



# UNOWAS Magazine

*Together for Peace*

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

For a collective commitment



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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

## An unwavering commitment

On April 3, I had the honor of presenting the United Nations Secretary-General's report on the political situation in West Africa and the Sahel. An opportunity to draw the attention of the international community, legitimately absorbed by geopolitical issues such as the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East.

In addition to the political and security tensions raging in the sub-region, the economic pressures of high inflation and excessive debt are severely affecting governments' ability to meet the priority needs of their populations and invest in essential infrastructure.

Despite a regional and international context increasingly marked by economic, political and security shocks and crises, it is vital to remain mobilized and act in a coordinated manner using comprehensive approaches and effective partnerships to consolidate

peace, stability and development in West Africa and the Sahel. We have every reason to be optimistic about the future of the people of West Africa, as significant progress has been made and deserves to be encouraged.

In Burkina Faso, the authorities have declared that they control over 70% of the territory, and are attempting to re-establish stable governance through national consultations; in Mali, 2,000 out of 3,000 former combatants have already joined the regular armed forces as part of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process; in Mauritania, dialogue has begun between the government and the opposition, while in Guinea, elections are due to be held by the end of the year.

Even if the implementation of action plans for the empowerment of











women and young people needs to be accelerated, it nevertheless remains a key axis of efforts to improve governance in the sub-region, where a significant number of countries have adopted laws to promote the participation of women in political life, as in Senegal and Ghana.

We must reinforce and protect these achievements.

Our commitment to the authorities and peoples of the sub-region is unwavering. In the face of the various challenges hindering their march towards peace and prosperity, we remain mobilized to continue working hand in hand with national and regional stakeholders to safeguard peace and contribute to the prosperity of the populations of West Africa and the Sahel.



# 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.

### ECOWAS High-Level Political Mission to Guinea-Bissau



The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) participated in an ECOWAS High-Level Political Mission to Guinea-Bissau, deployed from 21 to 28 February. The delegation was received in audience by President Umaro Sissoco Embaló and held a series of meetings with national stakeholders to discuss support to ensure inclusive and peaceful elections in 2025.

### SRSg Simão Visit Mauritania



The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Leonardo Santos Simão, undertook from 19 to 20 February a visit to Mauritania as part of UNOWAS' commitment to support peace, stability, and development in the sub-region, particularly in the Sahel. The Special Representative met with President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani. He emphasized the importance of strengthening regional cooperation and praised Mauritania's role in promoting regional stability.

### L'Arbre-à-Palabres on Corruption and Stability in West Africa and the Sahel



On March 20, UNOWAS hosted its regular "Arbre-à-Palabres" to discuss the link between corruption, sociopolitical crises, and instability in West Africa and the Sahel. Participants, including civil society leaders, academics, think tanks, anti-corruption agencies, and international organizations exchanged on the root causes of corruption and its far-reaching consequences, and on how to strengthen good governance, promote peace, and enhance regional stability. "L'Arbre à Palabres" is a periodic platform, coordinated by UNOWAS, for exchanges and reflections on the state of governance, human rights, the rule of law, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.

### 17th Meeting of the Steering Committee of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS)



The 17th meeting of the Steering Committee of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) which took place from 4 to 5 February in Dakar, Senegal, focused on global, regional, and cross-border dynamics to guide the United Nation's strategic positioning in the Sahel region. SRSg Leonardo Santos Simão, co-chair of the meeting, highlighted the importance of dialogue in the Sahel's political shifts and the evolving security landscape. He encouraged UN partners to continue using the UNISS platform to support collaborative frameworks that enhance regional stability and sustainable development.

# 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

## Together for peace



# Mr. Simão pleads for a coordinated response to the persistent crises in West Africa and the Sahel

*On Thursday, 3 April 2025, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), presented to the United Nations Security Council the report of the Secretary-General on developments in West Africa and the Sahel. He painted a picture of the security, political and humanitarian situation in the region.*



SRSG Simao at the Security Council briefing.

“Security remains a major concern,” Simão told members of the UN Security Council. He stressed the extent of the security crisis in some areas of the Sahel, particularly in the Lake Chad Basin, where terrorist groups such as Boko Haram continue to operate. Indeed, the Sahel is still one of the epicenters of global terrorism, with 51% of terrorism-related deaths recorded in this region in 2024. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2025, five of the ten countries most affected by this scourge are in the region. The recent attack in Niger in March, attributed to the Islamic State, which targeted a mosque and killed 44 civilians, is an illustration of the growing brutality of extremist groups.

