



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

*Provisional*

## 9825<sup>th</sup>

meeting

Friday, 20 December 2024, 11 a.m.

New York

*President:* Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield . . . . . (United States of America)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Ms. Azzi
China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador . . . . .	Mrs. Barba Bustos
France . . . . .	Mr. Dharmadhikari
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Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation . . . . .	Ms. Evstigneeva
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Kanu
Slovenia . . . . .	Ms. Jurečko
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley

## 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/2024/871)

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24-41498 (E)



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*The meeting was called to order at 11 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/2024/871)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel; and Ms. Levinia Addae-Mensah, Executive Director, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding.

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/2024/871, 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:** I have the honour to present today the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/871) on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). Allow me to convey my heartfelt congratulations to the United States on presiding over the Security Council for the month of December and to extend to it my best wishes for a successful presidency.

The adoption of the Pact for the Future (General Assembly resolution 79/1) in September marked a key milestone that commits Member States and the United Nations to strengthening preventive diplomacy, prioritizing dialogue and supporting regional organizations for sustainable peace and development, which we wholeheartedly commend. Indeed, those objectives form the core of the UNOWAS mandate. In a region beset by geopolitical strains that have heightened tensions and worsened a fragile security situation, my focus has been on promoting dialogue, fostering mutual understanding, conveying messages of encouragement and seeking common ground with all stakeholders, including government leaders, regional institutions,

United Nations entities, civil society groups, women and youth leaders. While the positive outcomes of those engagements are gradual, there are promising signs of increased collaboration on finding people-centred, pragmatic solutions to the region's security, governance, humanitarian and socioeconomic challenges.

In my recent encounters with the central Sahel countries and members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its leadership, we have witnessed a shared understanding of the importance of regional integration. Diplomacy and dialogue have taken centre stage, helping to ease bilateral tensions and reduce negative narratives, which is a positive and encouraging sign.

I just attended the ECOWAS summit of 15 December, at which, inter alia, the Heads of State took note of the decision of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger to withdraw from ECOWAS, instructing the ECOWAS Commission to commence withdrawal formalities after 29 January 2025, while also developing contingency plans. At the same time, the summit decided to extend diplomatic efforts, offering an additional six months for dialogue to encourage those countries to remain in ECOWAS. The summit reiterated the importance of strengthening support for regional coordination mechanisms to fight terrorism. In my address to the summit, I commended the bilateral initiatives between ECOWAS members and countries of the central Sahel, which have contributed to normalizing relations among the latter.

Regional leaders unanimously acknowledge insecurity, driven by terrorism and violent extremism, as the region's most urgent concern. Indeed, terrorist groups are becoming increasingly aggressive and are utilizing sophisticated weaponry, including drones. Moreover, recent attacks in the central Sahel have resulted in significant loss of life among both civilians and security personnel. Beyond the Sahel, incidents in northern Benin and Togo have demonstrated the increasing spread of violent extremism and organized crime in the Gulf of Guinea countries, as well as the increasing risk of association between terrorism and maritime crime. To address those threats, coordinated efforts with the support of the Council must be scaled up, involving affected countries within regional frameworks and with full respect for humanitarian and human rights standards.

While the announced operationalization of the ECOWAS Standby Force is a positive step, the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force has ceased operations and the Accra Initiative is undergoing restructuring to model the organization, operations and positive results of the Multinational Joint Task Force, which is the primary security cooperation mechanism in the Lake Chad basin region and remains the only functioning platform for cooperation on regional security in West Africa and the Sahel. Meanwhile, that platform requires more support to cope with the more aggressive and well-equipped terrorist groups it must confront.

To reinvigorate regional response mechanisms, I visited Chad in November, with Special Representative of the Secretary-General Abdou Abarry, Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa. There, in addition to local authorities, we met the Lake Chad Basin Commission and other partners and visited a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) near Lake Chad. The country is hosting approximately two million refugees and IDPs, including from the Sudan, and is grappling with the severe impact of flooding, stretching host communities to their limits. The worsening humanitarian situation in other countries, such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, has led to increased displacement. I urge partners to contribute to the underfunded humanitarian appeal, which remains less than 50 per cent funded, leaving millions vulnerable.

It is unacceptable that more than 8,200 schools in the region are closed as a result of insecurity. As noted by the Council in May (see S/PRST/2024/3), the right to education is essential for peace and security. Yet, that fact remains unheeded, denying children a future and feeding cycles of insecurity and instability. While human rights violations and restrictions on civic and political space persist, especially in Guinea and the countries of the central Sahel, there has been progress on fighting impunity. The conviction of those responsible for the 2009 Guinea stadium massacre sends a powerful message of justice. I also commend Liberia for its efforts to ensure accountability for crimes of the past and the Gambia for its exemplary transitional justice process.

I visited Ghana before and during the presidential and legislative elections, with the objective of supporting the national stakeholders in working together towards peaceful elections. Amid concerns over potential violence in highly competitive elections,

together with the National Peace Council, we facilitated five regional sessions of dialogue among stakeholders across the country to promote peaceful elections. On 28 November, all presidential candidates signed a peace pact, the fourth in the political history of the country, whereby they committed to promoting peaceful elections, a condition conducive to inclusive, free and fair polls, which took place on 7 December. Of note is the behaviour of the defeated presidential candidate, in conceding defeat even before the announcement of the results, which greatly contributed to the peaceful outcome of the elections.

Civil society organizations also played a crucial role in monitoring the elections throughout the country, in close collaboration with the relevant public authorities. Senegal also conducted legislative elections on 17 November, which resulted in strong gains for the ruling party, the African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity, and established gender parity in Parliament. The observer missions unanimously praised the transparency of the process and the trust that all political parties place in the national electoral institutions. Those two elections demonstrate progress in democracy in the region. Nonetheless, Ghana, Senegal and others continue to face significant economic challenges and will require support to manage rising debt and implement projects that protect livelihoods, lest their democratic gains fail to satisfy the expectations of the population, particularly among women and youth.

In the meantime, preparations for Côte d'Ivoire's 2025 presidential election are progressing, and in Sierra Leone, UNOWAS and ECOWAS are supporting the successful implementation of the Agreement for National Unity. Despite ongoing political tensions, Liberia is making progress on its democratic consolidation after the well-run 2023 elections. I continue to encourage all stakeholders to rise above their differences and place the interests of the Liberian people first. In Guinea-Bissau, the parliamentary elections planned for last November have been postponed *sine die* while consultations among the political entities are taking place to agree on a new road map leading to legislative and presidential elections to be held in 2025. For the Gambia, 2025 will be a critical year for the adoption of constitutional reforms, in a political environment in which consensus has eroded. The implementation of the ECOWAS decision to support the establishment of a special tribunal for the Gambia to prosecute the

alleged perpetrators of serious human rights violations and international crimes is a welcome development that will require considerable international support to ensure that justice is served.

I would like to highlight the progress of the Cameroon-Nigeria border demarcation. As Chair of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, I am encouraged by the parties' readiness to resolve the final areas of disagreement, as we near the completion of the demarcation. That achievement, following the 2002 International Court of Justice ruling, will be a landmark achievement for peacebuilding, the rule of law and diplomacy. In these final stages of the Commission's work, I intend to collaborate closely with the African Union to advance African-led peacebuilding and conflict prevention mechanisms.

