



UNOWAS Magazine

Together for Peace

Quarterly Magazine of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

A photograph of a young man with short, dark, curly hair and a beard, looking upwards and to the left. He is holding a large Ghanaian flag, which has horizontal stripes of green, yellow, and red. In the background, a building with a large star on its facade is visible. The man is wearing a dark shirt with orange and white stripes on the sleeves.

Ghana,
successful elections testify
to democratic maturity

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Leonardo Santos SIMAO

Special Representative of the United Nations
Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and
Head of UNOWAS/CNMC

“Successful elections testify to Ghana’s democratic maturity”

The holding of general elections in Ghana on December 7, and legislative elections in Senegal on November 17, testifies to unquestionable democratic vitality, despite a regional political, security and socio-economic context beset by complex challenges that require strong determination of all actors concerned. Redoubling our efforts and mobilization to achieve the stability, peace and development that the people of West Africa need is a major objective, and one that requires the responsible support and commitment of national, regional and international actors.

This was the sense of the commitment demonstrated by all Ghanaian players before, during and after the general elections, which took place in a peaceful environment and enabled, once again, a peaceful and democratic transfer of power.

Our collaboration with the National Peace Council (NPC) and other partners, through the support of the organization of five national

stakeholder forums in Tamale, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Ho and Accra to promote peaceful elections, and the signing on November 28 of the Peace Pact for the Presidential Elections by all candidates and political parties helped to reinforce the importance of mobilizing all citizens, regardless of their political or social affiliation, to hold peaceful elections, and to respect the country’s laws and institutions, as we observed during the December 7 general elections.

As the Reverend Ernest Adu-Gyamfi, Chairman of the National Peace Council (NPC) of Ghana, pointed out in the aftermath of the presidential elections (see interview), “the Ghanaian people were able to maintain peace throughout the electoral process, underlining that the success of the elections testifies to Ghana’s democratic maturity”.











Indeed, Ghanaians’ commitment to peace and democracy enabled the elections to be a success, but it is also important to remember the

need to uphold this commitment after the elections to consolidate peace and development, because, as the Chairman of the NPC states, “the pursuit of unity among all citizens, regardless of their political affiliation, is crucial to strengthening national cohesion and building a better future for all.”

The daily work we carry out with our various partners to prevent conflict and consolidate peace in West Africa and the Sahel is a long-term undertaking. Each step forward, which puts the interests of West Africans first, represents a major victory for an entire region that continues to face persistent challenges such as climate change, insecurity and the threat of terrorism.

Meeting these challenges can only be achieved through the coordinated mobilization and commitment of all, especially women and young people, who represent the future of the countries in the sub-region.

10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT UNOWAS

-  UNOWAS, United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, was established in 2002 as a regional special political mission of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding (DPPA).
-  UNOWAS is headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.
-  UNOWAS implements the mandate given by the United Nations Security Council to prevent crises and conflicts through an active role in preventive diplomacy, good offices and political mediation.
-  The UNOWAS mandate covers 15 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo-Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.
-  UNOWAS works closely with the various United Nations entities including regional and international partners such as the Economic Community of West African States, the Mano River Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the Group of Five for the Sahel and the African Union, to consolidate peace and prevent conflicts.
-  UNOWAS supports the 15 countries in their efforts to consolidate good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and gender mainstreaming in conflict prevention and management initiatives.
-  UNOWAS supports sub-regional institutions and States in their efforts to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security in the sub-region. UNOWAS also contributes to the analysis and assessment of the impact of climate change on security and stability in the sub-region.
-  UNOWAS contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) to support the countries of the Sahel facing multiple challenges such as, security, development, the management of the effects of climate change and the promotion of sustainable development.
-  Special Representative of the Secretary-General is also the Chairman of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC), created to facilitate the implementation of the judgment rendered in 2002 by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the border dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria.
-  CNMC supports the work of border demarcation between Cameroon and Nigeria. It also supports the needs of populations affected by demarcation work. Since its creation, CN has demarcated 2050 km of a border estimated at 2100 km, and built 2213 pillars out of a total estimated at 2969.

UNOWAS celebrates the 9th anniversary of Resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security and commits to the 16 Days of Activism against GBV against women and girls



On December 9, DSRSG Freeman chaired the celebration ceremony of the 9th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security, on the theme “Youth facing insecurity and political transition in West Africa and the Sahel”. In her opening remarks, Freeman said, “For almost a decade, Resolution 2250 (2015) has mobilized young people around the youth, peace and security agenda to give a boost to the creation of a stable and serene environment in different communities, countries and regions.” As part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls, UNOWAS organized a capacity-building session on November 29 on the theme: “Harnessing the power of communities: Local solutions to combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV)”. Ms Freeman stressed the need to “renew our commitment to action and transform the discourse around gender-based violence, creating an environment where community initiatives not only survive, but thrive”. The previous day, the Deputy Special Representative took part in the “Gender Café” on the Women, Peace and Security agenda organized by the Dutch Embassy in Dakar, in collaboration with UNFPA and UN Women.

SRSg Simão attends the 58th UNSAC in Bangui



SRSg Simão visited Bangui, CAR, from 27 to 30 November. On November 29, he took part in the 58th ministerial session of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa (UNSAC). In his address, he took stock of the collaboration between UNOWAS and UNOCA on a range of issues, including the fight against violent extremism and terrorism, border transhumance, maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, and climate security. On 28 November, he participated in the High-level meeting of the UN Special Representatives and Special Envoys working on the Central African region. The discussions covered regional political and security challenges, Mr. Simão shared experiences from West Africa and the Sahel.

In Abuja, Special Representative Simão reaffirms UN's continued commitment to closely work with Nigerian Government and People to promote peace, security and development



As part of UNOWAS' continued engagement to support the countries of the sub-region in their efforts to consolidate peace and security, the Special Representative Simão concluded a five-day working visit to the Nigerian capital, Abuja, on November 23rd. He held a series of meetings with national authorities, as well as with ECOWAS's officials. He met with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dunoma Umar Ahmed; the Minister of Justice, Attorney General, Lateef Olasunkanmi Fagbemi SAN; Vice President of the Senate and Deputy Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament, Senator Barau Jibrin; the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr. Omar Aliou Touray; and with former President of Nigeria, H.E Goodluck Jonathan. He also met with the United Nations Country team and the diplomatic corps. The discussions with his interlocutors focused on various issues pertaining to peace and security in the sub-region and on ways to further reinforce regional coordination and partnership to tackle the many challenges facing the countries of the sub-region. He also discussed the remaining steps towards the finalization of the border demarcation process as part of the Cameroun-Nigeria Mixed Commission mandate. The Special Representative praised Nigeria's leadership role, particularly in the Lake Chad Basin, West Africa, and the Sahel, and reaffirmed the UN's continued commitment to working closely with the Nigerian government and people to promote peace, security and development in the country and in the sub-region.

UNOCA and UNOWAS reaffirm UN support to Chad's efforts to fight terrorism



As part of their commitment to preventing conflict and supporting the consolidation of peace and security in Central and West Africa, the Special Representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General for Central Africa, Abdou Abarry, and for West Africa and the Sahel, Leonardo Santos Simão, carried out a joint mission to Chad from November 12 to 16. During their stay, they held talks with the Prime Minister, Allamaye Halina, and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Abderaman Koulamallah, among others. Mr. Abarry and Mr. Simão paid close attention to the humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad Basin and visited Bol, more than 150 km north of the capital N'Djamena, on November 13. They were thus able to gauge the challenges facing the population, local authorities and humanitarian partners. Exchanges with all stakeholders enabled a rigorous needs assessment to be carried out, in order to better organize and coordinate assistance in terms of protection, food security and health, particularly for the most vulnerable, including women and children.

