



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

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Friday, 12 July 2024, 10.30 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Ms. Evstigneeva. . . . .	(Russian Federation)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria. . . . .	Mr. Yahiaoui
	China. . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador. . . . .	Mr. De La Gasca
	France. . . . .	Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault
	Guyana. . . . .	Ms. Benn
	Japan. . . . .	Mrs. Shino
	Malta. . . . .	Ms. Cassar
	Mozambique. . . . .	Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea. . . . .	Mr. Hwang
	Sierra Leone. . . . .	Mr. Kanu
	Slovenia. . . . .	Mrs. Blokar Drobič
	Switzerland. . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. . . . .	Mr. Eckersley
	United States of America. . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## 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/2024/521)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.*

### **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/2024/521)**

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, 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/2024/521, 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. Simão.

**Mr. Simão** (*spoke in French*): I have the honour today to introduce the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

Let me begin by congratulating the Russian Federation on its leadership in the Council during the month of July.

As the United Nations prepares for the Summit of the Future with the aim of building a more resilient global community for current and future generations, West Africa is plagued by profound challenges. A worrisome picture emerges — one of growing insecurity, worsening humanitarian crises and insufficient cooperation among States to effectively address those challenges, particularly in the area of security. Those problems are exacerbated by the strained relations between certain Member States and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The socioeconomic situation also remains worrisome, as slowed growth is compounded by those political and security instabilities.

As a result of insecurity, approximately 7 million people are internally displaced or have fled across borders — a number greater than the population of each

of more than 100 countries around the world. Despite sustained efforts and a heavy material and human toll, those figures have risen again, leaving millions of people dependent on humanitarian assistance. In addition to daily insecurity, people have to cope with the lack of electricity, the closure of health centres and the interruption of other services, placing the incredible resilience of the population under enormous strain. In addition, more than 8,000 schools remain closed, depriving hundreds of thousands of children of access to education and eroding the very basis of any future development in their countries. It is very worrisome to note that the humanitarian response plan launched by the United Nations is only funded at approximately 15 per cent.

Despite that tense context, it is essential to also recognize the remarkable successes in terms of democratic practices that are emerging in several countries, demonstrating resilience and commitment to democratic governance. Mauritania just held a presidential election within the constitutional deadline. During the election, the candidates presented their vision of the country's future to an increasingly well-informed electorate. In Senegal, strong institutions resolved a political crisis, paving the way for the election of a young leader, bearing the hope of change advocated by young people throughout the region. In Ghana, after holding primaries to bolster the internal democratic operation of political parties, the country is preparing for another vote to elect the country's next leader, as the incumbent President has reached the two-term limit. In Liberia, a new Government smoothly succeeded President George Weah, who was not given a second term by voters.

Nevertheless, I regret the low number of women candidates running for elected office. I welcome the example of the women who stood as candidates in Senegal's presidential election, but I urge the countries of the region to adapt their legislative frameworks and the ways in which they are implemented, including at the political party level, so that more women have a chance to hold leadership positions at all levels.

With that in mind, we at UNOWAS are working to promote in a very concrete way women's leadership in resolving of political crises at the regional and national levels. In particular, as part of one initiative that is under way, prominent African women are organizing to engage in a mediation process for the West African subregion.

(spoke in English)

The political and civic space continues to shrink, especially in countries in transition. Transitional regimes have postponed the return to constitutional rule, causing fears of prolonged uncertainty. Amid reports by human rights organizations of exactions against civilians, new legislation and policies have limited civil liberties in countries in transition, with allegations of human rights abuses entrenching communitarian cleavages.

In neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, the trial of the suspects in relation to the 2022 coup attempt, most of whom have been held in pre-trial detention for more than two years, was postponed *sine die* as the lawyers raised challenges to the legitimacy of the military court and to its composition and competency, among other things.

Nevertheless, we must be mindful that questions of justice and accountability lie at the heart of many conflicts across the region. In Guinea, 15 years later, the ongoing trial on the 28 September 2009 brutal military repression exposes the deep societal rifts and the desire for justice and reconciliation. I also wholeheartedly salute the efforts by the Gambia and its partners to accelerate the implementation of the recommendations of the country's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. Equally, I welcome the steps taken to establish a war and economic crimes court in Liberia, more than 20 years after the end of the civil war, as a vehicle for national healing and reweaving the fabric of society. I applaud the proactive start made by the new authorities in Senegal on undertaking a reform of the judiciary in order to serve the needs of the population, thereby strengthening trust in institutions and social cohesion.

UNOWAS continues to provide support to the West African Bar Association, as a forum promoting the rule of law, respect for human rights and adherence to international human rights instruments, particularly the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. With partners, we are also closely following up on the efforts by the Government, political stakeholders and civil society in the Gambia to bring to a fruitful conclusion the adoption of a new constitution that embodies the aspirations of the people. I also welcome the recommendations by the National Assembly of the Gambia Joint Committee on Health and Gender that called for upholding the Women (Amendment) Bill of 2015, which criminalizes female genital mutilation.

UNOWAS is also working closely with partners — notably, the African Union, ECOWAS and the Commonwealth — to support the implementation of Sierra Leone's Agreement for National Unity, helping the country to overcome the grievances linked to the contested June 2023 electoral process. In June, I undertook a joint mission of the international moral guarantors of the agreement, with ECOWAS and the African Union, that engaged the two parties to reach an agreement on outstanding issues, which they committed to implement in good faith, leading to the subsequent submission by the Cross-Party Committee of its report to President Maada Bio on 1 July.

