

Presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire

Lasting peace is built through dialogue and shared responsibility

Young people in Abidjan - Photo by Yanick Folly - Unsplash

At the Security Council,
Leonardo Santos Simão
Calls for a Collective
Response to Crises in
West Africa and the
Sahel - P.14

Regional Conference on
Information Integrity in
West Africa and the Sahel :
UNOWAS calls for collective
mobilization in West Africa
and the Sahel - P.16

Interview - Helene N'Garnim-
Ganga, United Nations
Resident Coordinator in Côte
d'Ivoire - « Alongside Ivorians
to build a sustainable and
resilient future » - P.10

In this issue

EDITO



**Acting with commitment,
preventing with
conviction, building with
the people - P.4**

UNOWAS IN ACTION



Presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire : *Lasting peace is built through dialogue and shared responsibility*
- P.8



Interview - Helene N'Garnim-Ganga, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Côte d'Ivoire - « *Alongside Ivorians to build a sustainable and resilient future* » - P.10



At the Security Council, Leonardo Santos Simão Calls for a Collective Response to Crises in West Africa and the Sahel
- P.14



Regional Youth Forum in Dakar : *Advocating for decent jobs and equitable education in times of crisis*
- P.18

UN IN ACTION



Regional Conference on Information Integrity in West Africa and the Sahel : *UNOWAS calls for collective mobilization in West Africa and the Sahel* - P.16

SUBSCRIPTION

To receive the online version and for any information concerning the content of UNOWAS Magazine, please write a message to the email address below:

unowascpio@un.org

UNOWAS Magazine is designed and produced
by the Strategic Communications and Public
Information Office

2

FOLLOW US



unowas.unmissions.org



twitter.com/UN_UNOWAS



facebook.com/UNOWAS



flickr.com/UNOWAS



Leonardo Santos SIMAO

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

Acting with commitment, preventing with conviction, building with the people

In a constantly evolving West Africa and Sahel region—facing multidimensional challenges from the resurgence of terrorist attacks to disinformation, political crises, and humanitarian emergencies—the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) remains firmly committed to responding to the deep aspirations of the region's people: to live in peace, to fully participate in democratic life, and to thrive in inclusive, resilient, and prosperous societies.

The latest report by the UN Secretary-General, presented to the Security Council on August 7, 2025, provides a clear and at times concerning overview of the situation in the sub-region. Security is deteriorating in Mali, Benin, and Togo, political transitions are proving complex, and social tensions are rising—these are all challenges that demand a collective, integrated, and united response. The report highlights the crucial role of regional organizations such as ECOWAS and the African Union, while urging the international community to maintain its support. In this fragile context, strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms emerges as a strategic priority for safeguarding peace.

In Côte d'Ivoire, UNOWAS's engagement in promoting peaceful presidential elections illustrates

its role as a facilitator ahead of electoral processes. With the vote scheduled for October 25, 2025, a series of consultations were held with all stakeholders—approved and disqualified candidates, institutional authorities, and civil society representatives. These discussions carried a clear message: elections must be an opportunity to consolidate peace, not a source of division. The genuine commitment of all national actors to dialogue, collective responsibility, and respect for democratic principles forms the essential foundation for lasting peace.

Another key moment was the Regional Conference on Information Integrity, held in Praia, Cape Verde, from September 3 to 5, 2025. The event led to the adoption of the Praia Policy Framework, a vital tool to counter disinformation, enhance transparency in the information space, and protect democratic processes. This collective achievement now calls for concrete implementation, based on the coordinated mobilization of public institutions, media, regulators, and civil society. Fighting the manipulation of information is also a fight to defend democracy, peace, and human rights.










Finally, at the West Africa and Sahel Regional Youth Forum, held in Dakar from August 26 to 28, UNOWAS, in

partnership with the ILO and IOM, reaffirmed its commitment to the region's youth. The Dakar Pact, adopted at the end of the forum, calls for the creation of decent jobs and equitable access to education—even in times of crisis. By affirming that the future of the region will be built with and by young people, UNOWAS and its partners underscored that sustainable development necessarily depends on the political, economic, and social inclusion of the next generation.

These recent initiatives reflect a clear objective: to make conflict prevention a concrete, daily action—not just a guiding principle. Peaceful elections, stronger governance, engaged youth, and safeguarded information—these are key levers for building a stable, resilient, and forward-looking region.