In Kuwait, SRSB Simão calls on partners to put in place a regional cooperation mechanism to support the countries of the Central Sahel to successfully fight terrorism



SRSB Simão participated in the High-level Conference on Strengthening International Counter-Terrorism Cooperation and Building Agile Border Security Mechanisms, held on 4-5 November in Kuwait. Co-organized by the State of Kuwait, the Republic of Tajikistan and the United Nations Office of Counterterrorism (UNOCT), the conference aimed at promoting regional and international cooperation on various border security and management issues outlined in the eighth review resolution of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by the General Assembly in July 2023. Speaking at the ministerial session on how to “leverage Multilateralism to Achieve Enhanced Counter-Terrorism Cooperation around the World”, the Special Representative Simão underscored that due to geopolitical reasons, the Sahel has become a forgotten region, in comparison to other conflict-affected regions of the world, although it is now characterized as the terrorism hotspot of the world. “If the Sahel countries do not receive enough support to fight and defeat terrorism, there is the risk that some parts of this Region will become safe sanctuaries from where terrorists can plan attacks on other countries and continents, including spillover to the Gulf of Guinea states,” he warned.

UNOWAS and UN Women strengthen the leadership of women



UNOWAS, in partnership with UN Women, organized a three-day capacity-building workshop for the West Africa and Sahel Women's Rapid Response Team, women leaders and representatives of women's networks from the region from 10 to 12 September in Somone, Senegal. The workshop aimed to strengthen the leadership of women, including young women, in responding to conflict and emergency situations in West Africa and the Sahel region, to ensure that preventive interventions and mediation efforts are inclusive and sensitive to the needs of communities, particularly women, youth and children. More than 25 women leaders were trained in conflict prevention and management, peace negotiation and mediation. At the end of the training session and discussions, the women expressed their willingness to put their expertise in preventive diplomacy and mediation at the service of States in the region. They also adopted a roadmap to be implemented over a year and requested UNOWAS and UN Women to establish a database of women mediators in West Africa and the Sahel.

National Stakeholder Forums contribute to the success of Ghana's general elections



Young people take the floor at national stakeholder forums in Ghana.

Working closely with partners including the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Ghana and Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC), UNOWAS supported the organization of National Stakeholder Forums in five strategic locations : Tamale, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Ho and Accra, to help ensure peaceful general elections on December 7.

As part of its ongoing commitment to peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel, UNOWAS attaches great importance to electoral processes, which are a necessary step in the democratic life of a country but can also become a source of tension and conflict, with direct consequences for peace and stability.

From the very first days of the pre-electoral period, UNOWAS has

been committed to a coordinated approach involving all national stakeholders in order to prevent tensions and conflicts, and foster a peaceful environment leading up to the elections, notably through the organization of National Stakeholder Forums.

As was the case in Nigeria, Ghana's National Stakeholder Forums, held in five strategic locations- Tamale, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Ho and Accra- played a

vital role in building trust between the various stakeholders to ensure credible, inclusive and peaceful general elections on December 7.

The presence of hundreds of participants, including traditional chiefs, representatives of political parties, security agencies, civil society organizations, state institutions, trade unions and the judiciary, among others, clearly illustrates Ghanaians' commitment



to dialogue and consultation, and underlines the importance of the role of these Forums in raising awareness and mobilizing citizens to promote peaceful elections under the rule of law.

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these Forums in raising awareness and mobilizing citizens to promote peaceful elections under the rule of law.

For the Chairman of Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC), Reverend Ernest Adu-Gyamfi, the success of the elections underlines the importance of regular engagement between stakeholders. National stakeholder forums helped to ease tensions, align expectations and underline the importance of peaceful competition, culminating in the pre-election signing of the Peace Pact.

In addition to the NPC's advocacy activities, the joint efforts of the UN and the NPC also helped to build confidence in the electoral process, and the partnership enhanced the diplomatic and logistical support needed to hold peaceful elections in Ghana, the NPC Chairman stressed in the aftermath of the elections, adding that proactive peacebuilding strategies and pre-election mediation were key to avoiding conflict.

The sense of responsibility demonstrated by all stakeholders, and the commitment of all candidates and political party leaders to ensure that peace and security prevail through-

out the electoral process, undoubtedly constitute a major achievement for the consolidation of democracy in Ghana, which will be cited as a model of political maturity and pragmatism.

The democratic and peaceful transfer of power, marked by the exemplary and gracious concession of candidate Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia to his competitor, President-elect John Dramani Mahama, will serve as a model for other countries in the region, while ensuring that peace remains a priority beyond the electoral cycle.

"It is important to continue peace efforts even after the elections to ensure the sustainability of peace. I call on all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, to remain united to strengthen national cohesion and build a better future for all," urged the Chairman of Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC), Reverend Ernest Adu-Gyamfi.

In pursuit of the objectives of the Compact for the Future adopted in September at the United Nations General Assembly, UNOWAS, in coordination with its partners, will continue to support Ghana in its efforts to achieve greater development and prosperity.

“I call for continued unity among all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, to strengthen national cohesion and build a better future for all.”



Rev. Ernest Adu-Gyamfi

Chairman of the National Peace Council (NPC) - Ghana

Rev. Dr. Ernest Adu-Gyamfi is the Chairman of the National Peace Council (NPC). Under his leadership, the NPC played a vital role in sensitizing and mobilizing all Ghanaians to ensure that peace prevails and remains a priority beyond the electoral cycle. Interview

The NPC is an independent statutory national peace institution established by The National Peace Council Act, 2011 (Act 818), can you tell us more about its role and achievements?

The NPC has several responsibilities and plays an important role in consolidating peace and dialogue through its active engagement in four domains:

- Mediation and Dialogue: The NPC works to mediate conflicts at all levels of society, from community disputes to larger national issues.
- Promotion of Peaceful Elections: NPC has played a critical role in ensuring

peaceful elections by organizing forums, facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, and promoting electoral peace.

- Conflict Prevention: NPC engages in proactive measures to prevent potential conflicts by addressing underlying issues that could escalate into violence.
- National Stakeholders Forums: The NPC organizes these forums to bring together diverse groups, including political parties, civil society organizations, security agencies, and other stakeholders, to discuss issues of peace and security.

In terms of achievements, I can highlight the following.

Peace Pact and Election Preparedness: The NPC was instrumental in the organization of the National Stakeholders Forums in five cities (Tamale, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Ho, and Accra), where key peace discussions and commitments were made, including the signing of the Peace Pact, which helped foster a peaceful environment leading up to the election.

Peaceful Elections: Through its advocacy, the NPC contributed to maintaining peace during the elections by fostering collaboration and trust among political

parties, electoral authorities, and the public.

Public Awareness and Education: The NPC also works on raising public awareness about the importance of peace and stability in the electoral process and beyond.

The NPC was critical in the organization of five National Stakeholders Forums, in Tamale, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Ho and Accra and the signing of the Peace Pact. Now that elections are behind us, what is your assessment? Are there any lessons learned for Ghana and for the region?

The elections in Ghana have been peaceful, with no major incidents of violence, a positive outcome that highlights the success of pre-election peacebuilding efforts.

The peaceful nature of the elections reflects the integrity of the electoral process, including the efforts of the Electoral Commission and the adherence of political parties to the rule of law. There are also some lessons learned for Ghana and for the countries of subregion which I can cite:



The NPC would commend the people of Ghana for maintaining peace throughout the election process, underscoring that the successful election is a testament to Ghana's democratic maturity.

Role of Dialogue and Stakeholder Engagement: The success of the elections highlights the importance of regular engagement among stakeholders. National stakeholders' forums helped to diffuse tensions, align expectations, and emphasize the importance of peaceful competition.

Collaboration with Security and Civil Society: The collaboration between the NPC, security agencies, political parties, and civil society organizations is a model for peaceful elections and can be replicated in other African countries.

Early Prevention and Peacebuilding: Proactive peacebuilding strategies and mediation before the elections were key in avoiding conflicts. It is important to maintain continuous peace efforts even after the elections to ensure the sustainability of peace.

The UN have been involved in supporting and promoting peaceful elections in Ghana and in the sub-region. What is your assessment of your collaboration with the UN in Ghana and UNOWAS in particular?

The UN has provided technical assistance and resources to support the NPC's efforts in organizing forums, workshops, and dialogue sessions with political stakeholders. The collaboration between the NPC and UNOWAS has been strategic, with both parties working closely on conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives, particularly around election periods.