The Governments of the three Central Sahel States continue to argue that ECOWAS no longer serves their interests. Consequently, those three transitional Governments have reduced their participation in regional security cooperation mechanisms, even as terrorism and transnational organized crime remain a pervasive threat and are also spilling over to the coastal States. However, renouncing ECOWAS implies relinquishing the key benefits of ECOWAS regionalism: regional integration, the freedom of movement, security cooperation and an integrated regional economy. That would be hurtful to both sides. As the ECOWAS 2020-2024 Action Plan on Eradicating Terrorism is being re-evaluated, it is important that we continue engaging with and supporting the Accra initiative, which provides a valuable framework that has yet to realize its potential. We must also meet the regional expectations, expressed during the 7 July ECOWAS summit, that the Council's resolution 2719 (2023) — whose aim is to support African Union-led peace operations — will provide a valuable opportunity for securing the adequate, predictable and sustainable financing of peace support operations.

However, I am encouraged that ECOWAS is facilitating a more vigorous approach to its engagements with the three countries, including through the recent designation by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, at its 7 July summit, of President Diomaye Faye of Senegal as the ECOWAS facilitator in its engagement with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, in collaboration with President Faure Gnassingbé of Togo. I have appealed to ECOWAS and regional leaders to prioritize ECOWAS' trademark solidarity, and I have encouraged the leadership of transitional Governments in the Central Sahel to contribute to the preservation of regional unity in West Africa. The upcoming ECOWAS extraordinary summit on the future of the

community, which was agreed upon by the Authority of Heads of State and Government, represents a welcome opportunity for all stakeholders to consult and chart the way forward in the interests of the subregion.

In Bamako, Niamey and Ouagadougou, UNOWAS organized exchanges between the regional directors of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, on the one hand, and national stakeholders and authorities on the other, notably to ensure that United Nations access to local communities in need of humanitarian assistance should be granted. Indeed, we must put the people at the forefront of all our efforts. Accordingly, we should work resolutely with partners towards ensuring that essential natural resources, particularly water, are readily available to communities in need, to support their sustainable development and significantly mitigate a source of often deadly competition.

As dialogue is more crucial than ever, I applaud the decision by Cameroon and Nigeria to pursue the demarcation of the last 36 kilometres of their border — out of 2,100 kilometres — where disagreements existed, and to conclude that work by 2025 within the framework of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, which I chair, instead of referring the matter back to the International Court of Justice.

Against the multiple challenges, UNOWAS will stay the course. As I deploy the good offices of the Secretary-General, I shall continue advocating democratic principles and practices, while building consensus, promoting good governance and insisting on the observance of human rights and humanitarian principles. By way of illustration, co-chairing with ECOWAS and the Liptako-Gourma Authority of the Regional Working Group on Climate, Peace and Security, we are contributing to building resilience as increasingly volatile climate conditions aggravate food security and intercommunal conflicts. Moreover, we have made significant progress in enhancing our collaboration with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, the Development Coordination Office, Resident Coordinators and United Nations country teams. Convening the regional working group on women and peace and security, we are encouraging the implementation of the Council's resolution 1325 (2000)- and resolution 2250 (2015)-related action plans on women and youth empowerment. In that connection, I welcome the generous support of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund,

which has allowed the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UNOWAS, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations country teams to establish national coalitions in Benin and Liberia to develop national action plans on the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda and harness the immense potential of our young women and men for the promotion of peace and security in West Africa.

It is by speaking with one voice, interacting with Governments and partners at different levels, that we can have a significant and lasting impact. In that regard, I can assure the Council that the United Nations continues to be looked to as a vital rescuer in these challenging times, as the peoples in the region expect us to embody the values of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. As the Summit of the Future seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of collaborative action, I would like to once again thank the Council for its support in the execution of the UNOWAS mandate. In line with our mandate, we will continue to work in concert with our regional and international partners to consolidate peace, security and democracy, leading to economic and social development in West Africa and the Sahel.

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

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

**Mr. Kanu** (Sierra Leone): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council plus (A3+), namely, Algeria, Mozambique and my country, Sierra Leone, as well as Guyana.

I thank Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), for his comprehensive briefing.

The A3+ takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of UNOWAS (S/2024/521) and avails itself of this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of Special Representative Simão for his engagement in the region and the pivotal role of his good offices in the implementation of the UNOWAS mandate. We commend States in the region for their continued resilience in the face of multidimensional challenges to their security, stability and peace consolidation.

We are optimistic about the role of the Security Council in the consolidation of peace in the region. That is demonstrated by the unanimous adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2024/3) on UNOWAS in May of this year. The adoption of the presidential statement brought all 15 members of the Council together, not only to adopt a product but to engage, consult, identify and support a solution seeking to address the challenges in the region. We hope that the Council can employ the same approach in addressing, in particular, the persistent and concerning security situation and humanitarian crises.

The A3+ acknowledges the role of State institutions in advancing peace and development in the region and welcomes the many positive achievements in that regard. We highlight the notable progress towards achieving transitional justice, in the Gambia's implementation of the recommendations of its Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, and Liberia's issuance of the executive order for the establishment of the Office of War and Economic Crimes Court for Liberia. The A3+ applauds the successful elections in Senegal, Togo and Mauritania. We note the role of the Constitutional Court in Benin, the Independent Electoral Commission of Côte d'Ivoire, the National Assemblies of Togo and Senegal and renewed confidence in the Electoral Commission in Ghana. We applaud their efforts in undertaking initiatives for electoral reform and addressing tensions surrounding national governance architectures, which by extension are key milestones in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Against that backdrop, the A3+ wishes to make the following points.