As the challenges continue to grow, UNOWAS's commitment is grounded in a deep conviction: peace is built every day—through dialogue, solidarity, and collective courage. True to its mandate, and in close coordination with its partners, UNOWAS will continue to support the states and peoples of the region in working toward a future where peace is no longer the exception, but a lasting and shared norm.

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.

SRSG Simão participated in the 4th Annual Retreat for Special Envoys & High Representatives of Regional Economic Communities



SRSG Simão participated on 14 September, in Dakar, in the 4th Annual Retreat for Special Envoys & High Representatives of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the theme: “The Changing Global Dynamics & the Future of Regional Mediation Towards Peace and Constitutional & Democratic Governance in Africa.” During his speech, he emphasized that “no country can successfully tackle the various challenges on its own. Countries need support such as that provided by Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which are best placed to understand the challenges facing their member states, provide them with immediate support, and mobilize broader support at the global level, particularly through the AU and the UN, for peace, stability, and sustainable development.”

In Abuja, SRSG Simão participated in the “Conference on Combating Emerging Terrorist Groups and Strengthening Sustainable Security in the Ecowas Region and the Sahel”



On September 3, SRSG Simão participated in the “Conference on Combating Emerging Terrorist Groups and Strengthening Sustainable Security in the Ecowas Region and the Sahel”, held in Abuja, organized by Nigeria’s National Counter Terrorism Centre. In his remarks M. Simão said : “I wish to emphasise that no country can address terrorism alone. [...] We must move decisively beyond rhetoric to forge a common response — anchored in the principles of solidarity and learning from each country’s experiences and good practices in challenging security contexts.”

On the sidelines of the Africa Food Systems Forum 2025, UNOWAS co-organized the high-level panel : Sahel Government - UN on Food Systems Transformation Alliance



At the Africa Food Systems Forum 2025, DSRSG Freeman participated on 2 September in the high-level panel : Sahel Government- UN on Food Systems Transformation Alliance. In her intervention she said : “Food systems can indeed become engines of peace, resilience, and growth.” DSRSG Freeman emphasized that the United Nations stands with the governments and people of the Sahel to ensure that food systems become the foundation of stability and opportunity. She also highlighted that the event is a true reflection the One UN approach in support of national priorities towards lasting peace and sustainable development.

At the launch of Liberia’s National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security, DSRSG Barrie Freeman reaffirmed the UN’s resolve to support the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda



As part of UNOWAS continued engagement, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Barrie Freeman concluded on 30 August, a two-day visit to Liberia to support the launching of the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security (PAN/YPS). Anchored in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 and its subsequent resolutions 2419 and 2535, Liberia’s NAP/YPS is a strategic framework to guide and unify collective efforts of the government, youth groups, civil society institutions and various partners in promoting youth engagement in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and sustainable development.

UNOWAS’ “L’Arbre à Palabres” focused on the shrinking civic space in West and Central Africa



On July 24, UNOWAS, in collaboration with UNOCA and the OHCHR offices in West and Central Africa, organized « L’Arbre à Palabres” session on the theme: “The shrinking civic space in West Africa, the Sahel, and Central Africa: causes, manifestations, and approaches to solutions.” Around 150 participants, including representatives of NHRIs, civil society organizations, and academia, have attended online and in person the session to discuss the shrinking civic space, and to reflect on the causes and manifestations of the phenomenon. They recommended, among other things, that countries’ legal frameworks be strengthened to bring them more into line with international and regional human rights instruments, and that dialogue and collaboration between state institutions and civil society actors be intensified to rebuild trust.

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

Presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire

“Lasting peace is built through dialogue and shared responsibility”

With one month remaining before Côte d'Ivoire's presidential election, scheduled for 25 October 2025, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, concluded a high-level mission to the country. The goal of the mission was to encourage dialogue, strengthen mutual trust among political actors, and support national institutions in the lead-up to peaceful elections.



SRSR Simao during his meeting with President Alassane Ouattara.

From 17 to 25 September, Mr. Simão held a series of in-depth consultations with key Ivorian stakeholders, in a context marked by significant national and international expectations for political stability and social peace.

President Alassane Ouattara, as well as Jean-Louis Billon, Simone Ehivet Gbagbo, Henriette Lagou, and Ahoua Don Mello. He also held discussions with major political figures whose candidacies were not approved by the Constitutional Council, including Laurent Gbagbo and Pascal Affi N'Guessan.

entire Ivorian political spectrum, was widely welcomed by the stakeholders. Several of those he met with expressed appreciation for the United Nations' consistent commitment to Côte d'Ivoire and reaffirmed their determination to protect the country's democratic, economic, and social achievements.