The weakening of the Multinational Joint Task Force, following Niger’s withdrawal, is a matter of serious concern, although significant military investments and cross-border cooperation by member States of the Alliance of Sahel States have helped restore State authority in parts of the central Sahel, the Special Representative said. He then warned that “these gains remain fragile” due to the intensification of terrorist attacks, mainly in the coastal states of Benin and Togo. Simão welcomed the restructuring of the Accra Initiative as a “significant opportunity” to deepen regional security cooperation. In this perspective, he recalled that the effective implementation of Security Council Resolution 2719 is an essential lever for strengthening the coordination of efforts in the fight against terrorism.

In this context of persistent insecurity, the Head of UNOWAS highlighted the repercussions of the effective withdrawal in January 2025 of the member countries of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), namely Burkina Faso, Mali

and Niger, from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In his remarks, he stressed that the West African regional organization has opened a transitional period until July 2025. Mr. Simão said that ECOWAS is simultaneously working on the formulation of alternative strategies in order to structure its future relations with these states.



**The Sahel is still one of the epicenters of global terrorism, with 51% of terrorism-related deaths recorded in this region in 2024. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2025, five of the ten countries most affected by this scourge are in the region.**

On the political front, Mr. Simão highlighted the progress made in some countries in terms of democratic governance, while expressing serious concerns about the fragility of the ongoing transition processes. In Niger, for example, the transition was extended by five years at the end of the national conference, and in Guinea, delays in the transition process and the proposed constitutional referendum triggered political tensions. As the region prepares for major elections, he called for greater inclusiveness and

continued support from the international community. He expressed his “concerns about the inclusiveness of the upcoming presidential elections in Côte d’Ivoire.” He warned of the “deep disagreements in Guinea-Bissau over the end of the presidential term and the date of the 2025 elections that pose serious risks to a peaceful process.”

However, Mr. Simão was keen to highlight several positive developments, including the holding of national consultations in Burkina Faso and the political dialogue initiated by the Government of Mauritania with opposition parties. According to him, these initiatives are essential elements to promote social cohesion and foster inclusive decision-making. He also commended Ghana’s role in maintaining dialogue between ECOWAS and the ESA countries, calling this diplomatic engagement a constructive contribution to strengthening regional stability.

Addressing the issue of women’s political participation, the Special Representative welcomed legislative progress in favour of women’s participation, particularly in Senegal and Ghana, while regretting the slow pace of implementation.

As ECOWAS celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year, Mr. Simão recalled that the fundamental principles of the organization are being tested in an unstable regional context. He recalled the importance of a collective commitment in the face of the crises shaking West Africa and the Sahel. “Eighty years after its creation, the United Nations remains more vital than ever,” he said, calling on the international community to unite its efforts in the service of the people of the region.

# In Mali, UNOWAS works for constructive dialogue, peace and sustainable development

*As part of his ongoing engagements to support Sahel countries in their efforts to consolidate peace, security and development, the Special Representative, Leonardo Santos Simão, conducted a two-day working visit to the Malian capital, Bamako.*



SRSR Simao at his meeting with Abdoulaye Diop, Mali's Minister of Foreign Affairs.

During his five-day visit from 17 to 21 May last year, Mr Simão stressed the need to continue strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and the Malian authorities to provide, in a spirit of constructive collaboration and partnership, the necessary assistance to the Malian people.

This is what drives UNOWAS' engagements in the Sahel. Before travelling to Mali, Mr Simão travelled to Nouakchott, Mauritania, where he met with H.E. Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and with Mr.

Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad.

During this visit, the Special Representative stressed the importance of strengthening regional cooperation to address the political, humanitarian, security and development challenges facing the Sahel region.

Indeed, despite notable efforts, Mali continues to face various security and socio-economic challenges that require increased mobilization of national actors and support from regional

and international partners to improve the situation.

It is in this context that the Special Representative conducted a two-day working visit to Bamako on 20 and 21 February to reaffirm the solidarity of the United Nations and its commitment to peace and prosperity in Mali.

During his mission, the Special Representative was received in audience by H.E. Mr. Abdoulaye Maiga, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mali and H.E. Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International





Cooperation and Lieutenant General Ismaël Wague, Minister of Reconciliation, Peace and National Cohesion. He also had meetings with General Malick Diaw, President of the National Transitional Council, as well as the Diplomatic Corps and the United Nations Country Team.

These meetings held with the Malian authorities, followed by working sessions, aimed at assessing the socio-economic and political situation, and at providing an effective support from the United Nations Country Team to the implementation of na-

tional priorities. According to Khassim Diagne, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Acting Humanitarian Coordinator in Bamako since October 1, 2024, the United Nations Country Team in Mali is mobilized alongside the national authorities and is working in consultation with them to identify pragmatic solutions and ensure effective implementation of development and humanitarian aid projects. [Read the interview]

For his part, the Special Representative welcomed the willingness of the Malian authorities to work with the

United Nations to improve the living conditions of populations suffering from insecurity and terrorist threat. He encouraged the Malian authorities and all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to maintain an inclusive and constructive dialogue for the benefit of Mali and its people.