*(spoke in French)*

In May, the Council adopted a presidential statement on UNOWAS (S/PRST/2024/3), reaffirming its support for our work on security and governance. That renewed confidence has enabled us to make progress towards our objectives. In line with the presidential statement calling for integrated regional responses, we will continue to maximize the potential of the United Nations to carry forward our mandate. Through regional dialogues, including the Under-Secretary-General's tour of the countries of the central Sahel, we have strengthened the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and launched projects to address growing development needs, including food sovereignty, energy, education and youth employment. In that context, our collaboration with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, the Development Coordination Office and United Nations country teams and resident coordinators, provides us with a robust platform to make the most of our comparative advantages.

In the area of climate security, UNOWAS plays a key role in building climate resilience through conflict-sensitive adaptation measures. At the recent twenty-ninth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Baku, we brought together stakeholders from Governments, the African Union, the African Development Bank and civil society to discuss cross-border water management, a crucial issue for peace and sustainable development in Africa.

I also welcome the recent visit in December of members of the Security Council's Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security to the Lake Chad basin region, starting with Nigeria. The visit constitutes a crucial step in providing an overview of the links between climate, peace and security in one of the continent's most fragile regions. I sincerely hope that the Group will continue to visit the other countries of the Lake Chad basin in 2025.

Despite the financial constraints that we faced this year, which led to the suspension of some of our activities, we remain fully committed to maximizing the impact of the resources available to us. As ECOWAS intensifies its preparations for the convening of an extraordinary summit on the future of regional integration, we will continue to promote a people-centred peace, with a special focus on the implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2250 (2015), on the empowerment of women and youth. Allow me to express my sincere gratitude to the Council for its support in the implementation of our mandate.

In conclusion, as we usher in the year 2025, I would like to extend to the peoples of West Africa and the Sahel my best wishes for greater peace and stability.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Addae-Mensah.

**Ms. Addae-Mensah:** It is an honour and a privilege to brief the Security Council on key peace and security dynamics in West Africa from the perspective of civil society organizations. The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is a network of more than 750 civil society organizations across West Africa that for the past 25 years has been working to build capacities and facilitate spaces for engaging civil society and relevant State and international stakeholders in ensuring sustainable peace in the West African region.

As we reflect on the state of democracy, peace and security in West Africa we see a region with a heightened security threat profile but also with the steely determination and resilience of many communities across the region. In terms of the threat vectors, as Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão succinctly laid out in his briefing, the recent democratic transformations, complex political transitions and multi-layered governance and security challenges continue to unravel multiple intersectionalities,

rendering more complex and precarious the efforts to address existing fragilities within the governance, peace and security and development landscapes.

The growing spread of terrorist and violent extremist groups in the Sahel and parts of coastal States in the region continues to expand zones of instability and ungoverned spaces and accentuate the cascading negative effects of those dynamics around energy strategies and issues such as food insecurity, youth unemployment and limited access to education. Mr. Simão has already shared statistics with us on the implications for schools and the way that situation is undermining the educational and protective environment for girls in particular, exacerbating their vulnerability to early marriage, female genital mutilation, exploitation and trafficking. Together with other vulnerability factors, those threats expose fault lines in governance structures and political institutional frameworks and are fuelling social tensions, especially between States and citizens. Indeed, some analysts have indicated that they have contributed to the recent recurring coups d'état experienced in the region.

While those dynamics have prompted diverse responses from States, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and other international partners, there remains a broad perception of democratic backsliding and regional fragmentation across the region. We therefore welcomed the fact that at the recent summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, in noting the decision of three States to exit the bloc, it was decided to offer them dialogue opportunities to reconsider rejoining the Community. It is our hope that those opportunities will help mend the fractured relationships between ECOWAS and those three States and promote multilateral and bilateral security cooperation in effectively responding to regional threats.

In the face of those increasing security challenges, humanitarian crises and political instability, the region nonetheless continues to witness stories of endurance and tenacity. Across the region, several communities have demonstrated a high level of resilience that has contributed to averting a full manifestation of the doom and gloom predicted in some analyses. Civil society organizations in the region have been at the forefront in strengthening resilience, and I would like to highlight some of the key positive trends to which they have contributed.

The first is positive democratic transformations and transitions. Mr. Simão already cited the examples of Senegal and Ghana, which have demonstrated commitment to the principles of democratic governance by upholding presidential term limits and ensuring peaceful political transitions. Civil society organizations played a critical role in those countries in facilitating multi-stakeholder platforms to mitigate electoral violence.

The second is the strengthening of early-warning systems and response mechanisms. The growing importance of conflict prevention and the value of early-warning data and analysis for preventive diplomacy has seen a significant deployment of resources to enhance early-warning and response systems. In that regard, ECOWAS has established national centres for the coordination of early-warning and response mechanisms in several West African countries, providing valuable platforms for the timely identification of emerging crises and responses to them. Through memorandums of understanding with both ECOWAS and the African Union, WANEP offers technical support to both institutions in reinforcing their early-warning systems, with a view to bolstering resilience in African societies.

The third area I want to mention is the development of national and local infrastructures for peace. In recent years West African countries have intensified their efforts to institutionalize and strengthen local and national peace infrastructure to address the region's peace and security challenges. Local peacebuilding mechanisms, such as community dialogue, mediation and reconciliation, are frequently used to prevent conflicts at the community level and in some instances at the national level. Ghana's National Peace Council, Sierra Leone's Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion and Nigeria's National Peace Committee exemplify the peace infrastructure in the region, which could be leveraged to enhance community resilience across the region. Mr. Simão already cited the case of Ghana as a concrete example of the value of national infrastructures for peace, in which WANEP, UNOWAS and ECOWAS, in the pre-electoral phase of the 7 December elections in Ghana, contributed to mitigating electoral violence across the country. Ghana's National Peace Council also facilitated the signing of a peace pact, as has also been mentioned.

The fourth area concerns the role and agency of civil society organizations. Despite the instances of shrinking spaces resulting from multiple factors, including repressive acts by some States, as well as

funding challenges, these organizations remain key strategic partners, complementing national, regional and continental-level efforts in addressing peace and security challenges and strengthening resilience. An example of that is WANEP's establishment of security consultative committees in both Mali and Burkina Faso, enabling constructive dialogue between communities and authorities on assessing security challenges and promoting local solutions. Another is economic resilience programmes, some of them supported by the Peacebuilding Fund, which empower young people and women in the central and northern parts of Mali and reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups.

Finally, let me cite the examples of the changing dynamics of the media landscape and the role of digital technology in amplifying citizens' voices in democratic governance. Despite concerns about democratic decline, West Africa is experiencing a dynamic shift in its media landscape, driven by information technology and the growth of civil society organizations. The rise of digital technology, mobile telephony and increased Internet access is fostering greater political awareness, education and connectivity, particularly through hashtag platforms that serve as hubs for mobilization. Additionally, the expanding space for civil society in playing a crucial role in advocacy, enhancing citizen participation in governance and influencing decision-making processes is also worth noting.