First, the A3+ reiterates its call for the Council to pay due attention to the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the region. The ongoing threat of jihadist insurgency, violent extremism and terrorism is made all the more menacing as the forms those phenomena continue to evolve, eluding efforts to tackle and address their devastating effects. We remain deeply concerned about the activities of extremist groups such as the Al-Qaida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam walMuslimin (JNIM), and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara across the region. We condemn in the strongest terms all acts of terrorism and violent extremism and violations of international humanitarian law carried out by those groups, especially attacks on civilians and

civilian objects. Their strong operational capabilities, particularly in the Liptako-Gourma region, are a source of grave concern, and we urge all relevant actors to cease financing and providing support in the form of arms to such groups.

We underscore the importance of supporting Governments and regional bodies in operationalizing existing initiatives that prevent radicalization and combat the spread of and tackle terrorism. We also urge that a joint security mechanism be established to take strong action to address organized crime and bring to account all actors, sponsors, financiers and benefactors.

The A3+ welcomes the efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and institution-building to address the evolving threat of terrorism in West African and the Sahel, including the efforts of the Government of Nigeria, in organizing a high-level African counter-terrorism meeting in Abuja, with support from the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in April 2024. We are pleased that Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão participated in the meeting, had bilateral engagements in the margins with high-level representatives of Ghana, Nigeria, the African Union and ECOWAS and secured their support to leverage the Accra initiative to foster relations between the Central Sahel and coastal countries. The A3+ also welcomes the decision of the thirty-sixth ordinary session of the summit of the African Union, held in February 2023, on the need to change the name of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism to the African Union Counter-Terrorism Centre and review its status and structure so as to align it with similar international bodies, and on the need to improve synergies and further enhance the efficiency of African Member States in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

We also take note of the final communiqué of the sixty-fifth ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held on 7 July 2024 in Abuja. We note the reassertion of the Authority's commitment to eradicating terrorism, activating a regional force to fight terrorism, pursuing mobilization opportunities with the African Union Commission and working within the framework of resolution 2719 (2023) to achieve cooperation among the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security.

Secondly, the A3+ notes the urgent need to address the dire humanitarian crises in the region and to respond



to growing food insecurity, malnutrition, school closures and health concerns. We note with concern the increase in mass forcible displacement of people and the disproportionate impact on women and children. We are deeply concerned about the increase in the number of internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, while noting that numbers are approaching 6.9 million. The growing number of refugees and asylum seekers in neighbouring Mauritania, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo is also deeply concerning.

We note that people in those situations, especially the youth, are engaging in high-risk activities, including migration, which comes with its own challenges. We reiterate our call for scaled-up humanitarian assistance to conflict areas and host countries, which have limited resources and overburdened social infrastructure and are therefore unable to meet the basic needs of those vulnerable people. We are deeply concerned that of the \$3.2 billion needed for the humanitarian response plans for Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, targeting 15 million people, only 13 per cent had been received as of 23 May. We agree with the assessment that, without additional funding, millions of vulnerable people will be left without vital support.

Thirdly, the A3+ emphasizes the need for political solutions and unity in the region. In order to counter the far-reaching effects of security, political and other challenges, it is critical for all stakeholders to embrace common approaches and transcend political interests and regional polarization. Having acknowledged the role of State institutions in advancing peace, development, transitional justice processes and successful elections in the region, the A3+ remains deeply concerned about the challenging political transitions and the continuing impact of unconstitutional changes of government. We therefore encourage Governments to approach good governance practices holistically. We underscore the need for countries undergoing political transition to adhere to their electoral timelines and ensure democratic consolidation, good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, gender equality, sustainable development and the inclusion of civil society in democratic processes.

We take note of the development regarding the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States and the position of the Authority of ECOWAS, as reflected in the final communiqué of the Authority's sixty-fifth ordinary session. The A3+ sees an opportunity for

constructive dialogue and welcomes the Authority's designation of His Excellency Mr. Bassirou Diomaye Diakharr Faye, President of Senegal, as ECOWAS facilitator in the ECOWAS engagement with the Alliance of the Sahel States, in collaboration with His Excellency Mr. Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, President of the Togolese Republic.

The A3+ strongly believes that solutions that address underlying socioeconomic hardships and interrelated intercommunity tensions and the effects of climate change would not only improve the situation of people in the region but also prevent conflict and mitigate the situations that lead to conflict, including the radicalization, recruitment and use of youths in violent extremist groups. In addition, the spread and entrenchment of violent extremist ideologies in communities must be significantly addressed.

Despite those challenges, West African communities are rooted in strong traditions of self-reliance and innovation, which can be utilized to advance their human, socioeconomic and civil rights. To that end, we believe that addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting good governance, eliminating foreign interference and investing in development are crucial for the long-term stability and prosperity of the region.

In conclusion, the A3+ is of the considered view that the situation in West Africa and the Sahel offers an opportunity for the global governance system to collaborate to enhance unity, cohesion and cooperation in the region in order to achieve mutual security, stability and socioeconomic development. In that regard, there is a need for pragmatic and progressive solutions that are regionally owned and supported by the international community.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I welcome the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, and thank him for his briefing.

West Africa and the Sahel have tremendous potential. The region is one of the youngest in the world, in particular the Sahel, where most of the population is under the age of 25 years. We must therefore endeavour to respond to the needs and potential of those young people. Investment in health, education and vocational training could produce huge gains as a result of demographic development. Should, nonetheless, that

potential not be bolstered and sustained, significant risks and challenges could arise beyond the subregion.

The Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2024/3) on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in May. It represents a strong message of support, unity and solidarity from the Council vis-à-vis the region and the work of the Special Representative. The statement aims specifically to strengthen the region's potential and support it in meeting the challenges it faces, alongside the efforts of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States.

I would like to make three points.