Before leaving Bamako, the Special Representative, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, reaffirmed the commitment of UNOWAS and the United Nations system to support the Malian people in their quest for peace and prosperity.

# “The United Nations is in Mali to support the government in the implementation of its priorities. Our presence is part of a support framework. »

*Resident Coordinator and Acting Humanitarian Coordinator of the United Nations in Mali since October 2024, Khassim Diagne is working to build a quality partnership with the Malian authorities and contribute to the country's development. Interview.*



**Khassim Diagne**

Resident Coordinator and Acting Humanitarian  
Coordinator of the United Nations in Mali

**You have been the RC in Mali since October 1, 2024. What can you tell us about this country?**

Mali is a country with remarkable potential, endowed with considerable cultural and natural wealth, but evolving in a particularly complex context. My arrival coincided with a pivotal period, marked by the departure of MINUSMA and the need to redefine the terms of our engagement in accordance with the new strategic orientations of the Malian government.

Thus, with my colleagues in the United Nations country team, we have set ourselves the objective of engaging in a constructive dialogue with the authorities to strengthen the partnership, which requires a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each United Nations agency and what we can offer as an added value to national priorities. In short, the United Nations has no agenda separate from Mali's: national priorities constitute our roadmap. Mali is now engaged in a transition phase structured around three guiding principles defined by the

highest authorities: respect for Mali's sovereignty; respect for the strategic choices and partnerships made by the country; and the consideration of the vital interests of the Malian people in any strategic decision.

These principles guide all cooperation initiatives with the country and provide the framework for the work of the United Nations.

In addition, Mali has major assets. Its mining and energy potential is considerable, as are the strength of its dias-

pore and the dynamism of its private sector. These elements are all levers to boost sustainable and inclusive growth. We reiterated to the government our availability to provide technical support, if necessary, to maximize the impact of these assets from a sustainable development perspective.

### **Is the country still facing many challenges?**

Indeed, Mali is facing a major energy crisis that impacts the daily lives of the population and economic competitiveness, as well as a fragile security situation in some regions, limiting humanitarian access and hindering development interventions. There are also challenges related to climate change with cyclical floods and droughts that affect economic and social progress in several areas of the country.

But as a partner, the UN Country Team in Mali is mobilized alongside the national authorities and works in consultation with them to identify pragmatic solutions and ensure effective implementation of development and humanitarian aid projects.

### **The United Nations system has had a long-standing presence in Mali. What are its role and contributions?**

The United Nations is a long-standing partner of Mali and plays a central role in supporting development and humanitarian response. Today, the United Nations Country Team is composed of 21 agencies, 18 of which have a physical presence in the country.

Our role is clear: we work in alignment with the priorities defined by the Malian government, in particular, through the Cooperation Framework for Sustainable Development, which is a continuation of the Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and

Sustainable Development (CREDD). We are awaiting the publication of the Malian authorities' new strategic document, the National Strategy for Emergence and Sustainable Development (SNEDD), in order to adjust our contribution to the updated national priorities.

Our interventions cover both development and humanitarian issues, with a particular focus on the needs of women and youth in the sectors of education, health, access to energy, governance and economic recovery. The Malian government's recognition of the United Nations' contribution testifies to the strength of this partnership and our commitment to working for the well-being of the people.

### **More specifically, what are your priorities for this year?**

For the current year, we have agreed to work with the government on three flagship and transformative programs. These programs concern:

- Food systems to strengthen the country's resilience and food security.
- Renewable energies to support Mali in achieving energy autonomy and in its transition to green and sustainable energy solutions.
- Education, health and social protection with the ambition to guarantee equitable access to quality education for all.

We have already submitted the documents relating to these programmes to the government and we are waiting for their contributions and validations in order to start the next steps. The objective is to mobilize the necessary resources on both sides and to ensure the effective implementation of these

initiatives, in line with the expectations of the authorities and the population.

### **Do you have a message for Malians?**

First, I would like to reiterate a fundamental commitment: the United Nations is in Mali to support the government in the implementation of its priorities. Our presence is part of a support framework.

In this spirit, I appeal to our Malian brothers and sisters, including those in the diaspora, to remain mobilized and united to explore all possible avenues to preserve and strengthen development gains. It is essential that joint efforts not only provide immediate solutions to the most pressing needs but also lay the foundations for sustainable and inclusive development for future generations.

We remain resolutely committed to the Malian people and government, in a spirit of respect for their sovereignty, cooperation and solidarity.