The duality of West Africa's reality presents us with two related scenarios. In one breath, it leads us on a path of questioning the relevance and impact of global, continental and regional normative frameworks, the effectiveness of the strategies and approaches adopted in their implementation and deep reflections on what constitutes success in the face of dwindling resources. In another, it gives us a sense of hope, which should drive us to re-evaluate the power dynamics around response stakeholders for greater impact. That dichotomous reality underscores the value of local actors and their organic approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It is therefore imperative that our models and mechanisms for addressing contemporary and emerging peace and security threats in the region be infused with opportunities for local actors to lead and drive transformation processes.

The cases of resilience that we have seen should also serve as reminders that beyond political crises and difficult transitions are lives and livelihoods that

require our attention and support. Unfortunately, we are witnessing worrisome trends of declining funding for countries in transition, to the detriment of long-term peace initiatives. That de-investment threatens to undermine the collective efforts and achievements obtained through many years of work. We must not relent in our efforts to continue and sustain ongoing efforts to mitigate violence and security threats in the region. It is crucial to continue investing in community peace and security initiatives, in particular those that benefit vulnerable groups and fragile States in the Sahel. We must therefore continue to leverage opportunities that allow us to address the human security of ordinary citizens in those areas and enhance their resilience, including by revitalizing regional security initiatives such as the Accra Initiative and the Group of Five for the Sahel.

To conclude my briefing, I wish to draw attention to three key global-level processes and one continental initiative that present opportunities for resetting global, continental and regional approaches to addressing the contemporary and emerging governance and peace and security threats in West Africa.

First, the upcoming twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and the tenth anniversary of resolution 2250 (2015) on youth and peace and security offer the global community opportunities to reset actions around delivering on both agendas. Although significant strides have been made since the adoption of the two resolutions to translate their key pillars into national action plans for local ownership and implementation, the region continues to face challenges in implementing the policies and laws that protect young people and women's rights and promote gender inclusivity in politics and decision-making processes.

Secondly, the New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future offer opportunities to forge new forms of partnership to enhance the relevance, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of our prevention efforts. They open up more spaces for inclusivity and sustainability around *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982). By emphasizing human security, the New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future can also help bridge the gaps between conflict prevention, building peace and promoting resilience to climate change.

Thirdly, the 2025 review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture must recalibrate and address the power imbalances in existing partnership frameworks.

The review provides a critical opportunity to prioritize the meaningful inclusion of the perspectives of local civil society organizations in global peacebuilding policies and initiatives for building and sustaining peace. The process should therefore consider a reconfiguration of our collaborative frameworks in order to reposition local actors at the core of enhancing the sustainability of our preventive efforts. That will further accentuate the centrality of local leadership in driving locally defined change and give greater voice to local civil society organizations in the decision-making process in order to ensure that decisions reflect the relevant dynamics.

Fourthly and lastly, the Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions — a collaborative initiative of the African Union and the United Nations Development Programme — serves as a framework for harnessing multiple agencies and capacities to assist African nations that are undergoing complex political transitions, with a special focus on those at risk of unconstitutional changes of government. The Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions leverages multiple capacities and promotes inclusive participation in governance, enhancing the capacity for democratic processes and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to address fragilities. That initiative also emphasizes the importance of social cohesion and the role of civil society organizations in driving democratic reforms during transitions.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Addae-Mensah for her 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 Council, namely, Algeria, Mozambique and my own country, Sierra Leone, as well as Guyana (A3+).

We 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 and valuable briefing. We take note of the contribution of Ms. Levinia Addae-Mensah, Executive Director of West Africa Network for Peacebuilding. The A3+ takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/871) covering the period from July to November 2024 on the activities of UNOWAS. Noting the developments in West Africa and the Sahel during the reporting period and in keeping with the letter dated 18 July 2024 from

the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2024/562), the A3+ wishes to underscore the following points.

First, on the security situation, the A3+ remains gravely concerned by the intensification of terrorist attacks in the region. We deeply regret the increasing fatalities in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Togo and deplore the expansion of areas under the control of terrorist and criminal organizations across West Africa and the Sahel. The A3+ accordingly welcomes the efforts of Special Representative Simão, UNOWAS and other United Nations bodies and commends the continued commitment and coordinated work of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee in advancing the implementation of Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism.

We acknowledge the critical role of regional initiatives in addressing the common threat of terrorism and violent extremism, even in the midst of the region's evolving geopolitical reconfigurations. In that regard, we call for robust support for and the prioritization of regional security efforts. We note the importance of the Multinational Joint Task Force in fighting terrorist groups in the Lake Chad basin and the potential presented by the full operationalization of the Accra Initiative, particularly in addressing cross-border threats to peace and security and combating terrorist activity, including by preventing the recruitment and radicalization of young people in the region. We also call for predictable funding for regional security mechanisms and support for development and peacebuilding efforts as complementary efforts for sustaining peace in the region, including through the activation and use of such mechanisms, as provided for by resolution 2719 (2023).

The A3+ conveys our deepest condolences to the victims of terrorism and violent extremism in the region, as well as for the loss of life and property due to adverse weather conditions in the region, particularly in Ghana, Liberia, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria.

Secondly, on political developments and regional integration, the A3+ welcomes progress in consolidating democracy in Senegal, Cabo Verde, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire and especially in Ghana, which successfully held peaceful general elections earlier this month. We call for sustained efforts in that regard. Peaceful democratic transitions and restoring good governance

are a means of conflict resolution and prevention. The A3+ welcomes the positive updates on the democratic transitions of government, the ongoing constitutional reviews and the legislative reform processes in some countries of the region. We are optimistic that trend will be consistent and prevalent in other parts of the region, including countries that have upcoming general and local elections scheduled to be held in 2025.

However, we express serious concern at the loss of civilian lives in the course of peaceful protests. We call for a safe space for civic freedom and expression, respect for human rights and dignity, the inclusion of women and young people in governance and adherence to the rule of law. Shrinking civic spaces and rights erode public trust and breed public resentment, which in turn engender a recourse to violence and extremist activities. The A3+ strongly supports positive reforms that seek to promote accountability, good governance and the rule of law. We reiterate our call for the support of development partners and international financial institutions and for the necessary financing to be made available to West African and Sahelian States to stabilize their economies, finance their development programmes and fully realize their aspirations for prosperous and resilient democratic societies.

On regional integration, the A3+ notes the affirmation of the decision of the transitional Governments of Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso to withdraw from ECOWAS and the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States at the first summit held on 6 July in Niamey. We further acknowledge the sustained mediation efforts of ECOWAS, in particular through the efforts of the Heads of State of Senegal and Togo, as recognized during the sixty-sixth ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS held in Nigeria on 15 December. In that regard, we take note of ECOWAS's continued engagement with the three countries, the decision to implement a transition period and adopt separation modalities and a contingency plan to cover political and economic relations between ECOWAS and the members of the Alliance of the Sahel States.

Thirdly, having already noted the fatalities and devastation during the reporting period, the A3+ is concerned about the adverse and devastating effects of climate change in the region, which are further exacerbating the challenges of fragile communities while heightening food insecurity, and which are now recognized as part of the root causes of intercommunal

violence and the spread of violent extremism in the region. As we urge for further concerted efforts to address the adverse impact of climate change in West Africa and the Sahel, including by UNOWAS, we note with appreciation the efforts of the Informal Expert Group on Climate, Peace and Security and its recently concluded field visit to the Lake Chad basin.