First, we call on all parties to the conflict to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population. Large-scale attacks by armed groups and an upsurge in clashes with national security forces are affecting civilians. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to atrocities and forced recruitment. The relevant authorities should work with the United Nations to develop concrete action plans to end violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law and reinforce the protection of civilians and access to basic services. By way of example, Switzerland is working in Mali to provide educational opportunities in conflict-affected areas. Furthermore, the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/521) informs us that the operational context for humanitarian agencies remains challenging owing to insecurity and restrictions on access. In that regard, we recall resolution 2730 (2024), on the protection of United Nations and humanitarian personnel.

Secondly, it is crucial to promote dialogue and coordinate multinational, regional and bilateral commitments so as to mitigate internal and inter-State tensions and prevent the crises from worsening. The resurgence of tensions in the subregion is worrisome. We commend the advocacy efforts and good offices of Special Representative Simão and other actors. We also welcome the decision by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in May 2024 to appoint a high-level facilitator for the countries in transition. In order to rebuild trust and find a way out of the many crises that are gripping the subregion, Switzerland remains committed and is contributing to promoting spaces for engagement and dialogue between various stakeholders.

Thirdly, civic and political space is vital to millions of young people in the region in fulfilling their

economic and social potential. The shrinking of that space in some countries is worrisome. The Secretary-General's report highlights, among other restrictions, a prohibition on the activities of political parties and civil society organizations. A vibrant civil society holds Governments accountable, ensures transparency and fosters trust in the Government. We call on all States to create an enabling environment and ensure respect for the rights of peaceful assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression, including for members of all political parties. In that respect, Switzerland takes note of Mali's recent decision to lift the suspension of political parties and the activities of a political nature of associations. We therefore encourage UNOWAS to continue its work on promoting good governance.

Switzerland will pursue its commitment to sustainable peace, development in the region and the mitigation of security risks linked to climate change. In view of our presidency in October, we will also ensure that exchanges with the Peace and Security Council of the African Union allow for in-depth reflection on the Sahel, in line with regional expectations and those of the countries concerned. We urge both Councils to maintain their support and focus on the region.

**Mrs. Shino** (Japan): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão for the insightful briefing.

Japan welcomes positive recent developments in the region, including in Senegal, Liberia, the Gambia and, most recently, Mauritania, notably in the fields of democracy and the rule of law and judicial reforms. We also welcome the peaceful completion of the Cameroon-Nigeria border demarcation in June. At the same time, we remain deeply concerned about rising insecurity, political instability, humanitarian crises, the severe adverse effects of climate change and stagnant socioeconomic development in the Sahel region.

In that regard, the importance of the mediation efforts of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWAS) and its good offices role, working closely with regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), cannot be overstated. We call on the countries of the region and other stakeholders to coordinate and cooperate with UNOWAS to advance regional peace and stability.

In tackling the region's challenges, we need not only short-term solutions but a holistic approach that

addresses the root causes with a long-term perspective that puts human security at its centre. On that note, I wish to highlight three points.

First, on security, the Central Sahel is now the epicentre of terrorism, according to the 2024 Global Terrorism Index. And yes, force or physical intervention is needed to counter terrorism. However, when security forces do not respect the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law, people and communities cannot trust State institutions. Therefore, terrorists can again exploit societal fragility.

Secondly, people must have a sense of ownership in the building of a resilient society. To enable that, democratic representation is vital, political and civic space is essential and inclusivity in all processes reflecting the voices of various actors, such as women and youth, is key. Regarding the transition in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and the Niger, it is important for the international community to continue engagement with those countries, in coordination with the AU and ECOWAS in that respect.

Thirdly, we need to address the immediate humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian agencies are struggling to operate owing to insecurity, access limitations and other logistical constraints, especially in the Central Sahel. We call for full, safe, rapid and unhindered access for the delivery of humanitarian aid to all persons in need. Japan, for its part, is providing humanitarian support, through international organizations, addressing food insecurity, providing basic services such as water and health, mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change and assisting internally displaced persons, refugees and host communities, among others.

Many of the region's challenges are transnational. Japan commends regional efforts such as the Accra initiative, the Multinational Joint Task Force and the recent discussion to activate the ECOWAS Standby Force to tackle transnational security threats. Recognizing that terrorists take advantage of regional divisions, we encourage dialogue among ECOWAS and Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger to safeguard the gains of regional integration.

In conclusion, the Security Council must remain engaged, and Japan remains committed to contributing towards a stable and prosperous West Africa and the Sahel.

**Mr. Geng Shuang (China)** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Simão for his briefing.

Over the recent period, countries in West Africa and the Sahel have made efforts to maintain peace and deepen cooperation and have achieved positive results. However, they have had to face multiple challenges while doing so, including a serious terrorist situation, increasing economic and development difficulties and growing food insecurity. The international community and the Security Council should therefore provide more constructive support. I have three points to make.

First, since the beginning of this year, Senegal and Mauritania have successfully completed their general elections, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are actively preparing for elections, while Burkina Faso and others are engaged in domestic political dialogue. The advancement of those important political agendas is of great significance to the consolidation of regional peace and stability. We welcome the recent Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit and the re-election of Nigeria as the rotating chairperson and expect ECOWAS to continue to coordinate and cooperate with countries of the region to play a leading role in enhancing regional unity, maintaining regional stability and promoting regional development. Regarding the political transitions in Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso, among others, the international community should uphold the principle of African solutions to African problems, avoid heavy-handed pressuring, encourage all parties to bridge their differences through dialogue and support the countries of the region in exploring development paths in line with their national conditions.