**The Malian government's recognition of the United Nations' contribution testifies to the strength of this partnership and our commitment to working for the well-being of the people.**





Khassim Diagne, during a field visit. Mali



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



1 NO  
POVERTY



2 ZERO  
HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY  
EDUCATION



5 GENDER  
EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER  
AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND  
CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED  
INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES  
AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE  
CONSUMPTION  
AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE  
ACTION



14 LIFE  
BELOW WATER



15 LIFE  
ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS

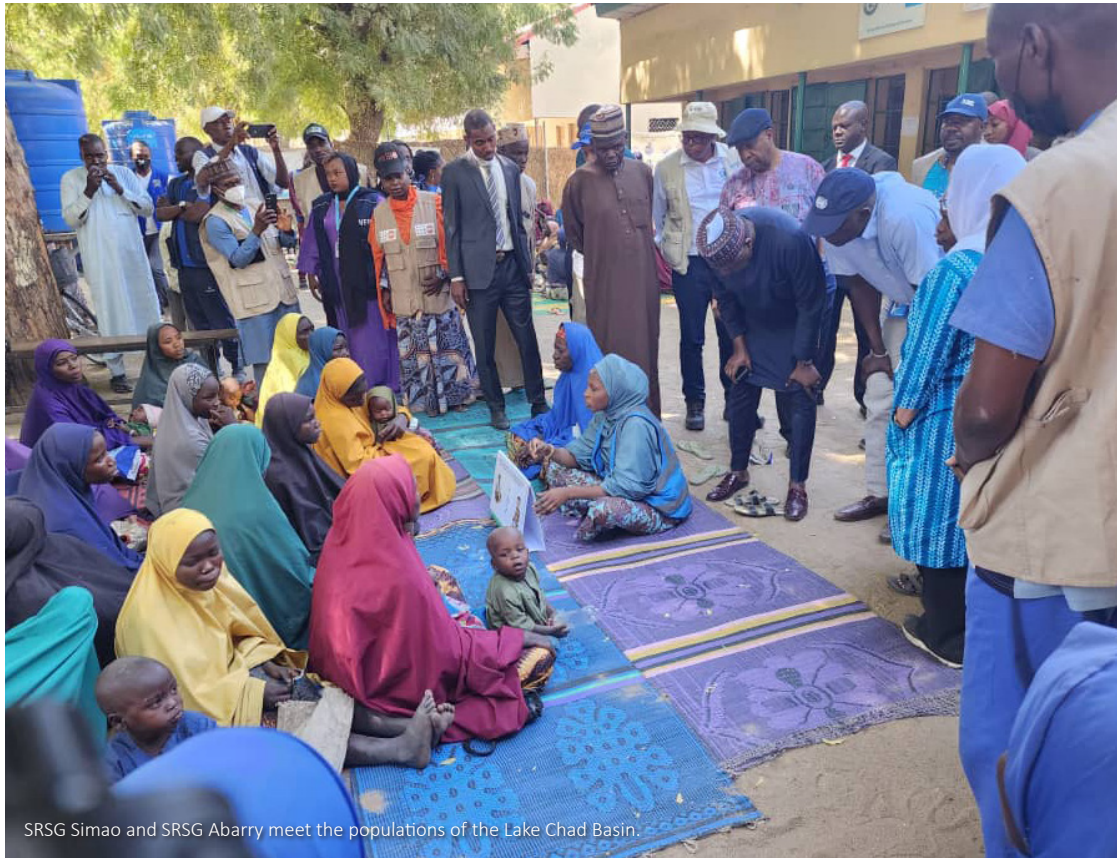


17 PARTNERSHIPS  
FOR THE GOALS



## Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum : UNOCA and UNOWAS reaffirm their commitment

*As part of their continued joint engagement, the Special Representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General for Central Africa, Abdou Abarry, and for West Africa and the Sahel, Leonardo Santos Simão, participated in the fifth Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum on Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development, held from 29 to 31 January 2025 in Maiduguri, Borno State.*



SRSG Simao and SRSG Abarry meet the populations of the Lake Chad Basin.

The four countries around the Lake Chad basin namely Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria have experienced unprecedented crises, aggravated by the repeated violence of Boko Haram for the past fifteen years. Socio-economic factors such as extreme poverty, underdevelopment, climate change, and human rights abuses have contributed to large-scale displacement and disruption of public services. To curb these challenges, the Lake Chad

Basin Commission (LCBC) adopted on 30 August 2018, the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience (RS SRR) of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Basin Region.

### **Regional Stabilization Strategy**

With support from the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Regional Stabilization Strategy aims at

stabilizing, recovering and building resilience of affected communities in eight regions of the four countries around the Lake Chad basin: Far North Region and North Region in Cameroon, Lac Region and Hajider-Lamis Region in Chad, Diffa in Niger, Adama, Borno and Yobe States in Nigeria. The RS SRR provides a robust framework to tackle the region's complex security, humanitarian, and development challenges. It recognizes the need



for a comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and coordinated set of sub-national, national, and cross-border efforts to achieve long-lasting stability and resilience throughout the Lake Chad Basin (LCB). The strategy is also grounded in inclusivity, local ownership, and a new way of working, and has been localized through Territorial Action Plans (TAPs) in the eight regions.