In order to address the various humanitarian challenges in the region, the A3+ reiterates its calls for a scaled-up humanitarian response, in tandem with development initiatives, addressing the socioeconomic challenges of the region. Urgent and rapid responses, as well as long-term solutions, are critical to improving the lives of the peoples of the region. We welcome the efforts of Resident Coordinators and United Nations country teams to implement the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and call for a continued comprehensive response in implementing it.

In conclusion, the A3+ reiterates its support for Mr. Simão and UNOWAS and remains committed to working with all Council members to ease the suffering of civilians and chart a better future for the people of West Africa and the Sahel. The A3+ commends the steps that Mr. Simão has taken in using his good offices to strengthen regional stability and cooperation, and we encourage UNOWAS to continue its engagement with regional stakeholders, including ECOWAS, the African Union and civil society organizations, in order to ensure a coordinated and effective response to the region's challenges.

Lastly, as this is the final scheduled meeting of the year in which the A3+ will deliver a joint statement, the A3+ pays tribute to Mozambique on its excellent representation and prioritization of African issues and its overall effective term on the Security Council. We also pay tribute to the co-penholder Switzerland for its outstanding commitment and work on the UNOWAS file, particularly in getting the Council to reach a consensus on presidential statement S/PRST/2024/3, adopted on 24 May.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, not only for his briefing but for his and his Office's cooperation throughout our term as co-penholder on this file. I also thank Ms. Addae-Mensah for her briefing.

As we heard once again, West Africa and the Sahel are at a crossroads. The multifaceted challenges facing the region are complex and far-reaching. However, we still believe that they are not insurmountable. During our term on the Security Council over the past two years, in January 2023 we succeeded in extending the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) for three years and in May adopting a presidential statement (S/PRST/2024/3). Through those products, we sent a clear message of support, unity and solidarity from the Council to the region. In addition, with Mozambique — and I would like to thank my colleague from Mozambique for all the work we did together — Switzerland, as co-Chair of the Informal Expert Group on Climate, Peace and Security, organized a visit to the Lake Chad basin region at the beginning of this month. I am pleased that I will be able to share some of our valuable findings during consultations. I would also like to mention and align ourselves with the statement to be made by my colleague from Guyana, on behalf of two delegations, on the important link between hunger and conflict, and to thank her for her work throughout the past year. Based on our experience over the past two years, the following points remain critical.

First, we must adopt a holistic approach to peace and security. The issue of insecurity is the major challenge and is also an obstacle to improving the socioeconomic and humanitarian situations. We are alarmed by the persistence of armed conflict, terrorism and violent extremism and their spread to coastal States. That trend demands our collective vigilance. Switzerland calls for greater cooperation and support for regional initiatives. We must take action to maintain and promote dialogue and social cohesion and tackle the root causes of this kind of fragility.

Secondly, we underscore the importance of inclusive dialogue. The political and governance landscape in West Africa and the Sahel has seen both challenges and opportunities over the past two years. Switzerland emphasizes the critical role of political dialogue and inclusive political processes in restoring and maintaining peace in the region. As Simone Mbodé Diouf, African Union Youth Ambassador for Peace for West Africa, has said,

“Recognizing the importance of empowering women and young people is not just a matter of words. Without real political will, little progress will be possible”.

In that regard, we welcome the successful holding of elections and democratic transitions of power this year, particularly in Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana. We note that some countries in transition have not yet made tangible progress, and we encourage them to return to constitutional order as soon as possible. Following the sixty-sixth ordinary session of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States, held on 15 December, Switzerland encourages a resumption of inclusive dialogue and the implementation of confidence-building measures to overcome differences and promote mutual understanding. Regional collaboration that takes into account cross-border dynamics is vital to overcoming the challenges facing the region.

Thirdly, with regard to the factors exacerbating security challenges, we welcome the various UNOWAS regional workshops and discussions on climate, peace and security, as well as the guidance provided to local authorities, particularly with regard to climate security risk assessments. During the visit of the Informal Expert Group to the Lake Chad basin, exchanges with stakeholders on the ground enabled an understanding of how climate change exacerbates armed conflict and other security challenges. For example, in a region where almost 80 per cent of the population depends on agriculture, livestock breeding and fishing, the effects of climate change on livelihoods contribute to increased violent extremism and facilitate recruitment by armed groups. The visit nonetheless demonstrated that climate change can serve to foster local, national and regional cooperation, aimed at promoting social cohesion and resilience.

It is crucial to maintain and even ramp up holistic support for countries in crisis. With action at every level, it is possible to find solutions to the region's multifaceted challenges. I sincerely hope that the Security Council will continue to show leadership and work closely with UNOWAS and the Special Representative, the African Union and subregional organizations with the goal of overcoming the obstacles to lasting peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel.

In conclusion, I would like to warmly thank the co-penholders of this dossier — Ghana in 2023, and Sierra Leone — for their outstanding collaboration and expertise on the region. Since the Special Representative of the Secretary-General took office, he has played a key role in preventive diplomacy. Switzerland supports his efforts to build peace, security

and democracy in West Africa and the Sahel. I am also grateful for the collaboration of all the members of the Security Council. While Switzerland is about to leave the Council, it will continue its commitment beyond its term and will remain committed to peace and security in the world and on the African continent.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Simão, for his comprehensive briefing and Ms. Addae-Mensah for sharing her views.

Allow me to highlight three points today.

First, when it comes to terrorism, a lack of coordinated regional responses and fragmented counter-terrorism efforts have heightened the risk of terrorist expansion across the central Sahel and into coastal States. Since the previous Council briefing in July (see S/PV.9685), terrorist activities have intensified and become sophisticated in West Africa. The attack in Burkina Faso this August, which claimed more than 600 lives, and the September attack in Bamako — the first such incident in Mali in nearly a decade — underscore the region's growing vulnerability as an epicentre of terrorism. Korea encourages the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and regional States to redouble their efforts in order to bridge differences and foster effective collaboration aimed at countering terrorism and transnational organized crime. In that context, we welcome the outcome of the sixty-sixth ECOWAS Summit held last week. Ongoing initiatives, such as the Accra Initiative, the ECOWAS Standby Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force, should also continue for the purposes of providing an effective regional security mechanism.

Secondly, democratic governance and the rule of law are critical foundations of sustainable development and economic transformation. Korea remains deeply concerned about the severe restrictions on civic space and human rights violations, in particular in countries undergoing political transition in West Africa. Abductions, arbitrary arrests, forcible conscription of civil society actors into armed forces and bans on public demonstrations are detrimental to long-term stability and development. The lack of progress in the full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of women also undermines the positive effects that women can bring to peacebuilding processes. In that regard, we urge countries in transition to swiftly return to constitutional order and advance political reform

through meaningful and inclusive dialogue. There are already leading examples of that in the region. We commend the peaceful elections held in Mauritania, Senegal and Ghana and the significant advances in transitional justice achieved in the Gambia, Guinea and Liberia.

Thirdly, the humanitarian crisis in the region requires the international community's urgent attention and support. More than 25 million people need immediate assistance and nearly 49 million are facing food insecurity in Mali, the Niger, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Climate change exacerbates those vulnerabilities by fuelling intercommunal violence, including farmer-herder conflict, and by aggravating the vulnerability of communities to recruitment and radicalization by terrorist groups.