Secondly, China appreciates the efforts of ECOWAS and countries of the region to combat terrorism and expresses serious concern about the gravity of the issue in the region. In his report (S/2024/521), the Secretary-General points out that a lack of coordination among regional counter-terrorism initiatives and a lack of funding have limited the effectiveness of regional counter-terrorism operations. China welcomes ECOWAS's active promotion of the joint counter-terrorism unit and the announcement of the establishment of a regional counter-terrorism centre in Nigeria at the high-level African meeting on counter-terrorism. We support ECOWAS in continuing to play a leading role in regional counter-terrorism efforts and in promoting integration and coordination among various regional counter-terrorism initiatives. Countries such



as Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso stand at the forefront of counter-terrorism and bear the brunt of its consequences. As such, the international community should provide more constructive support in terms of funding, equipment and logistical supplies.

Thirdly, over 25 million people in the Sahel are currently in dire need of urgent humanitarian assistance, with more than 32 million facing the risk of food insecurity. However, external assistance to the countries of the region is decreasing, and obtaining foreign credit and financing is becoming more difficult. The international community, especially developed countries, should maintain their aid levels and implement their commitments through concrete actions. The focus should be on helping the countries of the region to strengthen capacity-building for sustainable development and to eliminate the root causes of terrorism and violence. China attaches great importance to the challenges posed by climate change to those countries and is concerned about their lack of means and capacity to address those challenges. Developed countries should fulfil their climate financing commitments as soon as possible, settle historical debt and provide practical help to countries of the region to cope with the impact of climate change.

Recently, after a three-year interval, the Council issued a presidential statement (S/PRST/2024/3) on the situation in the region, clearly demonstrating the attention that the Council pays to the issue, which we welcome. China will continue to support the work of the Special Representative for West Africa and UNOWAS, deepen cooperation with countries of the region in all areas and contribute to promoting peace and stability in the region.

**Mr. De La Gasca** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão for his briefing.

The West Africa and Sahel region continues to face challenges to its political stability and security. In that context, the role of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in providing good offices, mediation and political facilitation within the framework of preventive diplomacy, is more relevant than ever.

The work of UNOWAS in conflict prevention and the reduction of tensions related to elections and political transitions, in cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, is commendable.

Several countries have taken important steps to consolidate their democratic processes and institutionality, such as the holding of peaceful elections in recent months in Liberia and Senegal. Progress has also been made in electoral processes in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mauritania, and in constitutional reforms in the Gambia.

The planned electoral processes to return to democratic life must be completed according to schedule. In that regard, the announcements by Mali and Burkina Faso about the delay of those deadlines to 2027 and 2029, respectively, and Guinea's announcement about the possibility of not meeting the time frame for elections, are of concern.

The inclusion of all segments of the population in political life fosters social cohesion. That is why the shrinking civic space in transition countries cannot go unnoticed.

The Accra initiative is important to counter the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel and the continuing danger of the spread of terrorism. Attention must be paid to the strong link between organized crime and terrorism in illicit activities such as arms, natural resource and drug trafficking.

Hostage-taking, extortion and suicide attacks are being reported in the Lake Chad basin. There are also terrorist activities in the Gulf of Guinea. Against that bleak background, we welcome the very positive step of the establishment of the Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre in Abuja, supported by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union.

Any initiative to fight terrorism is welcome, but it must take place within the framework of respect for international humanitarian law and human rights.

Violence exacerbates the humanitarian crisis. In the Sahel, 25.8 million people are in need of assistance. The number of displaced people exceeds 6.2 million. Food insecurity affects 32.9 million people in the West African region. The international community's assistance to alleviate those ravages must be strengthened.

Regional and subregional cooperation is key to addressing the challenges facing the West African region. The efforts of UNOWAS for closer cooperation between ECOWAS and Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger are commendable and should continue. Joint work

with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa on the shared challenges of the West and Central African regions, such as the coordination of efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, should also continue.

Finally, Ecuador reiterates its support for the comprehensive work of UNOWAS and welcomes, in particular, the activities carried out in the areas of women and peace and security and youth, peace and security.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Simão for his very informative briefing and his continued work in the region.

Over the past year, we have seen the drawdown of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the ending of the Mali sanctions regime, the dissolution of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the end of its reporting. At this moment, in which opportunities to discuss West Africa and the Sahel are few and far between, the mandate and reporting of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) are more important than ever. The United States therefore continues to strongly support the May presidential statement (S/PRST/2024/3) reaffirming the Council's commitment to UNOWAS, West Africa and the Sahel.

While the world's eyes have drifted elsewhere, this region continues to suffer. The people of the region continue to suffer. Terrorism and violent extremism continue to plague communities, a trend that has only exacerbated and accelerated since MINUSMA's forced withdrawal. Governments are struggling to reclaim control over territory and are registering record levels of violence. All the while, some Governments are engaging in heavy-handed counter-terrorism tactics while neglecting the causes of marginalization, thus worsening the security situation.

And the threat is only further spreading. This year, we have seen attacks and continual displacement in Benin and Togo, we have seen the deterioration of security in the Lake Chad basin, and we have seen an uptick in attacks and abductions in north-eastern Nigeria.

The United States is committed to holistic partnerships, including through our Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, in order to address the structural drivers of conflict, including gender-

based violence. And we are committed to democratic governance based on respect for human rights and human dignity.

On that front, there have been glimmers of hope. We applaud Liberia and Senegal's democratic transfers of power following elections this year. We welcome positive steps taken by the Gambia to reform its justice system and develop a hybrid court with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Indeed, it was encouraging to hear from Foreign Minister Tangara last month (see S/PV.9662) on the Gambia's positive partnership with the Peacebuilding Commission and we commend the decision to defeat the bill on female genital mutilation.