Six years into its implementation, significant progress has been made, with several pockets of stabilization in the region, community rebuilding, and the restoration of social order. Markets are reopening, facilitating trade and economic growth, and social infrastructure, including schools, clinics, and permanent housing, has been rehabilitated or reconstructed. Despite these achievements, Boko Haram factions continue to cause instability through violence and sporadic attacks on communities which required the need to assess and readjust the RS SRR to reflect the current situation, including the priorities of governments and communities.

It is in this context that the Fifth Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum, held in Maiduguri Borno State from 29 to 31 January 2025, to facilitate dialogue, coordination, and cross-border cooperation through the Governors' offices among the eight territories. Under the theme "Rebuilding the Lake Chad Basin: Consolidating Gains, Commitment to Peace, Cross-Border Cooperation, Security, and Sustainable Development for a Resilient Community," the forum focused on consolidating gains, advancing regional collaboration, and promoting sustainable peace and development.

Eleven Governors from various regions, including Lac Region, Hadjer-Lamis Region, Kanem Region in Chad, Far North Region and North Region in

Cameroon, Diffa Region, Zinder Region and Tahoua Region in Niger Republic and Borno state, Adamawa state, and Yobe state in Nigeria were present in the Forum which provided space for humanitarian, development partners, national and international donors, and security professionals to engage directly and recommend concrete actions for stabilizing the region.

#### **United Nations's commitment**

As part of the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2349 (2017) on the Lake Chad Basin crisis, Abdou Abarry and Leonardo Santos Simão, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and for West Africa respectively, undertook a five-day joint high-level mission in Nigeria, from 27 to 31 January 2025 and participated in this important Forum in which they renewed the United Nations's commitment to support stabilization and peacebuilding efforts in the Lake Chad Basin, while encouraging all actors to maintain their mobilization to safeguard the gains and further consolidate peace and security.

Echoing the Special Representatives' call, President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu of Nigeria, tasked the forum to work towards tackling terrorism and all forms of insecurity that ravaged the Lake Chad basin region. He emphasized the need for a multi-faceted approach to addressing insecurity threats, including poverty, inequality, and lack of job opportunities for the region's young population.

While acknowledging the concerns expressed by the governors regarding the suspension of donor support to the national window of the Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF) in the Republic of Niger, a funding mechanism implemented by UNDP, participants

reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cross-border security, neutralizing the remnants of non-state armed groups, and strategically enhancing the operational capacity of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). These efforts aim to consolidate peace in the Lake Chad region and pave the way for inclusive and sustainable development. In this context, the weakening of the MNJTF following Niger's withdrawal continues to raise serious concerns about the region's ability to sustain pressure on persistent terrorist threats in the Lake Chad Basin.



**Boko Haram factions continue to cause instability through violence and sporadic attacks on communities which required the need to assess and readjust the RS SRR to reflect the current situation, including the priorities of governments and communities.**

# Peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders, a priority for UNOWAS and UNOCA

*To strengthen the dialogue between farmers and herders in West and Central Africa and to anchor sustainable peaceful coexistence, UNOWAS and UNOCA organized a workshop on 26 and 27 February 2025 in Dakar that led to the adoption of a work plan.*



Farmers and herders in West and Central Africa face several challenges that threaten their livelihoods and activities. Climate change, characterized by unpredictable weather, prolonged droughts and rising temperatures, is disrupting traditional farming and grazing periods, and affecting crop yields, pasture availability and transhumance trajectories. Environmental degradation, including desertification and deforestation, further exacerbates the situation by reducing arable land and water resources, causing tension and conflict between farmers and herders.

In addition, multiple socio-economic challenges and insecurity are also significant obstacles, leading to violence, loss of life, destruction of properties and displacement of populations.

## **Strengthening peaceful coexistence**

As part of their continued support, the United Nations Offices for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and Central Africa (UNOCA) conducted extensive joint consultations with key stakeholders in both regions to highlight the importance of mainstreaming agriculture

and livestock activities in countries' economies and to focus on the causes of conflict.

In November 2023, a community of practice was established as part of a joint UNOWAS-UNOCA project on "Pastoralist Dynamics in West and Central Africa" to strengthen local, national and regional governance. Local bodies that oversee pastoral activities, interacting with agriculture in West and Central Africa, implement practices and mechanisms to maintain relations and interactions between

different countries and between the two sub-regions. The Community of practice aims to provide in-depth analysis, share best practices, proactively prevent and effectively manage conflicts arising from farmer-herder interactions.