Under those circumstances, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) plays a pivotal role, leveraging its wide-ranging partnerships to address those complex challenges. Korea has started to fund the post of a climate and security adviser to UNOWAS; the incumbent is significantly contributing to those efforts. We have also contributed \$20 million to peacebuilding projects in countries in the Sahel to bolster their resilience. In addition, Korea is ready to play a constructive role in enhancing collaboration between the Peacebuilding Commission and the Security Council so as to strengthen peacebuilding efforts in West Africa.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea reaffirms its steadfast commitment to supporting Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão, UNOWAS and the regional organizations in achieving lasting peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel.

**Ms. Gatt** (Malta): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Simão, and Ms. Addae-Mensah for their comprehensive briefings. Malta expresses its appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão and his team for supporting West Africa and the Sahel in harnessing its potential. We call for continued confidence-building and trust-building measures with countries in the region.

We issue a strong call for the protection and promotion of democracy, human rights, gender equality and the rule of law. In that vein, we welcome the successful holding of elections this year in Ghana, Senegal, Cabo Verde and Mauritania, as well

as the positive constitutional reform processes that are ongoing in Togo, Sierra Leone and Guinea. We look forward to the upcoming elections to be held in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Benin. It is imperative for elections to be held in a free, inclusive and transparent manner in order to ensure a lasting peace. At the same time, we remain deeply concerned by the postponement of elections in Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso. We urge transitional Governments to adhere to previously agreed electoral timelines.

Women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in elected and appointed positions remains indispensable. We welcome Ghana's introduction of a quota of 40 to 50 per cent for women's representation and commend such initiatives. Yet, it is with regret that we note the negative current trends in the Gambia and Nigeria. Malta also recognizes the vital contributions of young persons to political processes, especially in the region, which has the fastest growing youth population. In that regard, we welcome progress on the youth, peace and security agenda in Nigeria, Benin and Togo. We condemn all activities aimed at suppressing political and civic spaces in the region and call for the immediate release of all imprisoned political and civil society actors. It remains essential to monitor and address the issue of children affected by armed conflict in West Africa and the Sahel, including the recruitment of child soldiers, attacks on schools and other grave violations against children during times of conflict. At the same time, we welcome the measures taken to strengthen human rights protections, including the Gambia's upholding of the ban on female genital mutilation.

Security in the central Sahel requires a multidimensional response. The region faces interconnected crises, including the growing threat of terrorism, political instability, humanitarian challenges, environmental degradation and socioeconomic hardship. We join the Secretary-General in calling on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to use the upcoming calendar of summits to determine how best to deliver meaningful benefits to the region. Collaboration between ECOWAS, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Accra Initiative, among others, are critical in tackling regional security challenges. We encourage Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger to participate in such discussions. Greater regional cooperation is key to progress in an interconnected world.

The impacts of climate change on peace and security are another transboundary threat to the region by depleting natural resources and fuelling farmer-herder competition, while flooding damages critical infrastructure, cutting off communities from vital resources. Such trends increase vulnerability to violent extremism and leave communities exposed to threats from terrorist groups. Earlier this month, members of the Security Council belonging to the Informal Expert Group on Climate Peace and Security travelled through Nigeria to the Lake Chad Basin to assess those climate-related realities. Conflict-sensitive climate adaptation, better integrated early-warning systems and resilient farming practices are key to tackling climate-related security risks effectively. We acknowledge the efforts of the United Nations, including the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, and the European Union, ECOWAS, Nigeria and the Liptako-Gourma Authority.

In conclusion, the region is at a critical juncture. Malta has believed over the past two years and will continue to believe that integrated action that reinforces the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and promotes good governance should lie at the heart of our regional and global efforts to support the people of West Africa and the Sahel.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Representative Simão for his briefing. I have listened carefully and attentively to Ms. Addae-Mensah's statement.

In connection with the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/871), I would like to make the following three points.

First, we must help regional countries to maintain stability. During the reporting period, Ghana, Cabo Verde, Senegal and Mauritania successfully held elections at various levels. Guinea issued a new draft constitution. The smooth conduct of the relevant political processes is of great significance for the consolidation of regional peace and stability. The international community should support the countries of the region in strengthening national governance and capacity-building based on the conditions on the ground, steadily advancing the political process and pursuing a development path suited to their national conditions. As regards countries in transition, the international community should continue to exercise the necessary patience and provide them with greater constructive

support. China has maintained its traditional friendly relations with countries in the region and stands ready to support and assist efforts to strengthen regional unity and safeguard regional stability.

Secondly, we should help the countries of the region address security challenges. West Africa and the Sahel have long suffered greatly from terrorism. In the context of a complex and difficult counter-terrorism situation, the countries of the region should establish a sense of collective security and work consistently to enhance their cooperation on counter-terrorism. We welcomed the return of the Niger in July to the Multinational Joint Task Force and its cooperation with Libya and Nigeria on cross-border counter-terrorism and security.

China appreciates the decision of the sixty-sixth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States, held last weekend, to make counter-terrorism a priority. We call on the international community to provide effective assistance to countries of the region in enhancing their capacity to combat terrorism on their own. At the Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, held in Beijing in September, China announced that it would provide expertise and support to the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism and to the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism's Programme Office for Counter-Terrorism and Training in Africa. We are confident that the relevant initiatives will bolster cooperation on counter-terrorism in the region.

Thirdly, we should help the countries of the region to achieve sustainable development. According to the Secretary-General's report, many countries in West Africa and the Sahel are grappling with economic challenges such as high inflation, stagnating growth and debt-servicing difficulties. The international community should lend greater support to the countries of the region in developing their economies and improving people's livelihoods, and provide tailored assistance.

Owing to their geographic location, among other reasons, West Africa and the Sahel are facing particular challenges in responding to climate change. We call on developed countries to squarely face their historical responsibilities, actively honour their commitments on climate financing and increase their financial and technical support to the countries of the region. China is willing to share its technologies and experience, including in the areas of disaster prevention, mitigation

and relief, green development and water management, with a view to jointly addressing the adverse effects of climate change.

Lastly, we would like to express our appreciation for the efforts and contributions of Special Representative Simão and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and we will continue to support their work. It is also our hope that UNOWAS will strengthen its coordination and cooperation with other United Nations missions and country teams in Africa and thereby foster greater synergy in promoting regional peace and development.

**Ms. Jurečko** (Slovenia): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Simão, for his additional briefing, and Ms. Addae-Mensah for her contribution.

We believe it is essential for the Security Council to receive regular updates on developments in West Africa and the Sahel. We continue to follow the security and humanitarian situation in the region with deep concern. As the central Sahel grapples with complex challenges, a volatile security environment, a lagging democratic transition and political instability, displaced families in the Liptako-Gourma region and the Lake Chad basin are living in constant fear.

Violence driven by terrorist groups, intercommunal conflicts and political fragility is forcing communities to endure unimaginable suffering. Entire segments of society have been left stranded and completely out of reach of any humanitarian assistance. The growing food insecurity threatens to leave children at risk of malnutrition, while the closure of schools disrupts their education. Communities are repeatedly displaced, often more than once. We regret that time and time again the Sahel finds itself at the top of the list of the world's most neglected crises. The international community must remain engaged with the region and support its security, resilience and development efforts, while also engaging constructively on the importance of timely democratic transitions.