The UN, in partnership with the NPC, has helped provide election monitoring and advice to prevent conflicts, mediate tensions, and ensure transparency during elections. The UN and NPC's joint efforts helped reinforce trust in the electoral process, and the partnership enhanced the diplomatic

and logistical support needed for Ghana's peaceful elections.

The collaboration also allowed the NPC to learn from the experiences of other countries in the region where the UN has been involved in peacebuilding efforts, ensuring a more comprehensive and context-specific approach.

The elections went smoothly and peacefully. What is the message you would like to convey to the Ghanaians?

The NPC would commend the people of Ghana for maintaining peace throughout the election process, underscoring that the successful election is a testament to Ghana's democratic maturity. The NPC would call for continued unity among all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, to strengthen national cohesion and build a better future for all.

The NPC would emphasize the importance of continuing to foster peace not just during elections, but in every aspect of society. This includes peaceful co-existence, mutual respect, and understanding.

A message of continued support for democratic institutions, including the Electoral Commission, the judiciary, and security services, as these are critical in sustaining peace and upholding Ghana's democracy.

In conclusion, the NPC's role in promoting peace during the elections has been significant, and its collaboration with the UN and other stakeholders contributed to a peaceful and successful election process. The lessons learned can serve as a model for other countries in the region, ensuring that peace remains a priority beyond the electoral cycle.

Special Representative Simão urges the Security Council to step up its support for countries in the sub-region



SRSg Simão at the Security Council briefing.

On Friday, December 20, 2024, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Leonardo Santos Simão, presented to the United Nations Security Council the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel, in which he calls for the mobilization of all to tackle, in particular, terrorism, violent extremism and the impact of climate change, which are causing profound suffering to millions of people.

Issued on December 2, the Secretary-General's report, presented by Leonardo Santos Simão, covers the period from July 1 to November 30, 2024. It reviews the situation in West Africa and the Sahel and provides an update on the activities and efforts undertaken by UNOWAS and CNMC to contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Addressing the Security Council, Mr. Simão underlined the significant democratic progress made in the region,

citing the peaceful elections in Ghana and Senegal, while acknowledging the economic challenges that threaten these gains. "These two elections demonstrate the progress made towards democracy in the region. However, Ghana, Senegal and other countries face significant economic challenges and need help to manage growing debt and implement projects that protect livelihoods, failing which their democratic gains will fail to meet the expectations created by populations, particularly those of women and



Regional leaders are unanimous in recognizing that the insecurity caused by terrorism and violent extremism is the region's most pressing concern.

young people,” said the Special Representative.

Mr. Simão also reported on his participation in the latest summit of Heads of State of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), underlining the Summit’s crucial position to maintain dialogue with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, despite their decision to withdraw from the regional organization. The Representative then mentioned the need to coordinate efforts to combat terrorism. “Regional leaders are unanimous in recognizing that the insecurity caused by terrorism and violent extremism is the region’s most pressing concern,” he said.

The humanitarian and security situation is alarming in the central Sahel, where increased displacement and insecurity have led to the closure of over 8,200 schools. The Special Representative spoke to members of the UN Security Council about recent attacks in the central Sahel, which have resulted in significant loss of life, and the fact that “terrorist groups are becoming more aggressive, using sophisticated weapons, including drones”. He urged international partners to support the underfunded humanitarian appeal, which currently remains below 50% of its target.

With regard to climate resilience, he highlighted meetings between stakeholders to discuss transboundary water management at the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference in Baku, and welcomed the December visit of the Council’s informal expert group on climate change, peace and security in the Lake Chad Basin region.

Mr. Simão also drew attention to the human rights situation. He stressed that human rights violations and restrictions on civic space persist, particularly in Guinea and the countries

of the central Sahel. He nevertheless congratulated Liberia on its efforts to ensure accountability for past crimes, and Gambia on its exemplary transitional justice process.

The Special Representative also highlighted the progress made in demarcating the border between Cameroon and Nigeria, which he said would be a major step forward for peacebuilding, the rule of law and diplomacy. He informed that the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC) will strengthen its collaboration with the African Union to advance African peacebuilding and conflict prevention mechanisms.

Mr. Simão welcomed the recent adoption of the Pact for the Future, which aims to strengthen dialogue and confidence-building measures between member states. He reiterated UNOWAS’s determination to foster collaboration between different stakeholders, including governments, civil society, women and young people, to address urgent issues of security, governance and humanitarian assistance. He also reaffirmed UNOWAS’ commitment to promoting people-centered peace initiatives, particularly in light of the upcoming ECOWAS Extraordinary Summit, which will focus on strengthening regional integration, with an emphasis on implementing resolutions 1325 and 2250 on women, youth, peace and security.

For their part, the members of the Security Council expressed their full support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, for his ongoing commitment to peace and security in the region. They stressed the importance for all stakeholders concerned to collaborate fully and constructively with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in fulfilling the man-

date of the UN Office for West Africa.

The members of the Security Council also encouraged continued close and effective cooperation between the United Nations, including the UN Office for West Africa, the Peacebuilding Commission and UN country offices, the African Union and sub-regional organizations and mechanisms in support of sustainable peace, security, stability and development in West Africa and the Sahel.

The members of the Security Council reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the people of West Africa and the Sahel in their aspirations for peace, security and prosperity. They called on all parties to ease tensions and work together to build a more stable and prosperous future for the region.



These two elections demonstrate the progress made towards democracy in the region.

However, Ghana, Senegal and other countries face significant economic challenges and need help to manage growing debt and implement projects that protect livelihoods.

Collaborative Efforts for Advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in West Africa and the Sahel



Participants at the Open Day on Resolution 1325 (2000), in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

The Open Day 2024 on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security set the stage for next year's celebration of the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). Main discussions focused on how to facilitate the full participation of women, including young women in all conflicts prevention, peace processes, political transitions and other aspects of development in West African and Sahelian countries.

Women, peace and security (WPS) issues in West Africa and the Sahel are intertwined with the region's socio-political challenges, ongoing conflicts and the complex roles played by women. Indeed, West Africa and the Sahel are witnessing an unprecedented rise in violent extremism that feeds terrorism and is spreading from the central Sahel to coastal countries, the intensification of inter-communal conflicts, the exacerbation of sexual and gender-based violence, and the resurgence of organized and transnational crime. Successive military coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger, followed by economic sanctions against these countries, as well as security threats,

have exacerbated geopolitical and diplomatic imbalances between several states. This context, combined with the effects of climate change, affects the population, especially women and children, and exacerbates poverty.

Women are often direct victims of violence: sexual violence, including rape and forced marriages, displacement and recruitment by extremist groups, while also facing increased risks of sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse during conflict. But their role is two-fold: In many West African and Sahelian conflicts, women are not only victims, but also active participants in the conflict and peacebuilding processes.

In some cases, women are recruited or voluntarily join armed groups as combatants, spies or even leaders within insurgent organisations. On the other hand, women have also played an important role in peace negotiations, mediation and reconciliation. Women's movements and organisations often provide essential grassroots leadership in conflict prevention and peace advocacy, including efforts such as inter-community dialogue and promoting women's inclusion in formal peace negotiations.

Despite women's significant contributions to peace and security, they are often under-represented in formal

peace processes, as called for in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security. Cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and exclusion from formal political spheres hinder women's active participation in peace negotiations and security decision-making. This limits the overall effectiveness and sustainability of peace processes.

On 15 October 2024, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Leonardo Santos Simão, co-chaired the Regional Open Day on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security. The event set the stage for next year's celebration of the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and aimed to facilitate the full participation of women, including young women, in all aspects of development in West African and Sahelian countries. The participants to the 2024 Regional Open Day pointed out that all countries in West Africa and the Sahel region have taken appropriate measures to implement resolution 1325 (2000), largely in line with the objectives of prevention, participation, protection and recovery, which are the four pillars of resolution 1325 (2000).