Emotions must be channeled positively and lead to stability,

During his mission, the Special Representative met with the five qualified presidential candidates: incumbent

In each of these meetings, Mr. Simão conveyed a central message: “Elections should not divide but rather unite people around republican values. They should serve as an opportunity to strengthen peace, stability, and social cohesion.”

UNOWAS: a committed partner for peace and democracy

This impartial approach, which involved listening to voices across the

“Peace does not come spontaneously. It is built, step by step, through the collective responsibility of institutions, political leaders, and citizens,” Mr. Simão emphasized during an interaction with national media.

Beyond political dialogue, Mr. Simão also met with key institutional authorities, including the Prime Minister, the Ministers of the Interior and Defense, and representatives from the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), the

Constitutional Council, the National Assembly, and the National Human Rights Council (CNDH).

Discussions focused on the importance of ensuring a calm and rights-respecting electoral environment, including safeguarding freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and equal access to information.

“Emotions must be channeled positively and lead to stability,” said Mr. Simão, stressing the role of responsible communication and mutual respect throughout the electoral process.

Mr. Simão’s mission is part of UNOWAS’s ongoing efforts to support West African countries in preventing electoral conflicts and strengthening democratic governance. In coordination with regional partners such as ECOWAS, the African Union, and other international actors, UNOWAS plays a

key facilitation role in peacebuilding dynamics across the region.

“UNOWAS reaffirms its full commitment to supporting Côte d’Ivoire on its path toward a future of peace and prosperity,” Mr. Simão concluded.

A key step toward peaceful elections

With just a few weeks remaining before the vote, the Special Representative’s messages aim to foster trust among all stakeholders, prevent pre-electoral tensions, and reinforce collective adherence to democratic norms. This effort reflects the importance the United Nations places on Côte d’Ivoire’s stability, recognizing the country as a strategic pillar for peace and development in West Africa.

In a context where past political divisions remain sensitive, Mr. Simão’s call serves as a powerful reminder: “Lasting peace is built through dialogue and shared responsibility.”



Elections should not divide but rather unite people around republican values. They should serve as an opportunity to strengthen peace, stability, and social cohesion.



SRSR Simao during his meeting with Laurent Gbagbo.

Hélène N'Garnim-Ganga, United Nations
Resident Coordinator in Côte d'Ivoire

« Alongside Ivorians to build a sustainable and resilient future »

Since November 2024, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Côte d'Ivoire, Ms. Hélène N'Garnim-Ganga, has been supporting a country undergoing profound transformation. Drawing on her deep knowledge of the Ivorian context, acquired through decades of engagement, she reflects today on the country's remarkable progress, persistent challenges, and the UN's priorities for more inclusive and sustainable development. In this interview, she shares her vision of a strong partnership focused on the future and rooted in the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.



Helene N'Garnim-Ganga

United Nations Resident Coordinator
in Côte d'Ivoire

You have been the UN Resident Coordinator in Côte d'Ivoire since November 2024. What can you tell us about the country?

I am not new to Côte d'Ivoire. I previously worked here in the 1990s, then again between 2016 and 2018. Returning today as the UN Resident Coordinator is both a reunion with an old acquaintance and an opportunity

to discover a country in full transformation.

Côte d'Ivoire has changed a lot: it stands out for strong macroeconomic stability, significant investments in infrastructure, and a prominent role as a sub-regional leader. With an average annual growth of 6 to 7% over the last decade, it is now the second largest economy in the West African Econom-

ic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and one of the most dynamic in sub-Saharan Africa. The country also ranks among the top three worldwide for the most significant progress on the Sustainable Development Goals Index between 2015 and 2024.

However, many challenges remain, especially regarding human capital, climate change, digital transformation,

education, health, gender equality, etc. Our role, as the United Nations system, is to support Côte d'Ivoire's efforts so that growth and development benefit everyone, leaving no one behind.

Côte d'Ivoire is a key country in the sub-region. What specific challenges does it face?

The challenges Côte d'Ivoire faces are similar to those of many rapidly growing countries: transforming this economic momentum into inclusive and sustainable development while ensuring that the benefits of prosperity reach everyone.

Currently classified as a lower-middle-income country, Côte d'Ivoire has made remarkable progress. Yet challenges remain: social inclusion, empowerment of youth and women, reduction of inequalities, and strengthening human capital.

