



Bureau des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest et le Sahel

UNOWAS

United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

Ensemble pour la paix

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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 Members of the Council,

I am honored to be here today to introduce the latest report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS.)

Excellencies,

I have four key messages to share with you today with regard to developments in West Africa and the Sahel. **Firstly**, since my last briefing, **further progress has been made in democratic consolidation** in West Africa and the Sahel. **Secondly**, **such progress in the democratic space has not been linear nor without complications**. It has been the result of contestations, which have sometimes been palpably antagonistic. **Thirdly**, **the democratic progress has been delayed and complicated**, and sometimes, almost negated by a rapid expansion of violent extremism in the region. **My fourth and final message**, in recognition of progress made and despite continuing challenges, is one of **hope in**

the future and confidence in your support as we together work towards sustaining peace and preventing conflict in West Africa and the Sahel.

Indeed, we should **first of all** recognize and celebrate progress made in the consolidation of democracy in the region, including through peaceful transfers of power. In the past six months, presidential elections were organized in Nigeria (23 February), Senegal (24 February) and Mauritania (22 June) . Ahead of these fiercely contested elections, I met all presidential candidates and conveyed to them, alongside regional and international partners, the need to uphold the high electoral standards in the region. In Nigeria, my office also organized, jointly with the National Peace Commission and other partners, several peace fora to appease tensions in electoral hotspots.

Beyond successful elections, the past six months also saw the opening of political dialogues between the ruling government and the opposition in Burkina Faso and Benin, while in Ghana political stakeholders started a dialogue on vigilante groups. In Liberia on 7 July, the government respected the people's right to peaceful protests and agreed to begin a dialogue on strengthening the economy.

Pre-electoral and post-electoral periods however continue to be characterized by tensions, antagonistic contests and disputes, including around non-consensual constitutional amendments. Addressing such potential sources of conflict remains a major priority ahead of the upcoming cycle of high-stake presidential elections in West Africa scheduled for next year in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Niger and Togo. Furthermore, tensions around electoral periods derail the necessary attention to the pressing need to address questions of development and inequality.

Therefore, Mr. President, **my second message** is that the journey of democratic consolidation in this region has not been easy and cannot be taken for granted. Several countries in the region continue to struggle with human rights challenges. I am particularly concerned about the instrumentalization of the judiciary for political objectives in some cases as well as a predominant sentiment of impunity for violent crimes, undermining respect for the rule of law. In this sense, I commend the exemplary path chosen by The Gambia, where the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission as well as the National Human Rights Commission have embarked on their challenging tasks in a credible manner that has contributed to transitional justice and social cohesion.

While the region saw a slight increase in the number of female members of government and the first-ever appointment of a female speaker of parliament in Togo, women's representation remains a matter of concern. A persistently high level of inequality continues to have negative impacts on women, making them

prone to gender-based violence. The passing of legislation in Cabo Verde classifying gender-based violence as a priority prevention crime must be applauded in this context.

Thirdly, Excellencies, since my last briefing, the region of West Africa and the Sahel has witnessed an even more visible and significant rise in violent attacks directly related to violent extremism. The security situation remains volatile in the entire Sahel, where escalating violence and insecurity have sparked an unprecedented humanitarian crisis leaving a total of 5.1 million Burkinabe, Nigeriens and Malians in need.

Notably, however, the past six months have shown a rapid deterioration of the security situation in Burkina Faso: A total of 226 security incidents contributed to an accelerated displacement from 47,000 in December 2018 up to 220,000 internally displaced people and more than 25,000 refugees in June 2019, representing an almost five-fold increase. The north and east of the country remain the most affected by recurrent attacks of terrorist and armed groups as well as an increase in inter-communal violence with the involvement of seemingly uncontrolled self-defense groups. Terrorist groups are furthermore directly targeting schools and forcing health centers to close. Today, a total of 2,024 schools and 37 health centers remain closed in Burkina Faso as a direct effect of this crisis.

Amid this rapid escalation, Secretary-General Guterres has requested a significant scaling up of the United Nations' response and put in place an Emergency Task Force on Burkina Faso. The Task Force also builds on the findings of an inter-agency mission, which I was privileged to lead in February to Burkina Faso, and which defined a multi-sector response to address immediate needs as well as structural causes of the insecurity. A Humanitarian Response Plan budgeted at one hundred million dollars has also been launched and is currently being revised upwards to accommodate rising needs.

In the Lake Chad Basin, attacks by Boko Haram splinter groups continue to threaten the peace and stability of the region: The first half of 2019 has recorded 30 suicide bombers, a 70 per cent reduction compared to last year, due to the efforts of the Multinational Joint Task Force. However, the period under review also showed the deadliest attack to date on Chadian military, where Boko Haram fighters killed 23 soldiers in Dangdala. The terrorist group also attempted to launch a rocket attack on the airport in Diffa and led seemingly more sophisticated terrorist attacks in other parts of Niger. As of June, at least 147 civilians have been kidnapped in Niger's Diffa region, the highest number since 2015.

In view of this rapid escalation, including growing linkages in the region between terrorism, organized crime and inter-community clashes, the Heads of State

of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) decided during their summit on 29 June to hold an extraordinary summit on terrorism in Ouagadougou now scheduled for 14 September. It aims at discussing a concerted security approach for West Africa and the Sahel and represents a unique window of opportunity to harmonize the fragmented security arrangements.

Excellencies,

While the implementation of humanitarian response plans has seen laudable support, I urge governments and partners to redouble their efforts in defining a concerted approach to prevent a further expansion of the terrorist threat and foster support to much-needed medium and long-term stabilization measures aligned to UNISS.

In this regard, the second meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Governors Forum, which took place on 17 and 18 July that is, only last week, in Niamey, stressed once more the importance of holistic approaches to effectively tackle the instability in West Africa and the Sahel and successfully launched a Stabilization Facility for the Lake Chad. Through inclusive approaches based on national ownership and in line with UNISS, we must continue to work harder on addressing governance deficits, extreme poverty and lack of development that feed and sustain armed violence and extremism. Enhanced support to the implementation of the Regional Stabilization Strategy for the Lake Chad Basin as well as the Priority Investment Programme of the Group of Five of the Sahel, along a concerted effort to support national development plans remain essential for boosting development of the region and for exploring its full potential. This, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, is **my fourth and final message of hope**. With support from this august Council and guided by the inclusive national ownership of the countries of the region, I am confident that the consolidation of democracy can be further entrenched, and the activities of violent extremists can be better addressed, countered, through preventive measures.

In conclusion, let me assure you of the continued commitment of UNOWAS to work with all stakeholders in the region to promote peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel. I trust that we can continue to rely on the support of this eminent Council. In this regard, I am looking forward to the Strategic Review of UNOWAS, which should contribute immensely to respond to our quest for adequate resources to enable us to sharpen our tools for preventing conflicts and sustaining peace. I thank you, Excellencies, for all your support and look forward to working further with you.

Thank you for your kind attention.