At the same time, however, the United States remains concerned about shrinking access to political and civic space in the region, including through the banning of protests and the curtailment of freedom of expression. That is in addition to the increasingly dire humanitarian situation across the Sahel and West Africa. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 25.8 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance and protection this year. Across the region writ large, 32.9 million people are food insecure, and the number of displaced individuals only continues to balloon.

The United States is the largest single humanitarian donor in Africa, having provided more than \$1.9 billion in humanitarian assistance across the continent since the start of 2024. And yet, however much we have provided, we know that it is still not enough. The international community needs to give more. It also needs to do more, including within the United Nations system. And more importantly, countries of the region need to do more.

In particular, the United States underscores the necessity of a United Nations resident coordinator in the Niger. Resident coordinators are critical to supporting United Nations development efforts, as well as ensuring the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance. The need for that support is clear.

Finally, we cannot discuss peace and security in the Sahel and West Africa without mentioning the crisis unfolding in the Sudan. I have spoken at length about the colossal scale of the humanitarian disaster in the Sudan — the violence, the human rights abuses, the threat and the reality of famine. And I am grateful

that the Council came together to call for an end to those atrocities, both in and around El Fasher and across the country. But still, as we speak, the conflict threatens to spin out into an even larger regional crisis, all while humanitarian assistance lags far behind its unimaginably large demand. It is long past time that the parties allow for food, water and medicine to reach those in desperate need. And we call for continued pressure and messaging from the Security Council, the African Union (AU) and other partners on the need for the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces to end obstacles to humanitarian access and begin negotiations.

The United States applauds the efforts made by the United Nations, UNOWAS, the AU and ECOWAS to support the region. But in this deeply challenging moment for the region, the Council must also step up. This is not an African problem with an African solution; terrorism is a global problem that requires a global solution in support of African leadership. We must commit to collective action. And we must resolve to stand behind our African partners in addressing those issues.

**Mrs. Blokar Drobíč** (Slovenia): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão for his insightful remarks, especially on the most recent developments in the region.

Since this is the first meeting of the Security Council on this matter since the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2024/3) on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, I wish to reiterate my country's strong support for the Office's work in the security, political, humanitarian and human rights domains.

There are two striking messages contained in the report on the activities of the Office (S/2024/521) that I would like to touch upon in my remarks today.

First, as the multidimensional and interconnected crises persist, the Office reported that more than 8,200 schools remained closed in the Central Sahel, affecting more than 1.5 million children. In conflict-affected situations, education is a lifeline for children amid upheaval and instability. It plays a pivotal role in fostering resilience among children and their families and contributes to preventing their recruitment and use by armed groups.

Secondly, the report notes the absence of noteworthy progress on women's representation in decision-making

bodies. Without women's representation, neither the newly democratically appointed Governments nor the transitional structures benefit from the much-needed perspectives, skills and experience that women bring to the table. Slovenia fears that the grim picture of persistent inequalities and inability to improve the human rights situation, including in terms of economic, social and cultural rights in the region, only further contributes to creating an environment in which terrorist and violent extremist groups thrive and expand.

The precarious security environment and persistent terrorist threats in the Central Sahel and neighbouring regions are a matter of the utmost concern for us. Terrorist attacks on health centres, food reserves, water services, schools and places of worship are leading to devastating protection crises, in particular for women and children. The recent conviction of Al Hassan, former chief of the Timbuktu Islamic Police, by the International Criminal Court represents an important step for the victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the region. At the same time, it reaffirms the commitment of the international community to deliver justice and ensure accountability for atrocities, including those committed by terrorist and extremist groups against the civilian population.

That leads me to my final point. West Africa and the Sahel have long grappled with instability and conflict, and yet history has shown their resilience and ability to overcome challenges, including democratic backsliding. The region has tackled previous waves of instability through concerted regional efforts and in cooperation with the United Nations. Amid evolving threats posed by terrorism, extremism and organized crime, safeguarding the gains of regional integration, including within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States, remains crucial. We are afraid that regional fragmentation will only weaken collective responses, exacerbate divisions and hinder effective coordination against common threats. Those threats encompass violence, food insecurity and climate pressures that increase the fragility and weaken the capacity of the people of Sahel to cope with shocks, as cautioned by the Director General of the International Organization for Migration at the Arria Formula meeting held earlier this week.

To conclude, Slovenia welcomes Special Representative Simão's outstanding efforts to re-establish unity and inclusivity and support West

Africa and the Sahel in navigating complexities and securing a safe, prosperous and democratic region.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Simão, for his informative briefing today.

At the outset, we applaud the adoption of the long-awaited presidential statement (S/PRST/2024/3) on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel last May, thanks to the tireless efforts of the co-penholders, namely, Sierra Leone and Switzerland. The presidential statement was indeed timely, demonstrating the Security Council's continued engagement in the region amid deeply concerning political, security and humanitarian situation.

Today I wish to underscore three key points.

First, Korea urges all countries undergoing political transition processes in West Africa to come up with a clear plan to swiftly return to constitutional order. Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea have announced or implied dragging out transition periods until 2027, 2029 and possibly 2025, respectively. That heightens domestic tensions with the political opposition, stagnates social and economic development and intensifies the risk of regional instability.

Furthermore, restrictions on the freedom of expression and assembly severely limit civic and political space, leading to the deterioration of the human rights situation. Lack of progress towards the full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of women also undermines the positive impact that women can bring to peacebuilding processes. On the other hand, despite those democratic reversals in the region, we are encouraged by the successful presidential elections in Senegal last March after the resolution of pre-electoral tensions by the Constitutional Council. The progress achieved by the Gambia and Liberia on establishing mechanisms to address impunity in the context of transitional justice is also notable. We hope that those developments will become leading examples for the region.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned about the fragmentation of regional counter-terrorism efforts, owing to recent regional realignments and tensions. Against the backdrop of the dissolution of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the lack of coordinated regional responses increases the risk of further terrorist

expansion in the Central Sahel region, which has already become the epicentre of terrorism, according to the Global Terrorism Index report. That also raises concerns about the spillover of terrorism into coastal States, particularly into northern Benin and Togo.