To address the challenges of transboundary transhumance, particularly in the context of weak land tenure systems and regulatory frameworks, UNOWAS and UNOCA organized a workshop on 26 and 27 February 2025 in Dakar, focused on promoting peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders and improving transhumance management. More than thirty participants from various countries participated, including representatives of civil society organizations, including women's and indigenous peoples' associations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Climate Commission for the Sahel region, NORCAP, the United Nations and technical and financial partners.

Present at the opening ceremony, the Special Representative, Leonardo Santos Simão, stressed that “the workshop

represents an opportunity to reflect on one of the most critical challenges of our time: fostering peaceful coexistence, sustainable livelihoods and shared prosperity among farmers and herders”, adding that “transboundary transhumance poses significant challenges in terms of governance, especially when land tenure systems and regulatory frameworks are not well structured. If not properly managed, these tensions can escalate into security threats, affecting social cohesion and regional stability.”

### Two-year work plan

Over two days, participants highlighted the complexity and interdependence of pastoralist-farmer interactions, as well as the factors influencing these dynamics, and agreed to adopt a work plan for the Community of practice on Farmer-Pastoralist Dynamics in West and Central Africa. This two (2) year work plan mainly aims to encourage the harmonization of public policies while supporting cooperation between the various regional institutions and strengthening the resilience of communities to climate change. Concretely, the work plan will facilitate, among other things, the organization

of capacity-building sessions for different actors, the development of digital platforms for knowledge sharing and the concerted management of resources. Participants also recommended the harmonization of ECOWAS and ECCAS approaches.

The workshop laid the foundations for effective collaboration for sustainable governance of farmer-pastoralist dynamics in West and Central Africa. It highlighted an integrated approach involving local, regional and international actors to promote equitable and inclusive management of natural resources.

With new technologies, capacity building and the improvement of the regulatory framework, the work plan aims to prevent conflicts, strengthen the resilience of communities and promote innovative and sustainable agro-pastoral practices. It encourages States and regional organizations to strengthen their cross-border cooperation with a view to better harmonization of policies and concerted management of territories to consolidate the resilience, stability and prosperity of the agricultural and pastoral communities of the two regions.



Participants at the workshop on strengthening peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders in West and Central Africa.



# Security Sector Reform, fundamental to good governance in West Africa

*Security sector reform (SSR) is essential to promote peace, good governance and development in West Africa and the Sahel. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), in coordination with various partners, supports the efforts of States and regional actors in the establishment of professional security institutions that respect laws and rights.*



The security sector includes a wide range of institutions and actors responsible for maintaining security and stability. These include defence forces, law enforcement, corrections, intelligence agencies, border management authorities and civil protection services. In addition, ministries, legislatures and civil society organisations play a critical role in governance and oversight. Although each state defines its own security architecture, an effective system relies on coordination between all these actors to ensure transparency, respect for human rights and adherence to the rule of law.

Nationwide, Security Sector Reform (SSR) is a process aimed at transforming security institutions into professional, accountable, law-abiding, and rights-respecting bodies. Beyond

improving operational efficiency, SSR aims to strengthen public trust, social cohesion and create an enabling environment for sustainable development. At the regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) considers SSR to be a fundamental element in strengthening the governance of security forces. A well-governed security sector not only addresses security threats, but also facilitates political, economic and social progress.

For its part, in coordination with its partners in the United Nations system, the sub-region and other international organizations, UNOWAS supports governments and regional actors to set up occupational security sectors through knowledge management, sharing of best practices, capacity building at the

national level and the establishment of strategic regional partnerships.

From 10 to 21 March 2025, UNOWAS, in collaboration with the Alioune Blondin Beye Peacekeeping School in Bamako, co-facilitated an advanced training course for SSR advisors from seven countries in West and Central Africa, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Rwanda. Recently, in order to promote women's participation and leadership in the defence and police forces, UNOWAS facilitated a training programme in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for some forty women police officers from Guinea-Bissau. The training also made it possible to raise awareness among female police officers on the theme of gender-based violence.

# SSR

Consolidating of **Peace and Stability**, promoting **poverty reduction**, **rule of law** and **good governance** in post-conflict environments.

Helping ensure people are safer through effective and accountable **security institutions**, that operate under **civilian control** within a framework of the **rule of law** and **human rights**

Include **structures** **institutions** and personnel responsible for the **management**, **provision** and **oversight** of **security** (defense, law enforcement, corrections, intelligence services...)

Core element of **multidimensional peacekeeping** and **peacebuilding**, essential for addressing the **roots of conflict** and building the **foundations** of long-term **peace** and **development**.



# Combating drug trafficking along the Mauritania-Senegal border requires youth empowerment and strengthening cooperation

*To eradicate drug trafficking and its use in the border region between Mauritania and Senegal, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Office for West and Central Africa (UNODC ROSEN), in coordination with national authorities, has launched innovative initiatives aiming at empowering the most vulnerable, particularly young people, and strengthening cooperation between the two neighboring countries.*



Local authorities and community leaders gathered during the awareness session on integrated border management and transnational organized crimes in Sélibabi (Mauritania), from May 20 to 23, 2024.