On top of the security crisis, the region is being devastated by climate change. When the Informal Expert Group on Climate, Peace and Security recently visited the Lake Chad basin, it witnessed first-hand the destructive consequences of the recent extreme flooding, which has affected more than 3.7 million people across West Africa. Entire towns have been submerged, crops destroyed and critical infrastructure

washed away. Erratic weather patterns, coupled with increasing uncertainty over access to water, are fuelling tensions between herder and farmer communities. Crop failures, combined with local grievances and ongoing instability, create a fertile ground for recruitment by extremist armed groups. In the light of those challenges, we echo the call of the Secretary-General for countries in the region and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to develop conflict-sensitive climate adaptation plans as part of comprehensive peacebuilding strategies. Effective and innovative water management solutions, along with transboundary agreements, can play an essential role in securing durable solutions and long-term stability, as the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal have demonstrated with their shared aquifer basin.

Lastly, the challenges facing West Africa and the Sahel do not respect borders. Insecurity in one country often spills over into neighbouring nations. What happens in one part of the region affects the region as a whole. We therefore urge the countries of West Africa and the Sahel to build trust and seek solutions together. Slovenia supports regional dialogue between ECOWAS and the members of the Alliance of Sahel States, together with confidence-building measures, to forge a joint path forward. We welcome the further steps to that end that the ECOWAS leaders took at the recent sixty-sixth ECOWAS Summit. Strained relations between countries must not hinder collaboration, especially when it comes to addressing threats to international peace and security, preventing terrorism and exchanging valuable intelligence to tackle transnational organized crime. In that context, international solidarity is vital, as is local ownership, ensuring that local communities, traditional leaders, civil society, women and youth are at the heart of the solutions.

To conclude, Slovenia welcomes the work of Special Representative Simão, especially his use of his good offices and his efforts to create an environment of transparency and trust, whereby parties can feel secure in seeing good-neighbourly relationships as an opportunity rather than a threat.

**Mr. Eckersley** (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Representative for his very valuable briefing and for all the excellent work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) team, and I thank Ms. Addae-Mensah for her briefing. We are also grateful to Sierra Leone and Switzerland for all their work this year in driving forward a consensus

in the Council, which is so important on this file. And like others, we thank Mozambique for leading the visit by the Informal Expert Group on Climate, Peace and Security to the Lake Chad basin. The United Kingdom would like to make three points today.

First of all, we congratulate Senegal, Ghana and Mauritania on their successful recent elections. But elsewhere, democracy and civic space remain under pressure, with civil society organizations, human rights defenders, journalists and media institutions facing severe challenges. The timelines for returning to constitutional Governments in Mali and Burkina Faso have either been delayed or remain unclear. The Niger has not established a transition timeline yet, while Guinea's transition timeline has slipped again. We call for a return to constitutional order to be completed swiftly. Inclusive and transparent democratic processes are crucial to stability and peace.

Secondly, the security situation across the Sahel is worsening, with terrorist and insurgent activities, serious and organized crime and external actors and proxies exacerbating instability. Private military security companies such as the Wagner Group and the Africa Corps are not the answer. They have a track record of worsening existing conflicts and undermining long-term development and stability. And we are concerned about the economic impact of deteriorating security in already fragile States. Many countries in the Sahel now face difficulties accessing the financing they need to maintain macroeconomic stability and sustained growth. The United Kingdom notes the outcome of the recent Summit of the Economic Community of West African States held on 15 December, including the announcement of a six-month grace period for the Alliance of Sahel States. We urge all States in the region to cooperate in tackling the growing security, development and governance challenges and transnational threats. Maintaining strong links between States is critical.

Thirdly, we are extremely concerned by the deteriorating regional humanitarian situation. Extreme flooding has affected more than 3.7 million people in West Africa this year and has contributed to worsening food insecurity, further fuelled by conflict, displacement and climate change. Since 2019, United Kingdom aid has supported more than 16 million people in the Sahel with life-saving assistance. But

access is increasingly restricted. We call on all actors to ensure safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance. Armed escorts must remain a last resort.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom looks forward to deepening bilateral partnerships and continuing to work closely with UNOWAS and regional organizations so as to help to build peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.

**Ms. Evstigneeva** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Leonardo Simão, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, for his briefing on the current situation in the region and his office's activities over the past six months. We support the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel as part of its mandate. We listened attentively to Ms. Levinia Addae-Mensah.

The reporting period was marked by active electoral processes at the national level. We note the active electoral campaigns in Ghana, Senegal, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, which are on the whole proceeding peacefully and in a relatively orderly manner. Constitutional reform is under way in the Gambia, Togo and Sierra Leone. We commend the fruitful efforts of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in finalizing border demarcation, which has proven to be a veritable challenge for the two countries over many years.

The regional situation reflects the ongoing reconfiguration of cooperation among its countries and the drive to find new ways of collaborating. The members of the Alliance of Sahel States have decided to withdraw from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) upon the expiration of the timeline set by ECOWAS. The Security Council must respect that choice. We understand the reasons that prompted Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso to take that step. We trust that the relevant transition process, which is set to last until July 2025, will be painless for all regional players and above all for the entire population of West Africa. In that regard, we are encouraged by the news of the agreements reached on maintaining a visa-free travel regime and a free-trade zone throughout the region. We are also pleased at the forging of new economic ties between a number of countries in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea. It is our hope that such examples will set the tone for the development of good-neighbourly and mutually beneficial relations between the States in question in the long term.

However, the security situation remains marked by an upsurge in the activity of many terrorist and criminal groups, which represents a heavy burden imposed by the Western military aggression against Libya — a burden that all States in the region continue to bear. The situation remains particularly difficult in the Liptako-Gourma triangle, where we can see intense activities by the Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. Terrorists are carrying out regular attacks against the military and civilians alike. The growing combat capabilities of the Islamic State in West Africa is a factor that is compounding the security situation in the countries of the Lake Chad basin. In north-eastern Nigeria, the situation also remains tense due to the activity of the Boko Haram terrorist group. Similarly, the authorities in Chad have to contend not only with jihadists but also with a large influx of refugees from neighbouring Sudan, where a protracted armed confrontation is ongoing.

Long-term stabilization in the Sahara-Sahel region will be possible only if the international community provides support for Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso, which are on the front lines of the fight against pan-African terrorist groups. We note the successful operations that they are conducting and the close coordination of their efforts, including with regard to the mutual transfer of operational data and intelligence. That joint action has enabled many terrorist group leaders to be eliminated. Actions aimed at thwarting the transitional authorities in those countries are destructive, not only because they are antithetical to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations but also because they could spell devastating consequences for Africa in its entirety, including by increasing terrorist threats. Only the African authorities are in a position to decide what will or will not contribute to combating terrorism and boosting political and economic development in their countries. In doing so, they are informed by their people's aspirations and needs and are directly accountable to their people. Despite most Western donors having cut aid to the affected countries for political reasons, we are in no doubt that the States in the region are doing their utmost to assist local communities and displaced persons. Efforts to improve the humanitarian and socio-economic situation should go hand in hand with security measures. The people, in particular young people, should see some prospect for living a normal life in their countries.