In that context, we call on all concerned countries to collaborate with ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations and other international bodies, with a view to countering regional terrorism, violent extremism and organized crime more effectively. We sincerely hope that recent ECOWAS initiatives will bear fruit, including the designation of President Faye of Senegal as facilitator in ECOWAS's engagement with the Alliance of Sahel States, the decision to convene a special summit on the future of regional integration in West Africa and discussions on the ECOWAS Standby Force.

Thirdly, climate change exacerbates the existing food insecurity, displacement and competition for access to scarce resources, all of which are transboundary in nature. Under those circumstances, the role of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) as a regional office is crucial, as it can leverage its wide-ranging partnerships to address those aggravating challenges. We compliment the recent achievement of UNOWAS in developing and renewing transhumance protocols with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, ECOWAS and the Economic Community of Central African States, as well as in assisting ECOWAS in its resilience strategy. In that regard, the Republic of Korea has started to fund the post of a climate and security adviser in UNOWAS beginning this year.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea reaffirms its unwavering support for the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão, UNOWAS and regional organizations in consolidating peace in West Africa and the Sahel.

**Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative for his statement.

The past six months have been marked by the many ongoing challenges in West Africa and the Sahel, first and foremost, the dominant role played by terrorism. France is particularly concerned about the incessant attacks, which affect not only the Sahel, but also the countries of the Gulf of Guinea and the Lake Chad basin. That major security challenge is compounded



by intercommunal violence, of which civilians are the main victims.

That situation is having disastrous humanitarian consequences, in particular in Mali, Burkina Faso, the Niger and Nigeria, where almost 33 million people are currently suffering from food insecurity. The situation is further exacerbated by climate change, which is making access to resources especially difficult. France will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with those fighting those scourges, marshalling the tools at its disposal, together with those partners who wish to do so.

On the political front, France continues to encourage the countries concerned to pursue their transition towards a return to constitutional order, so that the people can freely choose their leaders. Certain countries of the region are sources of inspiration in that regard, notably Senegal, where the democratic transition concluded in March. I would like to reiterate France's congratulations to President Faye, with whom we look forward to working in the years to come. Other countries will also be going to the polls in the coming months. I would like to recall in that regard the essential role played by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel in the region in providing the best possible support for the holding of those elections. The vitality of democracy also depends on respect for freedom of the press, freedom to protest and freedom of association — all of which France will continue to promote with all its partners.

On all those fronts, France remains convinced of the benefits of complementarity between actors — be they national, through dialogue with civil society and all political forces, or international, as is the case with the Economic Community of West African States and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel in the region. In that respect, France is ready to continue to work with partners in the region who wish to do so, within a framework of respect for international law, and to advocate for the continued attention of the Council.

**Ms. Cassar** (Malta): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão for his remarks.

Malta commends the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) for its efforts in West Africa and the Sahel. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão's recent visits demonstrate the United Nations support to the people in the region, including their quest for peace and stability. In that

vein, we strongly support the Council's unified call through the recently adopted presidential statement on UNOWAS (S/PRST/2024/3), and we thank Switzerland and Sierra Leone for their tireless efforts.

On the political front, we welcome the strengthening of democratic governance in Senegal, Ghana, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire. Yet we are concerned regarding the lack of progress in ensuring women's full, equal, meaningful and safe representation in elected and appointed positions in Guinea, Senegal, Benin and across the Central Sahel. We fully support the call for effective implementation and resourcing of national action plans on women and peace and security and legislation that promotes gender equality.

We acknowledge the improved forecast of economic performance in the region, and we wish Côte d'Ivoire and Benin's success in their return to the international Eurobond market. Malta also welcomes the commitment displayed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to good governance and constitutional order. We urge Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger to engage with ECOWAS and other regional organizations, in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

We are deeply concerned that the challenges of terrorism, violent extremism and unconstitutional changes of government, continue to undermine regional stability. We strongly condemn all offensives by terrorist groups in the region, including violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights. Civilians, particularly women and children, are bearing the brunt of those threats. The number of children who have been recruited and used and abducted in the region is staggering. We call on all parties to increase efforts to protect children and to adhere to their obligations under international law. We must do better.

At last month's Arria Formula meeting on the nexus between terrorism and violent extremism and security in the region, we recalled the importance of coordination among regional and subregional organizations, in particular to curb the worrisome spread of terrorism to coastal States. We are encouraged by the establishment of the Nigerian counter-terrorism centre as a regional hub for ECOWAS member States. Safeguarding the rights of vulnerable communities must remain at the forefront of our collective efforts. We are encouraged by the adopted recommendations from Gambian lawmakers to maintain the country's ban on female

genital mutilation. We strongly urge the retention of that ban. At the same time, we are concerned about the threats to the fundamental rights and freedoms of LGBTQ+ persons, namely, in Ghana.

The adverse implications of climate change on the security of West Africa and the Sahel are undeniable. Devastating cycles of droughts, flooding and sea level rise precipitate further humanitarian suffering. A staggering 33 million people in the Sahel currently require life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection services. An interlinked, multidisciplinary and coordinated approach is therefore required to respond to the climate security risks. We welcome the progress made by UNOWAS in implementing the Dakar Call to Action and the work in strengthening partnerships through climate action initiatives.