Additionally, there are issues related to regional stability and transversal challenges such as climate resilience, economic diversification, and local development. The real challenge for Côte d'Ivoire is thus to translate its economic growth into equitable social progress so that every citizen truly feels the benefits of development.

The United Nations system has been present for a long time. What is its contribution and role?

The United Nations has a historic partnership with Côte d'Ivoire since its admission to the Organization in 1960. We are a trusted partner, mobilizing diverse expertise, resources, and the capacity to coordinate and engage all partners in supporting the country's development.

The UN's presence, notably through the former UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI, 2004-2017), was crucial in

helping the country exit the post-electoral crisis of 2010-2011.

Today, the UN system supports the country's transformation through the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF) 2021-2025, aligned with the national development plan. Our support focuses on the structural transformation of the economy with diversification of productive sectors and support to agricultural producers. Support for social inclusion and strengthening human capital has improved access to health, education, social protection, and opportunities for youth and women. We also emphasize climate resilience through promoting innovative solutions for adaptation and environmental sustainability.

Our role is resolutely geared toward development and achieving the SDGs by 2030, in partnership with the government, civil society, local authorities, the private sector, and all development





Helene N'Garnim-Ganga visits the temporary learning space set up by the United Nations for the children of asylum seekers at the Niornigué transit site (northern Côte d'Ivoire).

partners to optimize impact and ensure sustainability.

What are your priorities for the rest of this year?

2025 is a pivotal year marking the end of our current cooperation cycle (2021-2025) and the launch of the next SDCF 2026-2030. This new framework will coincide with the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals and the new national development plan for 2026-2030.

Our priority is to finalize and sign this framework with the authorities by the end of the year. The process has been inclusive, conducted in consultation with the government, local authorities, private sector, and civil society to ensure alignment with national priorities and local relevance.

We will also integrate the orientations of the Pact for the Future adopted in September 2024, the six key transitions to accelerate the SDGs, and the UN 2.0 initiative. Concretely, this means focusing efforts on education, health, social protection, and climate resilience while mobilizing more resources and strengthening the effectiveness of interventions to produce tangible impacts on people's lives.

The goal is to enter 2026 with a co-operation framework ready for implementation, focused on high-impact, better-coordinated, and locally rooted interventions to help sustainably transform people's lives.

Do you have a message for Ivorians?

Côte d'Ivoire has made significant progress, but development cannot be

built alone. It requires the engagement of all: government, civil society, private sector, and citizens. My message is simple: your country is magnificent, its potential enormous, and your youth dynamic and motivated. You have a precious asset: peace. Preserve it.

During my first stay in Côte d'Ivoire, the national television used to broadcast a daily message at the end of programs: "Peace is not a word; it is a behavior."

As the UN Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel recalled during his visit in September 2025: "Elections are always a challenge, no matter the country, and Côte d'Ivoire is no exception. Our hope is that the upcoming presidential and legislative elections take place calmly to preserve the remarkable economic gains achieved in recent years."



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



At the Security Council, Leonardo Santos Simão Calls for a Collective Response to Crises in West Africa and the Sahel

The United Nations Security Council held a crucial session on Thursday, August 7, focused on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel. On this occasion, Leonardo Santos Simão, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), presented the Secretary-General's latest four-month report, covering the period from April 1 to July 31, 2025. A clear message: the region is facing a series of multidimensional challenges that require an urgent, coordinated, and united response from the international community.



Alarming security situation

In a speech marked by a somber tone, Mr. Simão warned of an intensification of terrorist attacks in several countries in the region, particularly in Mali, Be-

nin, Togo, and Nigeria. He described increasingly sophisticated operations, characterized using drones, encrypted communications, and growing links between armed groups and transnational criminal networks.

“The threat is no longer confined within the Sahelian borders. It is already extending to coastal states, and the risk of regional flare-up is real,” he warned.

The mass recruitment of young people by extremist groups fuels this spiral of violence and undermines the foundations of social cohesion.

Acute humanitarian crisis: 12.8 million lives at risk

Beyond security, the humanitarian situation is worsening. According to figures from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 12.8 million people are currently at risk of acute food insecurity, while 2.6 million children are in danger of falling into severe malnutrition.

“Yet, only 14% of the 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan for the Sahel is funded,” Mr. Simão lamented, calling for rapid mobilization to avert a large-scale humanitarian disaster.