ECOWAS sustained momentum towards monitoring and reporting on the women, peace and security agenda through launching and fostering a collaborative and informed approach within members of ECOWAS Women Peace Security Steering Group on women, peace and security engagements.

In terms of participation, this year saw an important milestone in the advancement of women's representation in key governance positions with the adoption on 30 July of Ghana's Gender Affirmative Action Act, which requires

that at least 50% of civil service and decision-making positions be held by women by 2030. Ghanaian stakeholders have called for this law to be implemented as soon as possible.

Also on 30 July, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger agreed to set up a consultative framework within the Confederation of Sahel States to coordinate efforts to promote women and gender equality.

In the Gambia, we welcome efforts to defeat a bill to repeal the 2015 ban on female genital mutilation, which raises concerns about threats to the human rights, well-being and bodily autonomy of women and girls, in a general context of declining rights for girls and women. We welcome the mobilization of all stakeholders and the general political will to enforce the 2015 ban on female genital mutilation in The Gambia.

In September, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), in cooperation with UN Women, launched the West Africa and Sahel Women Mediators Rapid Response Team, a stand-by team of regional women mediators. SRSG Simão undertook to advocate for their inclusion in the region's mediation and negotiation teams and for the implementation of the roadmap they have developed. The AU-ECOWAS-UN two Missions to Sierra Leone, co-led by Her Excellency Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang, former Vice-President of the Republic of Gambia, and SRSG Simão, is a good example.

Sexual and gender-based violence has seen a new upsurge, especially with the proliferation of extremist groups who are specifically targeting women. The unprecedented number of IDPs in the Sahel has impacted women more dramatically, limiting access to vital health services, depriving youth of an education and increasing inequity.

Another theme that figured in the discussions was how the impact of climate change was particularly impacting on women. When natural disasters strike, there are still limited programs in post-conflict and recovery programs that consider specific issues related to women, including rights to land, consequences of forced displacement, sexually based violence and the reintegration of women associated with fighting forces.

However, the 2024 Regional Open Day participants recognized addressing women, peace, and security issues in the Sahel and West Africa requires coordinated regional and international efforts. Therefore, together, women and all actors must redouble their efforts to ensure that women and young women have the opportunity to contribute to decision-making on peace, security and development in West Africa and the Sahel, and to ensure that women and youth (especially young women) are not only involved but at the heart of conflict prevention/management, peacebuilding and development efforts.



Women's movements and organisations often provide essential grassroots leadership in conflict prevention and peace advocacy, including efforts such as inter-community dialogue and promoting women's inclusion in formal peace negotiations.



October 31, 2000, the Security Council unanimously adopts a resolution calling for women's participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution. Photo : UN Photo

UNOWAS

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE
FOR WEST AFRICA
AND THE SAHEL



BUREAU DES NATIONS UNIES
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At COP29, UNOWAS mobilizes regional players to better combat the impact of climate change in West Africa and the Sahel

During COP29, held in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22, UNOWAS, in collaboration with various partners, organized two meetings aimed at raising awareness and mobilizing public and private players on the impact of climate change on peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.

Pursuing its commitment to the effective implementation of the call to action issued by the regional conference on the impact of climate change on peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel held in Dakar on April 7, 2022, UNOWAS organized two important meetings during COP29 in Baku.

The first, organized on November 14 in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the United Nations Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NORCAP), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and GreenAid, focused on “Strengthening Climate Resilience and Peace in West and Central Africa”.

Participants discussed strategies for integrating climate resilience into frameworks for peacebuilding, resource management and human security. “It is important to strengthen information-sharing mechanisms and develop data- and evidence-based policies to further inform the development of adaptation strategies in the face of the adverse effects of climate

change”, stressed the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Barrie Freeman.



“UNOWAS will continue to work with its partners to ensure that access to water is integrated into conflict prevention strategies to strengthen peace and prosperity in the sub-region”

The second meeting, held on November 18, was devoted to “Water security and diplomacy in West Africa and the Sahel”. Organized in collaboration with the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the African Union (AU),

the meeting stressed the importance of promoting peace and development through water diplomacy. It also recommended strengthening collaboration between partners, adopting a Declaration on Water, Peace and Development, and organizing a second regional conference on climate change, peace and development. “UNOWAS will continue to work with its partners to ensure that access to water is integrated into conflict prevention strategies to strengthen peace and prosperity in the sub-region,” said Freeman in her address.

These two meetings, as well as the bilateral meetings Ms. Freeman had, are part of the activities UNOWAS is undertaking in coordination with its national, regional and international partners in response to the UN Security Council’s request on January 20, 2020 to “take into consideration the adverse consequences of climate change, energy insecurity, ecological changes and natural disasters on peace and security, by assisting governments in the sub-region and the UN system to carry out assessments of risk management strategies related to these changes.”



Regional Partnership to reduce tensions and Consolidate Peace in Sierra Leone



The joint ECOWAS-UNOWAS-Commonwealth delegation meets the President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio. Photo: Presidency of Sierra Leone

From 14 to 18 October 2024, SRSJ Leonardo Santos Simão co-led with H.E. Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang, former Vice-President of Republic of The Gambia, a joint high-level ECOWAS-UNOWAS Commonwealth Follow Up Mission of the International Moral Guarantors on the Agreement for National Unity (ANU) to promote national cohesion and consolidate peace in Sierra Leone.

The Agreement for National Unity (ANU), signed on 18 October 2023, between Sierra Leone's government and the opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) party, seeks to resolve political tensions and foster national cohesion. The disputed results of the June 2023 presidential elections were the source of the political tensions in Sierra Leone. Electoral irregularities and a lack of transparency in the results tabulation were among the allegations that marred the elections, which saw the incumbent President, Julius Maada Bio re-elected for a second term. Alleging that the Electoral Commission was biased, the APC, the main oppo-

sition party, rejected the results and demanded an independent audit. Preexisting political divisions were further exacerbated by this post-election dispute, which also fueled widespread dissatisfaction among opposition supporters. A general decline in public confidence in the country's democratic institutions, heightened mistrust between political parties, and sporadic protests were the results of the situation.

In view of preventing further escalation of tensions, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the African Union (AU),

the Commonwealth and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), voted for a concerted intervention to mediate between the Government and the opposition. As a result, the ANU was signed in October 2023, with the objective of restoring public trust in democratic processes, ensuring inclusive governance, and fostering political reconciliation.

The United Nations, represented by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Leonardo Santos Simão, the ECOWAS Commission, represented by Dr. Omar Alieu Touray, the AU Commis-

sion represented by Moussa Faki, and the Chief Mediator, H.E. Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang, serve alongside with key national institutions like the National Council of Paramount Chiefs as Moral Guarantors of this agreement. They work collaboratively with the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) to monitor progress and ensure compliance with the agreement's terms.

In that framework, an ECOWAS-UN-OWAS-Commonwealth Follow Up Mission of the International Moral Guarantors on the ANU, co-led by SRSG Leonardo Santos Simão and H.E. Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang, former Vice-President of Republic of The Gambia, took place from 14 to 18 October 2024. The joint high-level delegation held consultations with key stakeholders to assess progress made in the implementation of the ANU, and to engage on steps taken to implement the recommendations of the Tripartite

Committee Report. "This mission is a follow-up to the work that led to the signing of the National Unity Agreement and the creation of the Tripartite Committee," Timothy Kabba, Foreign Affairs Minister said. He further emphasized President Julius Maada Bio's unwavering commitment to national unity, noting that a divided country cannot achieve progress.

The mission noted reduced tensions which are a testimony to stakeholders' commitment to resolving post-election grievances. Efforts to promote regular consultations, inclusivity, and improved communication are crucial to sustaining this momentum. Her Excellency Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang praised the overall commitment of the government and other stakeholders to the peace process, noting that the achievement of sustainable peace is a collective responsibility. In his capacity as the co-chair of the joint high-level delegation, Special Representative

Simão reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to continue working with all partners and key actors to promote national cohesion and consolidate peace, stability and development in Sierra Leone and in the sub-region. "Sierra Leone has the potential to serve as an outstanding example of post-conflict recovery and a thriving democratic state in the region," Mr. Simão stated.



