



Briefing to the Security Council on the Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)

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Mr. President, Distinguished Council Members,

It is my honour to be here with you today to introduce the Secretary-General's report on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

Despite continuous progress in West Africa and the Sahel, notably regarding democratic and peaceful political transitions, the security situation in the region remains a matter of grave concern.

In Mali, terrorists launched a complex attack on MINUSMA's positions in Kidal resulting in the death of one peacekeeper; three more Malian soldiers have recently lost their lives through a landmine in Mopti region; another Malian soldier was killed by terrorists in Niono. Two separate attacks on security posts were also registered in Burkina Faso near the Malian border. The attacks in Mali as well as

within the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso tri-border area are mainly attributed to Al-Qaida affiliated groups and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara.

In Niger, the increasing number of security incidents has compelled the government to dedicate 17 per cent of public expenditure in 2018 to the security sector, compared to 15 per cent in 2017. This has, however, triggered demonstrations in Niger's capital given the expected detrimental effects on the delivery of social services.

Following a notable decline in Boko Haram attacks in the first half of the year, there has been an uptick in the number of incidents since September last year, with a peak of 143 civilian casualties alone in November 2017. The use of children as suicide bombers by Boko Haram increased five-fold compared to 2016 to reach 135 cases in 2017. While 700 people abducted by Boko Haram have recently escaped captivity, the group continues to kidnap innocent persons, as shown by the recent disappearance of 31 loggers in Gamboru near the Cameroon border. Overall, more than two million displaced persons are still desperately waiting for an end to this crisis in the Lake Chad Basin.

The comprehensive response of the region to address the Boko Haram threat must be supported by the international community. I commend the successful efforts of the Multinational Joint Task Force, I also welcome the conference on the resuscitation of the Lake Chad to be hosted by Nigeria next month.

In the Sahel, the Group of Five has made significant progress in the operationalisation of their Joint Force, including by establishing its military command structure and a Force headquarters in Sevaré, and conducting its first military operation with French troops in late October 2017. In line with Security Council resolution 2391 (2017), consultations are currently ongoing regarding the conclusion of a technical agreement among the United Nations, the European Union and G5 Sahel States on the provision of operational and logistical support to the Joint Force through MINUSMA.

On 8 December, at a meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union and representatives of the G-5 Sahel in Brussels, I underscored that the security response needs to be complemented by measures to tackle governance challenges as well as to boost economic development and the resilience of the Sahelian population as articulated in the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS).

The past six months have seen substantive progress in the efforts to reinvigorate UNISS, notably through an extensive mapping of UNISS-related activities and the presentation of a UNISS proposal to strengthen resilience of the Sahel population during the Third Annual Climate Finance Day on 11 December in Paris. A UNISS Support Plan will now be shared with national, regional and international partners to harmonise approaches and to canvass for effective support to the Sahel in line with national and regional priorities, the UN Agenda 2030 and the AU Agenda 2063.

Meanwhile, the exponential spread of intercommunal and farmer-herder conflicts that have claimed hundreds of lives in the recent past must also be cause for worry. It is a ticking time-bomb, which unattended, could escalate beyond the community level.

Mr. President,

Last December, during the Policy Committee of the West Africa Coast Initiative, member countries committed to reinforcing the fight against organized crime in line with the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan to Address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Transnational Organised Crime and Drug Abuse. Also, migration has become one of the most lucrative activities for criminal networks across West Africa and the Sahel. In this regard, stemming human trafficking must continue to be a top priority in 2018 as recently underscored by Secretary-General Guterres.

In line with Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016), the United Nations continues to pioneer the sustaining peace approach in The Gambia and Burkina Faso to ensure lasting peace and the consolidation of these young democracies. Strong support by the international community to Burkina Faso's Emergency Plan will enable it to withstand threats to its peace and security. The Gambia has just concluded the first phase of its security sector reform, and democratic consolidation is progressing with generous financial support of international partners. However, more attention still needs to be paid to the challenges facing the two countries in the areas of security sector reform, national reconciliation and the justice sector.

The United Nations continues to coordinate closely with AU, ECOWAS, EU and other partners in this regard.

Respect for human rights and the rule of law is a fundamental basis for advancing peace, security, and development. Thus, I particularly welcome Burkina Faso's new law on Human Rights Defenders and the law recently passed by the Gambia's National Assembly to establish a National Human Rights Commission. The establishment of a Judicial Commission in Nigeria to review the Armed Forces' compliance with international human rights standards and the start of judicial proceedings against Boko Haram suspects in Nigeria also need to be commended.

Also regarding the demarcation of the Cameroon-Nigerian border, the good neighbourly relationship between the two countries continue to increase prospects on its completion.

Mr. President, Distinguished Council Members,

The trajectory of successful democratic elections in West Africa continues. Notably, on 10 October and 26 December, the people of Liberia came out in large numbers to peacefully elect a new President. I applaud the Liberian people and their leaders for their recourse to exclusively legal means to settle all electoral-related disputes; this has served to further strengthen its existing democratic institutions. The deployment of former President Obasanjo of Nigeria, in his capacity as a member of the Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, following the 26 December presidential run-off, contributed to the gracious concession statement by Vice President

Boakai and the magnanimous gesture of President-elect George Weah, and demonstrated once more the efficacy of preventive diplomacy.

Further attention now needs to be paid to forthcoming elections in Sierra Leone and Guinea. In Togo, opposition parties continue with their street protests. The lack of consensus on the implementation of constitutional reforms in the country could threaten the holding of legislative and local elections this year. I continue my close collaboration with President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana, and President Alpha Condé of Guinea and Chairperson of the African Union, to facilitate a resolution of the impasse between the Government and the Opposition, in consonance with the Togolese Constitution, regional democratic best practices and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

As we pay tribute to outgoing President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, who is leaving office following 12 years of leadership and service to her country and to the wider region, in particular during her term as the Chair of ECOWAS, we must increase our efforts to promote the participation of women in decision-making and leadership, and ensure that the regions' youth are solidly placed at the center of development policies.

Distinguished Council Members,

Let me finally underscore that UNOWAS remains strongly committed to continuing to support efforts for the consolidation of peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel in line with its

mandate and very much appreciates the constant support it enjoys from this august Council.

I thank you for your attention.