Recent floods in several countries have also illustrated the region’s growing vulnerability to climate shocks, adding another layer of complexity to the ongoing crises.

Regional responses: between security initiatives and political dialogues

In response to this situation, the member states of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) have set up a joint defense force as well as shared cooperation structures. At the same time, consultations have been initiated between ECOWAS and AES with the aim of strengthening collective security mechanisms.

Mr. Simão stressed the need to encourage dialogue and cooperation between regional blocs, notably welcoming the efforts of Sierra Leone’s President Julius Maada Bio in enhancing regional security, as well as the creation of a joint threat analysis cell between ECOWAS and the African Union.



The threat is no longer confined within the Sahelian borders. It is already extending to coastal states, and the risk of regional flare-up is real.

Democratic progress worth noting despite tensions

Despite the tense climate, the Special Representative made a point of highlighting some notable democratic progress in the region. He mentioned institutional reforms in Senegal, the national unity agreement in Sierra Leone, and the initiatives of the National Peace Council in Ghana as encouraging signs. He also voiced support for the electoral processes scheduled in Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, and Mauritania, while calling for a peaceful political dialogue in Togo.

Human Rights and inclusion: ongoing challenges

Mr. Simão expressed concern over the shrinking civic space, human rights violations, and the persistence of impunity. He welcomed the establishment of a criminal court by the AES in Bamako, calling it an important step toward strengthening regional judicial mechanisms.

On the issue of inclusion, he noted that all concerned countries have now adopted National Action Plans on Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace, and Security). However, he regretted the continued underrepresentation of women in decision-making spheres

and peace processes. He also advocated for greater integration of youth in conflict prevention efforts.

A strategic vision for a sustainable future

Among key development projects, Mr. Simão emphasized the importance of water as a driver of peace and development, calling for the finalization of the regional Water Action Plan for the Sahel. He also praised flagship projects implemented under the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), in partnership with the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

Finally, the Special Representative concluded his address by highlighting the notable progress of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, which he sees as an example of the constructive role international mechanisms can play in peacebuilding and cross-border cooperation.

A call for international solidarity

Leonardo Santos Simão’s message to the Security Council was clear: in the face of converging security, humanitarian, climate, and political crises in West Africa and the Sahel, no isolated solution will suffice. A collective, integrated, and sustainable response is essential to prevent further destabilization of the region and to offer its people a future of hope and resilience.



Yet, only 14% of the 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan for the Sahel is funded.

Regional Conference on Information Integrity in West Africa and the Sahel

UNOWAS calls for collective mobilization in West Africa and the Sahel

In the digital age, the proliferation of false information, hate speech, and media manipulation poses a major challenge to democratic governance in West Africa and the Sahel. These issues are not merely disruptions of the media landscape—they weaken institutions, fuel social tensions, and threaten regional peace.



Panel at the Regional Conference on Information Integrity in West Africa and the Sahel

It is in this context that the Regional Conference on Information Integrity was held from 3 to 5 September 2025 in Praia, Cabo Verde, co-organized in partnership with UNESCO and the Government of Cabo Verde.

This high-level event brought together political decision-makers, experts, media representatives, international institutions, and civil society actors.

At the close of the conference, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mr. Leonardo

Santos Simão, issued a strong call for collective mobilization to combat disinformation and strengthen the reliability of the information space in the region.

In his remarks, Mr. Simão emphasized that disinformation, manipulation of information, and hate campaigns now pose real threats to the stability of countries in the region. These phenomena—often amplified by social media and digital technologies—undermine democratic institutions, fuel divisions, and compromise social cohesion.



**Information integrity
is not a luxury. It is a
fundamental condition
for peace, democracy,
and sustainable
development in our
region.**



SRSG Simão at the Regional Conference on Information Integrity in West Africa and the Sahel

“Information integrity is not a luxury. It is a fundamental condition for peace, democracy, and sustainable development in our region,” he underscored.

In the face of these challenges, the Special Representative called for a coordinated and sustained effort from all actors: governments, regulatory bodies, the media, civil society, the private sector, and technical and financial partners.

The Praia Political Framework: a major step forward

One of the key outcomes of the conference was the adoption of the Praia Political Framework, a strategic document that lays the foundation for a regional approach to promoting information integrity.

Mr. Simão welcomed this adoption as a pivotal step toward building an ethical, reliable, and transparent informa-

tion environment in West Africa and the Sahel.

