

## STATEMENT

### **Security Council Meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> Report of the Secretary General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)**

*As Delivered*

*Statement by Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNOWAS  
New York, 11 July 2016*

Mr. President, Distinguished Council Members,

I am pleased to be here today to brief you on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel. Further to the 1<sup>st</sup> report (S/2016/566) of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and Sahel (UNOWAS), which is before you, I would like to highlight a few issues and update you on some of the most recent developments. However, please allow me, once again, on behalf of my colleagues to thank you for the visit of the Council to Dakar and UNOWAS on 8 March, and ask you for your continuous attention to West Africa and the Sahel.

Mr. President,

A momentous decision anxiously awaited by many was reached on 30 May 2016. A former president was sentenced by an African Court for crimes committed during his reign, for the first time. The sentence handed out to the former President of Chad, Mr. Hissène Habré sent a strong signal against impunity, and I would like to commend Senegal for offering to host, and to support this trial, which drew on the expertise of legal luminaries from across Africa.

On another positive note, the credible and peaceful elections held in Niger, Benin and Cabo Verde, equally provided opportunities for their respective citizens to express their preferences in a democratic manner. In Benin and Cabo Verde, the unsuccessful incumbents from ruling parties swiftly congratulated the winners from opposition parties, allowing for peaceful and smooth transitions in both countries.

Mr. President,

Regarding the “nexus between peace, governance, and development, it was indeed the desperation from the perceived lack of opportunities, justice, and of hope that contributed to the creation of a conducive climate for emergence of militant

movements that have since manifested themselves in the north of Mali and north-eastern Nigeria, and which threaten to destabilize West Africa and the Sahel region, and the Lake Chad Basin area. Instability and the existence of terrorist networks in the Middle East and the Maghreb have further fuelled extremism and terrorist activities in all these areas south of the Sahara.

Across the Sahel, as we speak, 4.5 million people are displaced, and six million people are in need of emergency food assistance. Millions cannot farm their land, and millions of children do not receive the education they need for a better future. Boko Haram continues to change tactics, and has twice overrun the city of Bosso (Niger), on 3 and 16 June, killing dozens of soldiers. As a result, its residents as well as Internally Displaced Persons, and refugees who had earlier escaped violence in Nigeria due to continuing attacks by the group, have also fled and abandoned the town. I visited the area on 22 June together with Nigerien authorities and international partners from the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration, as an expression of our solidarity with the people and authorities of Diffa province, Niger.

Terrorists have also struck further afield in West Africa, notably the attacks in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on 15 January, and in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire on 13 March. Traffickers, criminals, and their collaborators are seeking to benefit from lawlessness and insecurity to expand their networks. Mr President, Distinguished Council Members, we must not allow this to continue to spread.

Firstly, we need to further strengthen regional forces mobilized under the Multi National Joint Task Force. I wholeheartedly salute the commendable efforts already undertaken by the countries of the region and international partners, but capacities, in particular in the area of intelligence gathering, need to be stepped up. Secondly, we need to strengthen efforts towards meeting the basic needs of innocent civilians trapped in this tragedy. It is deeply troubling, that only 11 per cent of the UN Appeal of 1.98 billion dollars in 2016 has been received so far. Thirdly, and crucially, we need to strengthen democratic governance and addressing root causes as an essential task in conflict prevention efforts.

Mr. President, Distinguished Council Members,

In the second half of this year, there will be legislative elections in Côte d'Ivoire, presidential elections in the Gambia, and legislative and presidential elections in Ghana. In Guinea and Togo, citizens are still waiting long-overdue local elections. In Ghana, we are working assiduously with all stakeholders to help them overcome their differences in order to maintain the country's well-deserved reputation for peaceful and well-managed polls. In the Gambia, I am deeply concerned about the repression following peaceful protests in April calling for electoral reforms, and the ensuing allegations of torture and the death of detainees, as well as inflammatory statements targeting certain communities. We conducted a high-level joint mission to the country together with the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and will

continue engagement in support of the people of The Gambia throughout the electoral process.

At the same time, countries of the region are engaged in reviews of their foundational laws. Commissions put in place in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone, are working on recommendations to adapt their constitutions to their needs as modern states. The referendum in Senegal, notably, has endorsed a reduction of the presidential term from seven to five years. After only six weeks, the Commission in Benin has submitted pertinent recommendations for political and constitutional reforms. We are working with our partners to support these processes, and are availing the UN's collective expertise to help strengthen Burkina Faso's High Council for Reconciliation and National Unity, among other efforts to assist the country to consolidate the successful transition. In Mauritania and Togo, we are pursuing efforts, with regional partners, to support dialogue among stakeholders over critical national issues.

We have good hope that these West African and Sahel countries will emerge from these reform efforts more cohesive, better governed, and with more women taking part in decision-making. This would in turn strengthen their resilience to withstand internal and external shocks, such as the recent Ebola outbreak, which has been eradicated. In spite of impressive strides in the fight against corruption, the fall of oil prices has undermined efforts by Nigeria's new government to revamp the economy. At the same time, the country is experiencing community tensions, disputes over resources, and renewed militant movements not only in the North-East, but also in Biafra area and the Niger Delta. As the recent decision by the Central Bank to unpeg the national currency from the US dollar will predictably lead to price increases and socio-economic hardship, Nigerian actors need to deepen consultative and economic reforms as they endeavour to reboot Africa's largest economy. Examples from Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and other places amply demonstrate the strength of policy-making to develop more balanced and resilient economies.

Mr. President,

At the same time, as the desert is expanding, and water resources are diminishing, we also need to come together as international partners. We must not allow fragility to turn into failure. In this vein, I urge you to support the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, as our part of efforts towards addressing the root causes of the crisis. As you know, the sub-region is also increasingly threatened by violent extremism and radicalization, often linked to wider regional and global instability. In response to the Secretary-General's Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism, UNOWAS organized a regional conference on 27 and 28 June in Dakar, Senegal, with key UN and other partners, to collectively identify drivers of extremism and avenues to strengthen prevention in West Africa and the Sahel. The Conference emphasized the need for greater dialogue with women and youth as well as the need for integrated security/development/human rights approaches, local ownership and alternative narratives on violent extremism. I will continue to engage with national and regional actors on this subject. I am also setting up a UN Regional Task Force on the

Prevention of Violent Extremism in the region to facilitate coordination and complementarity of the UN's work in this area.

Mr. President, Distinguished Council Members,

The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, which I chair, continued the emplacement of pillars for the definitive demarcation of the border, and held consultations in capital cities of Yaoundé and Abuja during the reporting period. The Commission remains a prime example of the benefits of foresight and cooperation, and continue to make progress, particularly based on the excellent bilateral relations between the two countries.

Looking at the underlying challenges in the sub-region and beyond, we also need to think harder, how we can collectively improve international conflict prevention efforts before crises escalate beyond control. We owe it to the people of West Africa and the Sahel, who have shown such remarkable resilience to persisting multifaceted challenges. With its expanded mandate following the merger, UNOWAS remains fully committed to playing its role in the region in cooperation with partners including the G-5 Sahel, the African Union and ECOWAS.

I thank you for your attention.

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