Sierra Leone has the potential to serve as an outstanding example of post-conflict recovery and a thriving democratic state in the region.



“Cooperation between the United Nations and Benin is on the up, as demonstrated by the government’s confidence in UN agencies”



United Nations Resident Coordinator in Benin since May 1, 2024, Aminatou Sar aims to put her experience and commitment to work to implement the 2030 Development Agenda. Interview

You have held the position of RC in Benin since May 1, 2024. What can you tell us about this country ?

I’ve been in Benin for 7 months now as UNS Resident Coordinator. In that short time, I’ve interacted a great deal with the national authorities, development partners, civil society players and the local population.

My first impressions of the country are quite positive. Benin is a country very much on the path to develop-

ment, with a very strong commitment on the part of the national authorities to ensure the implementation of the agenda 2030. Remarkable progress has been made in all areas: economic growth remains one of the most dynamic in West Africa, at 6.4% in 2023 and an estimated 6.6% in 2024. The outlook for economic growth remains very optimistic, despite the unfavorable regional environment.

This growth is supported by the implementation of a vast program of struc-

tural reforms in line with the vision and ambitions set out in the Government Action Program (PAG 2021-2026).

I would also like to note the Government’s commitment in the social field, notably with strategic investments in education with the generalization of school canteens in all public schools in the country. The reinforcement of health infrastructures to improve the supply of health services. The government has also embarked on an ambitious social protection program called

ARCH (Assurance pour le Renforcement du Capital Humain - Insurance to Strengthen Human Capital), which should help improve indicators and provide social protection for the most vulnerable. However, the country's Human Development Index is still very low, although it has improved in recent years. In 2020, Benin was ranked 166th out of 191 countries, with an HDI of 0.525, due to low life expectancy at birth (59.8 years), and low expected and average years of schooling (10.8 years and 4.4 years respectively).

Significant progress has also been made in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the latest Sustainable Development Report published by Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SNSD, 2024), Benin is halfway to achieving all 17 SDGs, with a score of 55.6 out of 100, above the population-weighted average for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The report also shows that Benin is on track to achieve MDG 1 (no poverty), MDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and MDG 10 (reduced inequality). However, declining trends are noted for MDG 4 (quality education), MDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and MDG 16 (peace, justice and effective institutions).

Benin's development outlook remains positive, and the foundations of economic growth remain solid in line with the structural reforms underway. However, major uncertainties linked to the political and security context remain, requiring particular attention from all development stakeholders.

Indeed, the security situation in the northern part of Benin, where sporadic attacks have been recorded, is currently a major challenge for the country's development. I would like to pay tribute to the efforts made by the

government to stem the rise of violent extremism in the north of the country. This approach, which combines both military and civilian strategies, aims to reinforce the presence of the State in at-risk localities, and to meet the economic needs of the population by providing public services, the absence of which would constitute a breeding ground for the spread of terrorism.

I would also like to mention the support provided by the United Nations through various programs to back government initiatives to prevent violent extremism. On the political front, as we approach the first general elections of 2026, an inclusive and peaceful electoral competition will enable Benin to focus more on its development priorities.

The United Nations system has been present in Benin for a long time. What is your assessment of its role and partnership with the national authorities ?

The United Nations system, through its Funds, Programs and Specialized Agencies, has been operating in Benin since the country's accession to national sovereignty in 1960, in various development fields such as health, education, agriculture and good governance.

Cooperation between the United Nations and the government is generally governed by the document currently known as the "Cooperation Framework Plan for Sustainable Development". The Cooperation Framework Plan currently in force in Benin covers the period 2023-2026. It is fully aligned with the national priorities set out in the government's development reference framework, the "Programme d'Actions du Gouvernement PAG (2021-2026)". The priority areas of cooperation between Benin and the United Nations

outlined in the Cooperation Framework Plan concern: i) inclusive, strong and sustainable economic growth, ii) strengthening human capital, and iii) good governance. The Cooperation Framework is structured around a set of joint initiatives and programs by all the Agencies, Funds and Programs, in line with the configuration of the United Nations Country Team in Benin. Through this framework plan, the United Nations aims to support Benin to the tune of 685 million USD over the 2021-2026 period.

An assessment of UN actions in the country shows that in recent years, significant results have been achieved thanks to UN support, notably in strengthening community resilience, improving access to basic social services and improving the quality of governance. The United Nations in Benin is also working alongside the government and other development partners to strengthen social cohesion and combat violent extremism.



The United Nations will also work with various stakeholders to strengthen the resilience of communities, but also the resilience of central, decentralized and local institutions to cope with different types of external shocks

We can confirm that cooperation between the United Nations and Benin is on the up, as demonstrated by the government's confidence in UN agencies. Indeed, the government has entrusted the implementation of several of its flagship programs to the United Nations. The National Integrated School Feeding Program (PNASI), for example, is implemented by the World Food Program (WFP). Several other government programs, financed with national resources, are implemented by entities such as UNDP and UNOPS, in the fields of resilience and health infrastructures. The Beninese government's contributions to the operation of UN entities are therefore up to date, and once again demonstrate the government's confidence in UN agencies and the commitment of Benin's authorities to strengthening multilateralism.

What are your priorities for next year?

The United Nations' priorities for the year 2025 are in line with the implementation of the annual tranche of the joint work plan of the Cooperation

Framework Plan and our willingness to accompany the government in accelerating progress towards achieving the SDGs through the six transitions that are: (1) food systems; (2) energy access and affordability; (3) digital connectivity; (4) education; (5) employment and social protection; and (6) climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

These priorities also focus on strengthening social cohesion, and the resilience of communities and systems to external shocks, with an emphasis on people left behind, and preparing structures for emergency management in line with the recommendations of our updated common country analysis.

Regarding social cohesion, actions will be aimed at preventing and responding to violent extremism in a holistic approach by increasing the provision of basic services and setting up infrastructures for peace. The United Nations will also work with various stakeholders to strengthen the resilience of communities, but also the resilience of central, decentralized and local in-

stitutions to cope with different types of external shocks (security risks, epidemics or shocks to food prices and inputs, etc.).

2025 is a pre-election year for Benin. The United Nations will remain mobilized alongside stakeholders to support the holding of general legislative, communal and presidential elections, scheduled for the first half of 2026, in a peaceful environment that respects the rule of law.



As we approach the first general elections of 2026, an inclusive and peaceful electoral competition will enable Benin to focus more on its development priorities



Aminatou Sar, during a visit to women who produce rice for school canteens supported by the WFP in Benin.

OBJECTIFS DE DÉVELOPPEMENT **DURABLE**



1 PAS
DE PAUVRETÉ



2 FAIM
«ZÉRO»



3 BONNE SANTÉ
ET BIEN-ÊTRE



4 ÉDUCATION
DE QUALITÉ



5 ÉGALITÉ ENTRE
LES SEXES



6 EAU PROPRE ET
ASSAINISSEMENT



7 ÉNERGIE PROPRE
ET D'UN COÛT
ABORDABLE



8 TRAVAIL DÉCENT
ET CROISSANCE
ÉCONOMIQUE



9 INDUSTRIE,
INNOVATION ET
INFRASTRUCTURE



10 INÉGALITÉS
RÉDUITES



11 VILLES ET
COMMUNAUTÉS
DURABLES



12 CONSOMMATION
ET PRODUCTION
RESPONSABLES



13 MESURES RELATIVES
À LA LUTTE CONTRE
LES CHANGEMENTS
CLIMATIQUES



14 VIE
AQUATIQUE



15 VIE
TERRESTRE



16 PAIX, JUSTICE
ET INSTITUTIONS
EFFICACES



17 PARTENARIATS POUR
LA RÉALISATION
DES OBJECTIFS



The climate crisis requires urgent action and long-term vision



The rainy season is drawing to a close across West Africa and the Sahel, and we are left surveying the impact of a year in which torrential rains and flooding have wrought havoc on vulnerable communities across the region.