**Rather than being seen as part of the problem, youth are proving to be a key part of the solution, taking active roles in raising awareness and strengthening community resilience.**

In the border regions of Mauritania and Senegal, drug trafficking and consumption continue to pose serious threats to security and social stability. These challenges demand more than just law enforcement responses, they require innovative, community-driven solutions that empower those most affected, particularly young people. Rather than being seen as part of the problem, youth are proving to be a key part of the solution, taking active roles in raising awareness and strengthening community resilience.

To reinforce cross-border cooperation and address these issues, the Regional Office for West and Central Africa of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC ROSEN) has implemented targeted initiatives bringing together local actors, security forces, and civil society organizations. The realities on the ground highlight significant obstacles. Drug networks exploit porous borders, making it difficult for authorities to control illicit flows. Security forces on both sides have historically operated with limited coordination, and community's trust in law enforcement remains fragile. At the same time, the absence of specialized addiction treatment centers in Mauritania leaves those struggling

with substance abuse without access to the support they need.

One of the most impactful initiatives launched by UNODC has been the mobilization of young leaders to take ownership of drug prevention efforts. A training session in Rosso brought together youth representatives from civil society organizations across the region, equipping them with the tools to lead awareness campaigns within their own communities. Their efforts are already making a difference, shifting perceptions and promoting preventive measures at the grassroots level.

Another breakthrough has been the facilitation of direct exchanges between security forces from both countries. Previously unfamiliar with one another, officers are now actively sharing intelligence and coordinating responses, marking a significant step toward more effective cross-border governance.

As Dr. Amado Philip de Andrés, Regional Representative of UNODC ROSEN, stated, "securing stakeholders' engagement and gathering valuable insights through collaboration with local counterparts - including law enforcement, community leaders, and local populations - is key. These initiatives represent a promising journey towards cross-border cooperation, fostering mutual understanding, inclusion, and enhanced collaboration between Mauritania and Senegal, with borders becoming bridges to peace and prosperity for all".

Despite these advances, long-term solutions require sustained investment. The establishment of an addiction treatment center in Mauritania remains a priority, as well as continued support for youth-led initiatives that reinforce prevention efforts. By strengthening institutional collaboration, fostering trust between commu-

nities and authorities, and empowering young people as agents of change, these UNODC-led initiatives are laying the groundwork for a safer and more resilient future along the Mauritania-Senegal border.



**These initiatives represent a promising journey towards cross-border cooperation, fostering mutual understanding, inclusion, and enhanced collaboration between Mauritania and Senegal, with borders becoming bridges to peace and prosperity for all.**

## International Women's Day

# A celebration of progress and persistent challenges

March 8, International Women's Day, was celebrated under the theme "For all women and girls: rights, equality and empowerment", recalling that while progress has been made, many obstacles remain, particularly in West Africa and the Sahel.



"For all women and girls" campaign - UN Women - 2025

This year's celebration of International Women's Day coincided with the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 25th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security. This coincidence underlines that these initiatives, launched more than a quarter of a century ago by the United Nations, are vital to raise awareness and support states,

international organizations, and civil society, to encourage the promotion of gender equality and the active participation of women.

Several events were organized in the countries of the subregion promoting the role of women and the progress made since the adoption in 1995 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action during the Fourth World Conference on Women.

At that time, 189 States committed to advancing women's rights and ensuring their full and equal participation in all aspects of life, including through twelve critical areas, including health, education, women's economic and political participation, and the elimination of violence against women and girls.

According to UN Women's latest report published on 8 March 2025, which



# FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

takes stock of women's rights, 30 years after Beijing, parity has been achieved in girls' education and maternal mortality has fallen by a third worldwide thanks to positive actions taken by countries. Women's representation in parliaments has more than doubled and many countries continue to repeal discriminatory laws. At the same time, laws promoting women's participation in decision-making have been adopted, as well as temporary special measures to support this goal. According to UN Women, between 1995 and 2024, 1531 legal reforms have been ratified in 189 countries.

However, while significant progress has been made, much remains to be done to strengthen women's participation. Indeed, the UN Women report notes that nearly a quarter of countries around the world reported a decline in women's rights in 2024. Gender-based violence remains a persistent problem. A woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes by an intimate partner or family member. In West Africa, these challenges are amplified by economic crises, conflict, and the effects of climate change.

The launch of a Beijing+30 Platform for Action, a roadmap that identifies six priority areas, including the inclusive digital revolution, the elimination of violence against women, peace and security, and climate justice, should help address these challenges.