In conclusion, we remain committed to giving West Africa and the Sahel the attention it truly deserves. We reiterate our support for increased UNOWAS reporting to ensure that timely information is received by the Council to better address the region's needs.

**Mr. Eckersley** (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão for his very helpful briefing and for all his work and that of his team.

I would like to start by welcoming the Security Council's agreement of the presidential statement on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) (S/PRST/2024/3) during what is a challenging period for the region. That was an important signal of the Council's full support for the region's peace and stability. We commend the penholders, Sierra Leone and Switzerland, for their excellent work to ensure its agreement.

We wish to make four points today.

First, the United Kingdom congratulates Mauritania and Senegal for their peaceful transfers of power. But democracy and civic space are under pressure in the region. We note that timelines for restoration of constitutional Governments in Mali and Burkina Faso have been extended, and we reiterate the Council's call, in its recent presidential statement, for the restoration of constitutional order. Guinea's transition timeline has also slipped, but we welcome the assessment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that some progress has been achieved in Guinea, including a planned referendum on the Constitution in 2024.

Secondly, security across the Sahel is deteriorating. The threat of terrorism is growing and requires a serious cross-regional response. Foreign mercenaries and proxies are not the answer. They have a track record of worsening existing conflicts and undermining long-term development, and the way they operate often poses grave threats to the protection of civilians, as we saw at Moura in Mali. The United Kingdom remains concerned about the security situation in Mali, especially after the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. We encourage UNOWAS to help bring all parties back to the negotiating table. We also note the recent ECOWAS and Alliance of Sahel States summits. We urge all States in the region to seek collective solutions to the growing shared security challenge. As we heard in the Arria Formula meeting called by Sierra Leone on 19 June, effective counter-terrorism efforts require regional collaboration.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation in the region continues to get worse. Food insecurity, fuelled by violence and displacement, is reaching record levels in the Central Sahel and Nigeria. Climate change is compounding those problems. Since 2019, aid from the United Kingdom has supported over 15 million in the Sahel with life-saving assistance, and 3 million in Nigeria since 2017. But access is increasingly restricted and needs are still going unmet. We call on all actors to ensure safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance.

Fourthly, we welcome the improved economic forecast of the International Monetary Fund, which demonstrates the enormous opportunity for growth across the region despite today's many challenges. The United Kingdom looks forward to deepening our partnerships in the region and working collaboratively to ensure that we drive forward growth and security.

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

We would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, for his report on the situation in the region and the work of his Office over the past six months. We highly appreciate the work he is performing, including in terms of establishing dialogue with the countries of the region. We support his efforts.

The past period witnessed electoral processes in many countries of the region. We commend, for example, the peaceful transfer of power in Liberia and Senegal, which was achieved despite the tense situation in the run-up to the elections in those countries. We further commend the effective work of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, which is involved in the complex process of State boundary demarcation. In recent years, the demarcation issue has posed difficulties for the two countries but now, thanks to the Commission's efforts, the demarcation process is nearing completion.

However, the regional security situation continues to be marked by the increasing activity of numerous terrorist and criminal groups. The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin pose the greatest threat. The growing combat capacity of the Islamic State in West Africa is aggravating the security situation in the countries of the Lake Chad basin. The situation in north-eastern Nigeria also remains tense due to the activity of Boko Haram. Likewise, it is tense in Chad, where the authorities are not only combating jihadis, but also tackling an influx of refugees from neighbouring Sudan, where a long-standing conflict continues. The situation in the Liptako-Gourma triangle is also complicated. Terrorist attacks against civilians and the armed forces in the region continue unabated. At the same time, Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger are engaged in an uncompromising and coordinated fight against terrorist groups and are making progress in stabilizing the situation on their territories.

Against that backdrop, however, most Western donors are cutting aid to affected countries for political reasons or imposing further conditions on it. We therefore welcome the commitment shown by the States in the region that, to the best of their capacities, are taking action to assist their local populations and displaced people. Efforts to improve the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation must go hand in hand with security measures. People, young people especially, must see that there are prospects for a normal, stable and secure life in their countries.

Sahara-Sahel countries are themselves taking the lead in maintaining peace and security in the region. Salient examples of include the conclusion by Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso of the Liptako-Gourma charter on mutual commitments in defence and counter-terrorism and their steady progress towards

establishing a confederation of States — the Alliance of Sahel States — as announced on 6 July at the Summit of the Sahel States in Niamey.

All of those efforts are creating a fundamentally new architecture in the area of security and development. Not only are the armed forces of those three countries standing shoulder-to-shoulder in conducting effective joint counter-terrorism operations, but their Governments have also outlined steps to coordinate their political approaches to economic cooperation. We are convinced that their intentions and actions seek primarily to meet the aspirations of their people. Of no less importance, however, is that such actions epitomize a response to ongoing attempts to impose neocolonial models on African countries.

Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso are in the vanguard of the fight against trans-African terrorist groups and deserve the support of the international community and of African countries in particular. The reasons for the decision by the three States to withdraw from the Economic Community of West African States are understandable: they did so in response to pressure and even threats of force.

At the same time, we welcome the lifting of some of the sanctions. In that regard, we are hopeful about the prospects for improved relations in the region between those countries that share numerous challenges. We are convinced of the wisdom of West African and Sahel leaders; they are capable of finding their own way out of the current situation. We expect constructive interaction between the two parties to resume on the basis of their mutual interests.

For our part, we will continue to constructively assist the efforts of the international community aimed at ensuring stability in the region. We will continue to assist the Sahel States bilaterally and multilaterally, including by enhancing the combat capacity of national armed forces, training their military and law enforcement personnel and providing humanitarian aid.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.*