Floodwaters are now slowly receding in some areas and media interest waning, but the suffering of those affected

by the flooding remains. It would be comforting to imagine that these extreme weather events are one-off, unlikely to be repeated; in fact they are set to become increasingly common in the years ahead. If we are to avoid the same suffering year on year, we must have serious conversations now not only about how to provide immediate relief, but also how we can better pre-

pare for and mitigate disasters such as these in the future.

Discussion around the climate crisis can often seem confusing to the non-expert – academic debates around emissions targets and abstruse scientific indicators. But the reality of the climate crisis has been laid bare for all to see this year in West Africa:

for the 3.7 million people affected by flooding in the region, the effects of climate change are all too real, and they are paying a heavy price.

Almost all countries in the region have been affected by flooding this year, with Niger (1.5 million affected people) and Nigeria (1.3 million) the worst-affected countries, followed by Mali, Guinea, Senegal and Liberia. The impact on people's lives has been devastating. At least 833 people have lost their lives, while nearly 900,000 people have been displaced and over 341,000 people have seen their homes damaged or destroyed.

Moreover, there is a knock-on impact on people's access to the most basic services. Across the region 731 schools have been affected by the floods this year – in some cases schools have been damaged or destroyed by floods, in others school buildings have ended up as temporary shelters for those who have lost their homes. Access to health services has also been affected, with 143 health facilities affected by the floods. Moreover, with water points and sanitation facilities also in many cases damaged and destroyed, the conditions are rife for the spread of disease, including cholera.

Beyond the short-term impact, there is also an impact on livelihoods which will remain even once the floodwaters have disappeared. The floods affected almost 440,000 hectares of agricultural land, and left more than 50,000 head of livestock dead. With their source of food and income now gone, affected communities are left even more vulnerable to future shocks and will be forced to adopt unsustainable coping mechanisms.

Extreme weather events like floods, drought and heatwaves are all set to become more frequent due to the climate crisis, exacerbating related prob-

lems such as desertification and the degradation of agricultural land.

West and Central Africa, including the Sahel, is on the frontline of a worsening climate crisis, and the most vulnerable people are paying the highest price. But the discomfiting reality is that much of the suffering outlined above could be avoided.

That is the choice we have before us – do we invest in tackling the effects of the climate crisis, or will we be back next year penning the same articles about the same tragic events?

To tackle the effects of the climate crisis, the humanitarian system needs funding to help those who are hit by the effects of flooding – those whose homes, schools and health centres are washed away, whose livelihoods have been destroyed, and who are forced to flee where they live in order to survive. UN agencies and NGO partners are doing incredible work across the region supporting those facing enormous challenges.

But humanitarian action is not a long-term solution in itself. Beyond humanitarian funding, there must also be investment in other initiatives – which need to be implemented in a coordinated way alongside traditional humanitarian interventions – to get ahead of the curve and help communities to prepare and to build resilience. We must establish early warning systems, to give communities as much advance warning as possible of what might happen. We must invest in preparedness so the humanitarian community can react with speed and agility to the onset of climate-related disasters. And we must invest in anticipatory action initiatives so that instead of simply reacting to crises, we work alongside communities to help prevent, and mitigate the effects of, those disasters. Through coordinated

humanitarian and development initiatives, we must help to create robust, resilient communities who are prepared to face the crises of the future. Of course, the above requires funding. As of late November, the humanitarian response plans in the region are still only around half funded. This is not a technical point – this means, quite simply, that vulnerable people who urgently need lifesaving assistance and protection will not receive it. This means humanitarians are left with impossible choices about who and where to help. And it means collectively we are falling short of our collective responsibility to support those in need.

Millions of people across West and Central Africa lead lives which contribute only minimally to the emissions that are fuelling the climate crisis, yet they have been left to pick up the tab for a problem they did not create. Their lives, livelihoods and futures are at risk. For their sakes, we must come together to provide the immediate support that is needed today, and to build resilience for tomorrow.



West and Central Africa, including the Sahel, is on the frontline of a worsening climate crisis, and the most vulnerable people are paying the highest price.

By Charles Bernimolin, Head of the OCHA Regional Office for West and Central Africa

“Despite all the challenges, there is hope for the realization of human rights in West Africa and the Sahel, thanks in particular to the progress of democracy and the mobilization of young people and women”



Robert Kotchani

OHCHR Regional Representative

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for West Africa (OHCHR-WARO) is the main United Nations agency responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights in West Africa. Based in Dakar, Senegal, since 2008, OHCHR-WARO works in coordination with States, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, communities and other partners to promote and ensure compliance with international human rights standards. The OHCHR Regional Representative, Mr. Robert Kotchani, tells us more. Interview.

You are the OHCHR Regional Representative, can you tell us about the role of your office?

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for West Africa (OHCHR-WARO) covers the West Af-

rican region, with a focus on Senegal and the so-called “priority” countries where OHCHR is not present, such as Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. Its work consists in ensuring that every person, regardless of race, religion, culture, nationality or gender, can enjoy their human rights.

Concretely, our activities cover the following areas:

Promotion and protection of human rights: we speak out objectively when human rights are violated and ensure that human rights standards are respected in the sub-region.

Human rights education and awareness: helping to empower individuals: our research, advocacy and educational activities help to raise awareness and encourage the participation and commitment of the international community and public opinion in human rights issues.

Technical assistance: we provide assistance and support to countries in the sub-region to help improve their human rights capabilities: thanks to our presence on the ground, we help with training, institution-building and the development of legislation in line with international human rights standards.

Mechanism and monitoring: we monitor human rights violations and prepare reports on the situation in various countries, to inform the international community and mobilize action, including preventive action, to defuse situations likely to generate conflict. Our in-country monitoring and analysis work enables governments and other stakeholders to make decisions and design programs adapted to each context.

Mainstreaming human rights into all UN programs: we help to mainstream human rights into all UN programs, including CCAs and Joint Analyses and Cooperation Frameworks, to ensure that peace and security, development and human rights- the three essential pillars of the UN system- are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

As a Regional human rights office, what are your priorities?

In line with our mandate and following an in-depth analysis of the human rights situation in West Africa, our priorities revolve around the consolidation of the rule of law and the principle of accountability for human rights violations. This is reflected in

our efforts to support States in building institutions and adopting laws, practices and policies that comply with international human rights norms and standards. We are also committed to strengthening equality and combating discrimination. We support governments in adopting and implementing laws, policies and practices aimed at combating gender-based discrimination and inequality, which particularly affect women, children and migrants. This also includes ongoing support for civil society organizations and National Human Rights Institutions to apply the principles of LNOB (Leave No One Behind), HRBA (Human Rights-Based Approach) and GEWE (Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment).

In this context, we are currently implementing two regional projects for children and migrants. One is the *Projet d'Appui à la Protection des Enfants Victimes de Violations de leurs Droits (PAPEV)*, a project financed by Italian Cooperation, which aims to improve national child protection systems in the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, the Republic of Guinea, Niger and Senegal. PAPEV helps to promote an ABDH in child protection. The PROMIS project, funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is a joint initiative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Republic of Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal, to develop a human rights-based response to migrant smuggling and to respond effectively to human rights abuses linked to irregular migration. We also have other supporters, such as the Catalan government, which is supporting us in the field of gender-based violence and the promotion of gender equality in West Africa. This aspect complements our work on strengthening the participation of

women, young people and vulnerable groups in public processes and the protection of human rights.

We are also committed to the Peace and Security agenda through the promotion of a human rights early warning analysis system to inform and influence the development of policies, strategies and operations aimed at preventing, mitigating or responding to emerging conflicts and humanitarian crises. Integrating human rights into sustainable development, above all by promoting greater consideration by relevant stakeholders of the human rights risks and impacts associated with the environment and business activities, in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and other relevant international norms and standards. Finally, we work to improve stakeholder engagement with international and regional human rights mechanisms, supporting reporting processes and the implementation of recommendations with the meaningful participation of CSOs.



Women and young people play a crucial role in the protection and promotion of human rights, and we are mobilized to support and accompany them in their advocacy process for the realization of their human rights.