He also reaffirmed UNOWAS’s unwavering commitment to supporting the implementation of this framework, in collaboration with UNESCO, member states, and other regional and international partners.

“UNOWAS will continue to play its role as facilitator and catalyst, alongside UNESCO, to support states in strengthening their capacity to fight disinformation and promote inclusive information governance,” he stated.

Mr. Simão also expressed his gratitude to the authorities of Cabo Verde, particularly Prime Minister Ulisses Correia e Silva, for their dedication in organizing this conference. He further commended the participants for the quality of the discussions and the relevance of the recommendations formulated during the three days of deliberations.

Cabo Verde, known for its democratic stability and commitment to press freedom, has thus positioned itself as a key actor in the defense of information integrity in the region.

Toward a collective and sustainable dynamic

The Praia Conference marks the beginning of a collective momentum that the United Nations hopes will grow stronger in the months and years ahead. In a regional context marked by complex security, political, and social challenges, information integrity is becoming a cornerstone of resilience for West African and Sahelian societies.

By calling for the mobilization of all stakeholders, Mr. Simão delivered a clear message: only an inclusive, coordinated approach, based on shared values, can effectively address the threat of disinformation.

Regional Youth Forum in Dakar

Advocating for decent jobs and equitable education in times of crisis

From August 26 to 28, 2025, nearly 150 young leaders, experts, government officials, social partners, and representatives of regional organizations gathered in Dakar for the fourth edition of the Annual Youth Forum of West Africa and the Sahel, held under the theme: “Employment and Education in Emergency Situations for Young Women and Men: Building a Peaceful and Secure West Africa and Sahel.”



Participants during a panel discussion at the Regional Youth Forum in Dakar

Youth at the Heart of Regional Solutions

Organized by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), in collaboration with various UN agencies, the forum served as a strategic platform for dialogue, experience-sharing, and the development of concrete policy recommendations.

Amid the complex crises facing the region, young participants reaffirmed their determination to play an active role in peacebuilding and sustainable

development. One of the highlights of the forum was the presentation of the Dakar Pact, an ambitious, youth-led declaration calling for: the rapid creation of decent and sustainable jobs; equitable access to quality education, even in emergency contexts; the meaningful inclusion of youth in public decision-making processes.

In his opening address, Mr. Assane Diallo, Director General for Youth and representative of Senegal's Minister of Youth, Sports, and Culture, emphasized that over 65% of the population in West Africa and the Sahel consists of young people.

“This is both a tremendous challenge and a strategic opportunity. We must turn this reality into a transformative force for our societies,” he said.

Ms. Barrie Freeman, Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, warned of the consequences of youth exclusion:

“The meaningful inclusion of youth in peacebuilding processes brings social, political, and economic benefits. Yet, 72% of young workers in sub-Saharan Africa remain in precarious employment, and over 14,000 schools are



A delegation of participants in the Regional Youth Forum meets with Ms. Khady Diène Gaye, Minister of Youth and Sports of Senegal.

closed, depriving 2.8 million children of their fundamental right to education.”

Shaping the Future with and by Youth

Over the course of three days, participants from 17 countries engaged in discussions on key topics such as vocational training, migration, resilience in crisis contexts, and youth employment policies. Young women and men shared not only their concerns but also concrete and innovative proposals.

The Dakar Pact, adopted at the close of the forum, sets forth a clear roadmap. It urges stronger coordination between governments, social partners, and regional institutions to ensure a better future for young people across the region. Dr. Coffi Agossou, Deputy Regional Director of the ILO for Africa, praised the forum’s momen-



The meaningful inclusion of youth in peacebuilding processes brings social, political, and economic benefits.

tum and reiterated the ILO’s commitment to supporting governments and young people: “The ILO is committed to strengthening public policies for youth employment, supporting entrepreneurship, and developing more responsive skills systems. These efforts align with the AU-ILO Joint Strategy on Youth Employment in Africa (YES-Africa), which places youth at the heart

of the continent’s economic and social transitions.”

Following the forum, a youth delegation formally presented the outcomes of the discussions—including the Dakar Pact—to Madam Khady Diène Gaye, Senegal’s Minister of Youth, Sports, and Culture. This symbolic gesture underscores a clear intention: to make youth voices heard at the highest political levels.

The Annual Youth Forum of West Africa and the Sahel has become a vital platform for regional mobilization around the aspirations of youth. In a region facing multidimensional challenges, investing in youth employment, education, and participation is not optional—it is a critical pathway to sustainable peace, stability, and prosperity.