The blanket criticism levelled at sovereign countries, including the claim of a shrinking space for civil society and the media — which is unfounded — is being instigated by external forces and fuelled by States seeking to preserve their post-colonial influence. Council members should be aware that the foreign media in the region serves to a large extent as a tool for disinformation. The recent publication of material openly hostile to the authorities of the Niger and Mali by the BBC and Radio France Internationale are prime examples. It comes as no surprise that the authorities of those countries have decided to temporarily restrict the dissemination of material from those media outlets.

We object to the climate-security nexus agenda being promoted by a number of delegations. Similarly, we do not support proposals to have the topic included as an item on the Security Council's agenda. In our view, it is for the specialized United Nations funds and agencies to tackle the issues related to adaptation to climate change and the mitigation of its consequences. The Security Council has its own mandate, and it is regrettable that the number of tasks with which the Council has to grapple is steadily increasing.

In conclusion, Russia will continue to make a constructive contribution to collective efforts to achieve stability in the Sahara-Sahel region and in West Africa as a whole. We will continue to provide bilateral support to the States of the subregion. One such example of our contribution to regional security is the agreement concluded in September 2024 between Roscosmos and the Alliance of Sahel States countries on the launch of a communications satellite and an Earth remote-sensing satellite. The implementation of that project will significantly boost the capacities of the three countries to control State borders and monitor emergency situations. We will continue to provide support to the States of the region in strengthening the capabilities of their national armed forces and training their military and law enforcement personnel. It is our intention to ramp up humanitarian assistance to the countries of the Alliance of Sahel States.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): I deliver this statement on behalf of the informal co-focal points on conflict and hunger to the Security Council, Switzerland and my country, Guyana. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão for his briefing and express our support for his work and that of his team. We also thank Ms. Addae-Mensah for her briefing.

This year was a concerning year for food insecurity. As global food production levels increased, we also saw an unprecedented increase in global hunger. The recent early warnings on acute food insecurity November 2024 to May 2025 outlook by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme indicates that acute food insecurity is set to increase in both magnitude and severity across 22 countries and territories. According to that report, conflict and related international humanitarian law violations, climate variability and extremes, economic slowdowns and downturns, lack of access to and unaffordability of healthy diets, unhealthy food environments, and high and persistent inequality continue to drive food insecurity and malnutrition all over the world. Those are all challenges faced by West Africa and Sahelian countries. In fact, several West African and Sahelian countries are recognized as global hunger hotspots, as the region grapples with a growing humanitarian crisis. It is within that context that Guyana and Switzerland wish to highlight food insecurity in the region.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 48.6 million people throughout the region were projected to experience food insecurity in the critical June and August lean period, mainly owing to worsening security conditions in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. Of that number, 25.8 million people require humanitarian assistance and protection, in contrast with the 45 per cent guaranteed contributions to the humanitarian response plan. Yet, against that backdrop, the people of West Africa and the Sahel have demonstrated extraordinary resilience over the years. Their ability to collaborate and coordinate to improve their circumstances is renowned. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) continues to serve as a true demonstration of regional integration on the African continent. The recently adopted ECOWAS resilience strategy provides a unified framework to tackle vulnerabilities, foster sustainable development and promote long-term sustainability across the region. In order to prioritize efforts to mitigate food insecurity, early warning mechanisms, community-led initiatives and strong macroeconomic policies are crucial.

Acknowledging those deep-rooted challenges, their protracted nature and the vicious cycle they create, exacerbating extant security concerns and development challenges, strong political will becomes a critical

component for positive change. In the context of food insecurity, as informal co-focal points, Switzerland and Guyana would like to underscore three cross-cutting points that should form the basis for a positive outlook.

First, there is a need for increased international support. While the need for financial support and resources to build and sustain critical infrastructure remains, capacity-building is critical in West Africa and the Sahel. Among the largest youth populace in the world, capacity-building could lead to the type of sustainable and resilient societies envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Secondly, respect for international law, including international humanitarian law measures, must be put in place to protect objects indispensable to civilian survival. Equally important is the implementation of measures to respect and protect humanitarian and United Nations personnel, including nationally and locally recruited personnel, and their premises and assets. Such measures are crucial to ensuring humanitarian access to all those in need, as required by international humanitarian law and reaffirmed in resolutions 2417 (2018) and 2730 (2024).

Thirdly, a comprehensive overview is necessary. In addressing food insecurity in the region, stakeholders must acknowledge the interrelated nature of existing and emerging challenges. The food insecurity and climate nexus, the need to empower and involve women and youth in decision-making, reviving the education and health sectors and addressing displacement, migration and counter-terrorism measures must be taken into account in a comprehensive approach to addressing the region's challenges.

Allow me to conclude by reaffirming Switzerland and Guyana's commitment to the shared vision of a prosperous and secure West Africa and Sahel region, one that realizes the full aspirations of its people and their well-being.

**Mrs. Barba Bustos** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Representative Leonardo Santos Simão for his detailed briefing. I acknowledge the participation of civil society representative Ms. Addae-Mensah.

The West Africa and Sahel region faces complex challenges related to the lack of opportunities for young people, who represent 60 per cent of the population. Poverty, inequality and exclusion encourage the population to fall into the tentacles of terrorism, one

of the root causes of violence in the region, which also strengthens transnational organized crime through trafficking in arms, people and natural resources. The activities of terrorist groups continue to exacerbate violence, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities. Regional and international efforts, such as the Accra Initiative, are fundamental tools for cooperation in the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime. Likewise, it is necessary to strengthen maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. That is why we support the implementation of the Yaoundé Architecture for security, as a fundamental axis of stability in the region.

Achieving stability in the countries that make up the West African and Sahelian region is a goal that can only be achieved by strengthening institutions and the rule of law. This is made possible by promoting transparent and inclusive political processes. That is the path chosen by Cabo Verde, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana and Senegal, which have enhanced their democratic processes in search of greater stability. That demonstrates that strengthening institutions is possible even in adverse circumstances. We urge the transitional authorities of the region to carry out electoral processes without further delays, encouraging the use of civic space, promoting the exercise of fundamental freedoms and civil and political rights, and thereby guaranteeing inclusive, transparent political processes with the participation of all segments of the population, in particular women and young people, in order to achieve social cohesion and institutional legitimacy.

During Ecuador's two years as a member of the Council, we have witnessed the erosion of trust in regional organizations and regional security alliances. This is an opportune moment to reflect on the causes and reflect on changes that are tied to the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, development, and human rights.

The humanitarian consequences of insecurity are devastating, and they are worsened by the adverse effects of climate change that exacerbate natural disasters. Currently, more than 48 million people are affected by food insecurity due to flooding. Vital infrastructure has been destroyed, and more than 800,000 people have been displaced. It is imperative that countries in the region acquire the capacity to access climate and development financing to achieve medium- and long-term resilience. The international community must urgently intensify its efforts to continue the provision

of humanitarian aid to those who need it most. Ecuador supports the initiatives by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel seeking humanitarian responses and sustainable development strategies that can address the structural causes of the problems in the region.