Strong and autonomous national human rights institutions, an effective fight against impunity, including where necessary through transitional justice mechanisms, and a dynamic, broad-based, inclusive and secure civic space enabling the active participation of women and young people in constructive dialogue and advocacy processes, are the prerequisites for positioning West Africa and the Sahel in a dynamic of peace, stability and sustainable development.

Would you say that the human rights situation in the sub-region is better today than it was 10 or 20 years ago?

Last December 10, the world celebrated Human Rights Day. On that occasion, the Secretary-General delivered a message in which he said, among other things: “On this Human Rights Day, we are faced with a harsh reality.

Human rights are under attack”. Our region is not spared this reality, which is marked by political instability, coups d’état and armed crises that fuel situations of serious human rights violations. Added to this is the propensity for violent extremism, as well as the impact of climate change, leading to massive population displacements and violations of human rights, particularly for the most vulnerable.

The shrinking of civic space, hate speech, online violence, gender inequality, the human rights of migrants, the food crisis, security and humanitarian crises and climate change are all equally worrying situations, with negative impacts on the human rights situation.

Similarly, coups d’état, contested constitutional amendments and repression of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, leading to arbitrary arrests and detention of journalists, human rights defenders or political activists, or quite simply the use of excessive force during demonstrations by defense and security forces resulting in loss of life or serious injury in some states in the sub-region.

Without being exhaustive, the points mentioned indicate that there is still a long way to go in the field of human rights.

What are the most worrying violations in West Africa and the Sahel ?

When it comes to human rights, all violations are cause for concern. However, political tensions, intercommunity and armed conflicts, the rise of terrorism and the effects of climate change in the region have led to massacres of civilians, thousands of forced displacements, sexual violence, kidnappings and the destruction of school, hospital

and other infrastructures, jeopardizing peace and sustainable development.

On the political front, we continue to note with regret the repression of demonstrations, including peaceful ones, arbitrary detentions and summary executions, and the shrinking of civic and democratic space. In some situations, corruption and impunity compromise peace-building processes. Gender-based violence and discrimination against marginalized groups such as migrants and ethnic and sexual minorities are equally worrying.

In social and economic terms, access to water, quality education, vocational training, sexual and reproductive health services, decent housing, a healthy and varied diet, a healthy environment, etc. are still challenges for a significant number of people in the region. For the most part, these elements are still considered as services to be provided to populations, and not as rights. It is important to bring about this paradigm shift so that these services are henceforth considered as rights guaranteed by States to their populations..

Are governments in the sub-region doing enough to promote and respect human rights?

We can see glimmers of hope, notably with the adoption of national legal frameworks to protect human rights. Indeed. We can note a satisfactory level of ratification of the main international and regional human rights instruments by West African countries. Côte d’Ivoire’s recent ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families is a case in point.

The improvement of reporting mechanisms to the various human rights



Two women vote in Senegal's March 2024 presidential election.

mechanisms is also noteworthy, with the establishment and operationalization of national structures responsible for reporting on and monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

The establishment of stronger, more autonomous National Human Rights Institutions to monitor and report on the human rights situation in countries. In this respect, we welcome the reform of the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in Senegal, with the

adoption in September 2024 of the law establishing the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), and the launch in December 2024 of the call for candidates for the presidency and membership of the institution.

The development of the media as well as better access to information thanks to the magic of the Internet and the emergence of a strong and dynamic civil society to engage in human rights advocacy inspires me with great hope.

How does the United Nations work with States to strengthen governance and promote human rights?

This collaboration takes place through capacity-building for national human rights institutions, advocacy for the integration of human rights into public policy, assistance with the drafting of periodic reports to UN and African human rights bodies, the promotion and protection of the rights of women, young people and marginalized populations, and support for transitional justice through the development and implementation of programs to restore peace in post-conflict countries.

Are the demands of women and young people a good sign or a source of tension?

For us, it's basically a positive sign. It testifies to a heightened awareness on the part of these actors of their rights, the will to drive change and highlight structural discrimination, and to push

for legislative and social reforms.

These demands are even necessary to combat discrimination and denounce rights violations suffered by certain categories of the population. It is also an essential indicator that freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are respected.

Indeed, through their social movements, young people and women exert pressure on governments, international institutions and companies to respect, protect and realize human rights without discrimination.

Well-organized advocacy campaigns can lead to the adoption and enforcement of laws favorable to human rights, or the repeal of discriminatory laws. These campaigns are often the means by which vulnerable or marginalized populations can make their voices heard in traditional political spheres.

By making the struggles of these groups visible, social movements highlight injustices that are often ignored. At OHCHR-BRAO, we believe that women and young people play a crucial role in the protection and promotion of human rights, and we are

mobilized to support and accompany them in their advocacy process for the realization of their human rights.

What are the hopes for the future of human rights in West Africa and the Sahel?

Despite all the challenges listed, we believe that there is hope for the realization of human rights in West Africa and the Sahel, thanks to the progress of democracy and the mobilization of young people and women. This will require stronger political will and greater responsibility on the part of States, as duty-bearers, to respect their human rights commitments, placing them at the heart of planning, development and policy implementation processes. Strong and autonomous national human rights institutions, an effective fight against impunity, including where necessary through transitional justice mechanisms, and a dynamic, broad-based, inclusive and secure civic space enabling the active participation of women and young people in constructive dialogue and advocacy processes, are the prerequisites for positioning West Africa and the Sahel in a dynamic of peace, stability and sustainable development.



International Human Rights Day Campaign 2021 - UNHCR

The Photo of the Mag



*In Zinder, Niger, dedicated social workers engage children in a variety of recreational activities at the center for victims of trafficking.
Photo: IOM/Alexander Bee*

Alice Djiba, journalist committed to promote women's rights



Alice Djiba

Journalist, winner of the 3rd Francophone Prize for innovation in the Media

Alice Djiba, journalist and founder of the InfoElles platform, received the 3rd Francophone Prize for Innovation in the Media last October awarded by the International Organization of La Francophonie, Reporters Without Borders and France Médias Monde. UNOWAS Magazine went to meet this young woman committed to the promotion of women's rights.

She dreamed of becoming a nurse or midwife, she is now a committed journalist and founder of the InfoElles platform! An unexpected orientation or a choice dictated by the circumstances that shape the environment in which she evolves.

to give up her desire to serve others, especially women, to have their place in society recognized. This is the commitment she has nurtured since her youth and which, if you listen carefully to her words, will, without a doubt, be even stronger in the years to come.

ment. Her natural solidarity with other women was undoubtedly the trigger for her first passion, still intact, for the professions of nurse and midwifery, but with the help of time, her passion became a commitment to women's rights.

At 35 years old, Alice Djiba, a native of Hillole, a village in Senegal located in Lower Casamance, does not want to give up her dream, nor does she want

From her childhood spent in a rural environment, Alice was able to observe social relations marked by the absence of women as major actors in develop-

In 2010, she obtained her baccalauréat at Khar Kane High School, after completing her primary education at Notre-Dame des Pauvres in Mbar, in



“Women’s rights are not an option, they are a necessity to build a collective future based on justice and equality”

the Fatick region. After her bachelor’s degree, she pursued studies in journalism and communication, obtaining a scholarship to pursue a career in the field.

During her professional career as a journalist, Alice has worked in collaboration with several radio stations and broadcasters, such as Radio Convergence FM, Sud FM, Africa 7, Convergence FM and Excaf Telecom. Together with other young collaborators, she also produced programs for the radio station VOA Afrique. In 2017, she left the world of the press with the intention of focusing on other initiatives. In 2019, she was certified by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Turin to promote more responsible journalism in this sector. She has also taken part in awareness campaigns on the Maputo Protocol in Togo, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire and The Gambia.

In the same year, she was in charge of communication and advocacy at the Inter-African Network for Women, Media, Gender and Development (FAMEDEV), which was responsible for coordinating the Global Media Monitoring Project in West and Central Africa. In her role, she supervised a study for Senegal that found that only 13 per cent of media experts are women, a

particularly low percentage. The main recommendation from this study is to promote more gender-sensitive journalism. In 2021, she set up InfoElles with the aim of promoting the rights of women and girls in media content and intervenes around six strategic axes: Rights and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Sustainable Development, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Women’s Leadership, Entrepreneurship, and Positive Masculinity.

