries of the region to actually achieve this, given the mechanisms that it includes to intensify and coordinate international and regional support for the countries of the region.

In that regard, we commend the regional and international initiatives undertaken in 2019, including the Economic Community of West African States Summit and the Biarritz meeting of the Group of Seven (G-7) held in August, which focused on the situation in the region, as well as the July 2019 meeting among G-7 Ministers for Cooperation and the European Union Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, along with their counterparts from the five Sahel countries, dealing with the root causes of the lack of development and the worsening of poverty and marginalization in the Sahel region. We look forward to the Summit that will be held in Paris shortly. All those initiatives attest to an increasing awareness at the regional and international levels of the need for a cross-border approach to reinvigorating the broad international partnership to provide the urgently needed support for the people of the region.

In conclusion, we renew our full support for UNOWAS and its Head, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to see you in the President's seat, Sir, and we wish your country a successful

presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. We also welcome all the colleagues who have joined us in the new year. We welcome their participation and stand ready to cooperate closely and constructively with them. We also thank our American colleagues, whose presidency in December was very successful and effective.

I also would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, for his briefing.

We share the concerns voiced by Mr. Chambas with regard to the further deterioration of the security situation in that part of the continent. We are especially concerned that, in the Sahel, the geographical area of terrorist activity, drug trafficking and organized crime is expanding. Extremist ideology is, regrettably, winning over an increasing number of adherents. Almost weekly, we receive tragic reports about the deaths of dozens of military personnel and civilians at the hands of criminal gangs in various countries of the region.

During the latest reporting period, Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger were especially negatively affected. We reaffirm our full support for those countries in the fight against terrorism and express our condolences with regard to the latest terrorist attacks, in particular in the Niger. At the same time, it is important to remember that the States of the Gulf of Guinea are also at risk of destabilization.

Who is to blame for these unfortunate developments? As we can see from today's discussion, opinions differ with regard to that question. Naturally, we do not dispute the fact that the region faces fundamental problems, such as weak State governance, intercommunal and interethnic tensions, inadequate protection of human rights and climate change. They all need to be addressed.

However, were we to look back not just one or two years, but over recent decades, it is clear that those phenomena are hardly new and that, overall, the local authorities have been able to mitigate them. We are convinced that the real trigger that set off the current unprecedented crisis was the reckless actions of those who unleashed chaos in Libya through the use of military force to overthrow the legitimate authorities there. As many stakeholders of the region have pointed out, it will hardly be possible to achieve peace and

stability in the Sahel without stabilizing the situation in that country.

Eradicating terrorism is one of the top priorities for African countries. In that regard, the efforts of States of the region to counter increasing threats are extremely timely. They are particularly important at a time when terrorist groups are, increasingly, actively coordinating their actions. We support the pledges made by the States members of the Economic Community of West African States at the recent summits in Niamey and Abuja to raise funds to combat jihadists. We share the view that the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Multinational Joint Task Force established to counter Boko Haram require additional international support. For our part, we are providing assistance to African States through bilateral channels.

At the same time, it is clear that terrorism cannot be eradicated by military means alone. It is necessary to effectively counter the expansion of extremist ideology, begin addressing acute socioeconomic problems and strengthen State institutions and foster a culture of respect for human rights. In that regard, we attach great importance to the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, as well as the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

We hope that the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 2020 in many countries of the region will take place in an environment of law and order. We welcome the successful conclusion of the second round of presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau. We hope that they will turn a new page in the history of the country, thereby making instability and political turbulence a thing of the past.

In conclusion, we once again assure Mr. Chambas of Russia's continued support for his personal efforts and the activities of his Office in addressing regional crises and issues involving political mediation, helping to improve State institutions and finding ways to foster economic development and counter extremism and terrorism. The scope and results of his work deserve the highest praise.

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

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2019/1005) on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, for his comprehensive briefing.

My delegation wishes to make the following observations.

First, we commend the unceasing work and efforts of UNOWAS from 2016 to 2019 in assisting and sustaining peace and conflict prevention efforts in the countries of West Africa and the Sahel. We also welcome the positive developments in the political process, post-conflict reconstruction and the peace outcome of the past several years in the countries in the region.

Secondly, although important progress has been made over the years, we are of the view that greater national, regional and international efforts are needed to consolidate the still fragile peace and to address paramount development challenges. We are concerned about the deteriorating security environment in some countries, especially violent extremism, terrorism and criminal activity. Such blended threats constitute a perfect storm, seriously undermining peace and sustainable development in any country. We strongly condemn all forms of violence and terrorism, notably the recent deadly terrorist attacks on civilians and security forces in the Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali.

Thirdly, we welcome the results of the presidential election in Guinea-Bissau on 29 December 2019. We also support Togo, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana and the Niger in ensuring successful elections in 2020.

Fourthly, we support every initiative and effort to enhance regional and international cooperation and partnerships to promote greater social and economic development and to tackle the root causes and other security-related threats, including climate change, in the region.

Finally, we support the role of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), including Chad, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger, in fighting transnational terrorism in the region and hope that the international community will continue to support the G-5 Sahel Force, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.*