As this is the last time that Ecuador will have the opportunity to speak on this subject during our current term on the Council, I would like to reiterate my support for the work of Special Representative Leonardo Santos Simão and his team. We encourage him to continue applying preventive diplomacy, good offices and mediation to prevent conflicts and tensions in support of political stability, the promotion of the rule of law and peacebuilding in West Africa and the Sahel.

**Mr. Dharmadhikari (France)** (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Representative Leonardo Santos Simão and Ms. Levinia Addae-Mensah for their interventions.

France continues to closely monitor the situation in West Africa and the Sahel. France is concerned by the deterioration of the security situation in the central Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, where terrorist attacks carried out by local branches of Al-Qaida and the Islamic State, as well as community-based violence, are reaching unprecedented levels. That violence is having disastrous humanitarian consequences, with more than 25 million people in need of assistance. The consequences of climate change, which make access to resources difficult, constitute an additional difficulty in West Africa. The floods in the region have reminded us of that. France is taking action and has renewed its support for the climate, peace and security mechanism, particularly in the region, to address them.

We must work collectively to identify solutions, given the challenges. France remains convinced that improving the situation in the region requires a peaceful political environment and commitment by all stakeholders to inclusive dialogue, particularly in the run-up to the upcoming elections. It requires a return to constitutional order and rule of law, in instances in which they are suspended, in order to lay the foundations for democratic governance. Finally, it requires universal respect for human rights and freedoms of association and expression.

France welcomes the efforts made by the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to maintain

dialogue, in support of the initiatives led by the Economic Community of West African States, with the valuable contributions of Senegal and Togo. Those challenges must not overshadow the positive developments that the region has experienced in recent months. France congratulates Senegal and Ghana for the transparent and inclusive organization of the recent elections. France welcomes the progress made in the area of transitional justice in the Gambia and Guinea, and the new step towards national unity in Sierra Leone. France is ready to continue to collaborate with UNOWAS as well as partners in the region who wish to do so, on all those questions, within a framework that respects international law.

**Mr. Mikanagi (Japan)**: I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão and Ms. Addae-Mensah for their informative briefings.

West Africa and the Sahel continue to face multidimensional and interconnected challenges. In that regard, we welcome the additional report and today's briefing, as it is essential that the Security Council remain engaged in the region. The developments there have an impact not only on the continent but also on the wider international community. We also commend the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel in supporting the region to address those crises through its good offices and its work to enhance regional cooperation, such as with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union.

Today I want to highlight two points.

First, democracy and good governance are the foundation for peace, stability and development. In that regard, Japan welcomes the peaceful holding of legislative and presidential elections in various countries in the region, such as Senegal and Ghana. We remain, however, deeply concerned by the unclear political timelines in the countries in transition in the region and call for a swift return to constitutional order based on the rule of law. We are also disturbed by the reports of severe restrictions on political and civic space and human rights violations in some countries in the region. We stress that respect for human rights and securing inclusivity, including the participation and representation of women and youth, are fundamental to building a stable and resilient society.

Secondly, the regional security situation remains alarming, compounding the already severe humanitarian situation and socioeconomic difficulties. That is further exacerbated by the adverse effects of climate change

affecting the region's peace and security. In tackling those cross-border and cross-cutting threats, regional and subregional cooperation is increasingly important. Regional security efforts, such as the Accra Initiative, the Multinational Joint Task Force and the ECOWAS Standby Force, should be further strengthened, especially as we see the spillover effects of terrorism and insecurity to littoral States of the Gulf of Guinea.

Furthermore, we emphasize the importance of preserving and fortifying regional integration so that terrorists do not take advantage of regional divisions. In that regard, we take note of ECOWAS's decision to set a six-month transition period and to keep its doors open to Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso. We encourage continued dialogue.

As we leave the Council at the end of this month, Japan reiterates its commitment to continuing to support regional efforts to address the root causes of instability and ensure human security, including through capacity- and institution-building, in collaboration with the international community.

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

Let me start by thanking Special Representative Simão and Ms. Addae-Mensah for their briefings and their leadership.

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) mandate and its reporting are critical, given the immense challenges faced by the people of West Africa and the Sahel. There are the challenges of countering violent extremism, of building resilience in democracies throughout the region and of assisting people in the region who are facing food insecurity and who have fled conflict. Allow me to address those challenges one by one.

First, the threat of terrorism and violent extremism to the region is extremely concerning, and it has been exacerbated by the aftermath of the force withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. Governments are struggling to reclaim control over territory and are witnessing record levels of violence. And leaders who engage in heavy-handed counter-terrorism tactics while neglecting to address the drivers of marginalization are only making the security situation worse. The security threat is further spreading into coastal West Africa, as

we see with recurrent attacks in Benin and Togo and in the continual increase in displacement.

As the United Nations reports, the Lake Chad Basin has also seen deterioration in its security, with an uptick in attacks and abductions in north-eastern Nigeria. For our part, the United States is committed to holistic partnerships, including through a strategy to prevent conflict, promote stability and address structural drivers of conflict, including gender-based violence and poor governance.

These are not just African problems. They are global problems that require African leadership. That brings me to my second point: democratic governance based on respect for human rights and human dignity is essential to building citizens' trust in their leaders and institutions and to stamping out the threats posed by terrorists and other malign actors. The good news is there are many examples of democracy in action. We applaud Liberia's and Senegal's democratic transfers of power following elections this year and congratulate Ghana on its recent presidential and parliamentary elections. I want to recognize the efforts of hundreds of thousands of Ghanaian poll workers, civil society members, the Electoral Commission and the country's security forces, who helped to ensure the election is conducted in a peaceful, transparent and credible manner. We also welcome positive steps taken by the Gambia to strengthen its justice sector and develop a hybrid court with the Economic Community of West African States. However, there are also clear signs of backsliding across the region, especially in countries shrinking their political and civic space by banning protests, arresting journalists and other civil society advocates, and curtailing freedom of expression. Leaders must reverse those deeply troubling trends. Human rights and freedoms must be respected.

Thirdly, across the region, millions of people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, including more than 25 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. And across the region, nearly 33 million people are food insecure. The scale of displacement, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has also dramatically increased. The United States is the largest single humanitarian donor in Africa, having provided more than \$6.7 billion in humanitarian assistance across the continent in 2024. However, that is not enough, and we cannot do it alone. We, as the international community, need to do more. We also

need United Nations officials leading the charge. In that vein, we welcome the July appointment of Ms. Flore-Smrecznia and the August appointment of Ms. Keita as the United Nations Resident Coordinators in Burkina Faso and the Niger after long vacancies.

The challenges before the region are great. But with the support of the Council, UNOWAS, regional partners and, first and foremost, of grass-roots leaders, change is possible. Lives can be saved, and conflicts can be resolved. None of this work will be easy, but we must not waver in our resolve.

Finally, before I conclude, I wish to say, in my national and personal capacities, that this may be my last meeting as President of the Security Council and

as the United States representative here in New York. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their friendship and support in terms of working to achieve our common and mutual goals in the Council. I want to thank the five elected members, who have worked so hard over the past two years and who really worked to bring the Council together. I also want to welcome the five new elected members to this body. It has truly been an honour and a pleasure for me to work with everyone.

I 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 12.40 p.m.*