Three years later, InfoElles has been rewarded. In October 2024, she was awarded the third Francophone Prize for Media Innovation, awarded by the International Organization of La Francophonie, Reporters Without Borders and France Médias Monde. An important distinction that highlights InfoElles’ contribution to the promotion of women’s rights. “We have several sections, such as Nos Musukebas, which highlights women in so-called ‘masculine’ fields and those who are active in entrepreneurship and activism. There is also Fem’Médias, as well as Au Masculin,” she explains proudly, before concluding that these two sections are innovations that largely contributed to the selection of her candidacy. “The former stands out for its role in promoting women in media governance bodies, and the latter focuses on men committed to women’s rights or in their communities,” she said.

Alice has no intention of stopping there! Because even though women make up half of the world’s population, inequalities in rights, opportunities and freedoms persist.

She plans to transform InfoElles into a major pan-African organization dedicated to the promotion of women’s rights and initiatives, with a focus on issues often overlooked by the media, but crucial for women. This project

is of paramount importance to him, as it represents a major challenge in terms of social justice and development. Indeed, according to the young woman, women have been relegated for a long time and it is imperative to remedy these injustices. She envisions continuing the legacy of those women who fought for women’s rights, including her own, and who paved the way for many opportunities such as access to education, the right to vote, and the pursuit of their most ambitious aspirations.



It is essential that women and girls fight injustice, inequality and violence. It is essential that they rise up to assert themselves and contribute alongside men to development and progress

Her commitment to women’s rights aims to promote a more just, equitable and sustainable society. “Women’s rights are not an option, they are a necessity to build a collective future based on justice and equality,” she asserts forcefully.

“It is essential that women and girls fight injustice, inequality and violence. It is essential that they rise up to assert themselves and contribute alongside men to development and progress,” Alice concludes by way of message.



Pact for the Future

World leaders adopted on 22 September, a Pact for the Future that includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations. This Pact is the culmination of an inclusive, years-long process to adapt international cooperation to the realities of today and the challenges of tomorrow. The most wide-ranging international agreement in many years, covering entirely new areas as well as issues on which agreement has not been possible in decades, the Pact aims above all to ensure that international institutions can deliver in the face of a world that has changed dramatically since they were created. As the Secretary-General has said: “We cannot create a future fit for our grandchildren with a system built by our grandparents.”

Overall, the agreement of the Pact is a strong statement of countries’ commitment to the United Nations, the international system and international law. Leaders set out a clear vision of an international system that can deliver on its promises, is more representative of today’s world, and draws on the

energy and expertise of governments, civil society and other key partners.

“The Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Compact, and the Declaration on Future Generations open the door to new opportunities and untapped possibilities,” said the Secretary-General during his remarks at the opening of the Summit of the Future. The President of the General Assembly noted that the Pact would “lay the foundations for a sustainable, just, and peaceful global order – for all peoples and nations.”

The Pact covers a broad range of issues including peace and security, sustainable development, climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, gender, youth and future generations, and the transformation of global governance. Key deliverables in the Pact include:

In the area of peace and security

The most progressive and concrete commitment to Security Council reform since the 1960s, with plans to

improve the effectiveness and representativeness of the Council, including by redressing the historical underrepresentation of Africa as a priority.

The first multilateral recommitment to nuclear disarmament in more than a decade, with a clear commitment to the goal of totally eliminating nuclear weapons.

Agreement to strengthen international frameworks that govern outer space, including a clear commitment to prevent an arms race in outer space and the need to ensure all countries can benefit from the safe and sustainable exploration of outer space.

Steps to avoid the weaponization and misuse of new technologies, such as lethal autonomous weapons, and affirmation that the laws of war should apply to many of these new technologies.

On sustainable development, climate and financing for development

The entire Pact is designed to tur-

bo-charge implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The most detailed agreement ever at the United Nations on the need for reform of the international financial architecture so that it better represents and serves developing countries, including:

Giving developing countries a greater say in how decisions are taken at international financial institutions;

Mobilizing more financing from multilateral development banks to help developing countries meet their development needs;

Reviewing the sovereign debt architecture to ensure that developing countries can borrow sustainably to invest in their future, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), UN, G20 and other key players working together;

Strengthening the global financial safety net to protect the poorest in the event of financial and economic shocks, through concrete actions by the IMF and Member States;

Accelerating measures to address the challenge of climate change, including through delivering more finance to help countries adapt to climate change and invest in renewable energy.

Improving how we measure human progress, going beyond GDP to capturing human and planetary wellbeing and sustainability.

A commitment to consider ways to introduce a global minimum level of taxation on high-net-worth individuals.

On climate change, confirmation of the need to keep global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and to transition away from fossil fuels

in energy systems to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

On digital cooperation

The Global Digital Compact, annexed to the Pact, is the first comprehensive global framework for digital cooperation and AI governance.

At the heart of the Compact is a commitment to design, use and govern technology for the benefit of all. This includes commitments by world leaders to:

Connect all people, schools and hospitals to the Internet;

Anchor digital cooperation in human rights and international law;

Make the online space safe for all, especially children, through actions by governments, tech companies and social media;

Govern artificial intelligence (AI), with a road map that includes an International Scientific Panel and a Global Policy Dialogue on AI;

Make data more open and accessible, with agreements on open-source data, models and standards;

This is also the first global commitment to data governance, placing it on the UN agenda and requiring countries to take concrete actions by 2030.

Youth and future generations

The first-ever Declaration on Future Generations, with concrete steps to take account of future generations in our decision-making, including a possible envoy for future generations.

A commitment to more meaningful opportunities for young people to

participate in the decisions that shape their lives, especially at the global level.

Human rights and gender

A strengthening of our work on human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

A clear call on the need to protect human rights defenders.

Strong signals on the importance of engagement of other stakeholders in global governance, including local and regional governments, civil society, private sector and others.

There are provisions across the Pact and its annexes for follow-up action, to ensure that the commitments made are implemented.

Summit process

The Summit process and the Pact have been deeply enriched by the contributions of millions of voices and thousands of stakeholders from around the world.

The Summit brought together over 4,000 individuals from Heads of State and Government, observers, intergovernmental organizations, UN System, civil society, and non-governmental organizations. In a broader push to increase the engagement of diverse actors, the formal Summit was preceded by the Action Days from 20-21 September, which attracted more than 7,000 individuals representing all segments of society. The Action Days featured strong commitments to action by all stakeholders, as well as pledges of \$1.05 billion to advance digital inclusion.

UNOWAS

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE
FOR WEST AFRICA
AND THE SAHEL



BUREAU DES NATIONS UNIES
POUR L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST
ET LE SAHEL



CNMC



CAMEROON-NIGERIA
MIXED COMMISSION



COMMISSION MIXTE
CAMEROUN-NIGERIA



2025

Season's greetings

Meilleurs vœux

Ensemble pour la paix

Together for peace

“They said...



“Like men, we play an active role in natural disaster management and prevention. We understand that this is not just a task for the men, but for the whole village, including the women.”

– Fatma resident of Lemghayes, Mauritania



“The problem is we fight alone, we make it alone, and only we benefit. Imagine if we flipped the script—those of us who’ve made it, putting others on; sharing job tips, scholarships, opportunities—basically, say one country has fire, lights up another, who in turn passes it on, and soon, all of Africa’s on fire (in the best way of course)! We would all glow together, not alone.”

– Moumouni Dialla, President, Pan African Youth Union



In Nigeria, as throughout the Sahel, we young people have this energy, this determination, and we need to play a greater role in society, to be leaders!

– Eromosele Peter Adene, young activist and founder of ABENOL



“Things have been improving lately, and we are hopeful. I can once again sell my cattle to the Nigerians”.

– A Cameroonian livestock farmer and trader returning from Banki, a neighboring Nigerian town