Five years after the Beijing Declaration, on 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325, which calls on States, inter alia, to ensure the representation of women at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for prevention. Dispute management and resolution. Resolution 1325 (2000) was supplemented by the following nine resolutions relating to women, peace and security; namely: 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019). It should also be noted that resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) on youth, peace and security take into account the role of young women in these different issues, as perfectly illustrated by the theme of this year's International Women's Day.

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) pays particular attention to gender mainstreaming in conflict prevention, conflict management and peacebuilding efforts. Thanks to several actions initiated in partnership with international and regional actors such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UN Women, as well as other United Nations agencies, the vast majority of countries in the region have been able to develop National Action Plans (NAPs) to include women and youth in decision-making bodies and peacebuilding efforts. UNOWAS has also contributed to the strengthening of women's capacities in the field of conflict resolution, mediation and peacebuilding. Advocacy efforts by the various UNOWAS leaders have provided support to governments in the region and have facilitated increased political representation of women.

It is essential to continue these efforts to ensure that women's rights are fully respected and that their contribution is recognized and valued, in order to build a more just and equitable future for all.



# FESPACO: An African cinema at the forefront of social change

Every year, since 1969, filmmakers, artists and other art enthusiasts have converged on the capital of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, to participate in one of the most important cultural events in Africa: FESPACO. This year, the 29th edition highlighted hard-hitting films that addressed hot topics such as governance, natural resources, ecological and security challenges, especially in West Africa and the Sahel.



Film screening as part of the "FESPACO Hors les murs" program, supported by UNICEF Burkina Faso- Photo: UNICEF BF- 2025

“Art is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It expresses the deep aspirations of a people and carries within it the seeds of revolution.” These words of Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first President of the Republic of Senegal, show the power of art as a vector for the transmission of history and cultural identity but also as a tool for claiming and raising awareness among the population. In Africa, especially in West Africa and the Sahel, art plays a central role in the consolidation of identities. The organization of the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), whose 29th edition took place from 22 February to 1 March 2025, perfectly illustrates this dynamic.

FESPACO is one of the few remaining state film festivals in the world. Created in 1969 by Alimata Salembéré, a Burkinabe director, producer, and politician, it is held every year in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. Its objective is to promote the dissemination of African cinema, to facilitate contacts and exchanges between film and audiovisual professionals, and to contribute to the growth, development and preservation of African cinema as a means of expression, education and awareness.

### **Committed art**

Historically, art has served as a lever of resistance in the face of injustice and oppression. For example, during colonization in Africa, songs and oral histories carried the claims of peoples against colonial administrations. Even today, this dynamic continues with committed artists who denounce abuses of power, corruption and human rights violations. Emblematic figures such as the Ivorian musician Tiken Jah Fakoly or the Senegalese rapper Didier Awadi have been able to make their art a committed platform,

denouncing the excesses of regimes and social injustices, while awakening consciences and mobilizing citizens around the values of freedom and democracy. Cinema is not to be outdone! directors such as Ousmane Sembène, have used the seventh art to denounce inequalities, while Djibril Diop Mambéty, with his symbolic works, has offered a subtle but hard-hitting critique of African socio-political realities.

This year, FESPACO, which brings together filmmakers, artists and intellectuals from the continent and the diaspora, highlighted films addressing current political themes such as governance, collective memory and armed conflicts. Moreover, the grand prize, the Golden Stallion of Yennenga, was won by the film by Burkinabe director Dani Kouyaté “Katanga, the dance of the scorpions”, which denounces the exploitation of natural resources and geopolitical tensions in Central Africa. And the prize for best documentary was awarded to “L’Homme-Vertigo” by Malaury Éloi Paisley, which traces the history of citizen resistance to ecological and security challenges in the Sahel.

### **The United Nations’ commitment to the promotion of art**

The United Nations also recognizes the importance of art as a vehicle for peace and social cohesion. Through UNESCO, the organization supports cultural and creative industries, protecting cultural heritage, which is very often threatened by conflict and instability. In addition, agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) fund artistic projects with the aim of promoting values such as tolerance, intercultural dialogue and good governance.

In her speech at FESPACO 2025, Carol Flore-Smrecznick, Resident

Coordinator of the United Nations System in Burkina Faso, said that “FESPACO is much more than a film festival. It is an exceptional showcase of African talent and a powerful vector of social transformation. It should be noted that within the framework of this event, the United Nations supported initiatives to promote cinema as a tool for awareness and civic education. For example, UNICEF supported the “FESPACO Hors Les Murs” programme, which, through the screening of open-air films in several localities, made it possible to democratize access to culture, by making cinema accessible to populations living on the outskirts of Ouagadougou and in other cities.

Finally, art and politics are intimately linked. Whether it is anti-establishment, memorial, educational, inspiring or recreational, art remains a powerful lever for social and political transformation.



**FESPACO is much more than a film festival. It is an exceptional showcase of African talent and a powerful vector of social transformation.**