

8. Peace consolidation in West Africa

During the period under review, the Security Council held two meetings under the item entitled “Peace Consolidation in West Africa”. Both meetings took the form of briefings.²⁷⁸ More information on the meetings, including on participants, speakers and outcomes, is provided in table 1 below. In addition to meetings, Council members held consultations of the whole in connection with this agenda item.²⁷⁹

On 10 January, Council members heard briefings by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Office for West Sahara and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and by the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).²⁸⁰ The Deputy Special Representative reported that the security situation in large parts of the region had deteriorated, and thousands of schools and health centers had closed, owing to the activities of armed groups, violent extremists and criminal networks. The central Sahel continued to face multidimensional challenges and UNOWAS supported the efforts of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security in Development in the Sahel, which sought to find more innovative solutions and generate commitment for change.

The Deputy Special-Representative reported that countries along the Gulf of Guinea had experienced increased attacks and, in that regard, commended the collective efforts by regional leaders to address insecurity under the Accra Initiative. She briefed Council members on UNOWAS’ work with national stakeholders in relation to the upcoming electoral processes in the subregion, as well as the Mission’s contribution to conflict resolution at the regional and local level. The Deputy Special-Representative was pleased with the agreements reached on the length of the transitions in Burkina Faso and Guinea and stated that the United Nations system should continue to support the countries concerned. She commended stakeholders in the Gambia for pursuing the implementation of the recommendations of the Gambia’s Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission and welcomed the adoption of national legislation on gender parity with regards to women’s participation in political decision-making in several countries in the

²⁷⁸ For more information on the format of meetings, see part II.

²⁷⁹ Informal consultations were held on 10 January and 25 July. See [A/78/2](#), part. II, chap.31.

²⁸⁰ See [S/PV.9238](#).

region, while expressing her hope that legislative processes on this issue would be relaunched in Nigeria and the Gambia. She stated that UNOWAS would continue to work with the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel and would continue to support the revision of the 2001 ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. The Deputy Special-Representative also emphasized that the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel had leveraged the region's opportunities and urged the Council to continue supporting the Strategy.

The President of the ECOWAS Commission noted that violence in the West African region was worsening, particularly in the Sahelo-Saharan region, with spillover into littoral States. The Lake Chad basin and the central Sahel had emerged as epicenters of terrorism and violent extremism and terrorist attacks had gradually increased over the years, with significant humanitarian consequences in some communities. The recent series of coups d'état in the region constituted a major setback to the democratic gains made since the 1990s but had also galvanized leaders into action. The Authority of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government had restated its commitment to ensuring a return to full constitutional order in the three Member States in transition by 2024 and had instructed the ECOWAS Commission to urgently complete the review of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. The Authority had also decided to establish a regional force to support Member States in addressing challenges to constitutional order and had instructed the full operationalization of the ECOWAS 2020-2024 priority action plan to eradicate terrorism. The transition processes in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea were on course and ECOWAS was committed to accompanying those processes towards inclusive, transparent, free and fair elections, with ECOWAS also supporting other Member States in the conduct of elections. The President of the ECOWAS Commission emphasized the importance of partners staying engaged in the region, and especially in the Sahel, and commended the relationship between ECOWAS and the United Nations, especially through UNOWAS. He further outlined various joint initiatives between ECOWAS and UNOWAS and encouraged the United Nations to enhance the frameworks for its support to counter terrorism and violent extremism in the region.

In the statements that followed the briefing, most Council members noted positive developments with regards to political processes related to elections, social cohesion and reconciliation in various countries across the region. Nonetheless, Council members also condemned or expressed concern about the unconstitutional changes of Government or democratic backsliding in a number of countries,²⁸¹ with some calling for the restoration of constitutional order or the return of civilian-led Governments.²⁸² In this context, several Council members welcomed efforts by UNOWAS and ECOWAS to support the political transitions and electoral processes.²⁸³ Most Council members also stressed the importance of the inclusion of women and youth, welcoming UNOWAS' work on the matter or encouraging further efforts by the Mission. In addition, most Council members expressed concern about the security situation in the region, frequently emphasizing the potential or actual expansion of insecurity to littoral countries. Nonetheless, some also noted an improvement of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.²⁸⁴ Most Council members further discussed various regional initiatives and mechanisms to respond to insecurity.

Some Council members addressed the Wagner Group's presence in the region, emphasizing the threat it posed to human rights, security and stability, as well as its role in exploiting resources and contributing to violent extremism.²⁸⁵ The representative of the Russian Federation rejected any unfounded allegations that attempted to smear the Russian Federation's assistance to Mali and other countries on the continent, noting that Russia was providing Mali with appropriate assistance on the basis of bilateral agreements. Council members further discussed the adverse effects of climate change on conflicts and the already severe humanitarian situation.²⁸⁶ Lastly, most Council members expressed their support for a renewal of the

²⁸¹ Ibid., (Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), United States, Albania, Ecuador, Malta and United Kingdom).

²⁸² Ibid., (Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), United States, United Kingdom and Japan).

²⁸³ Ibid., (United States, Albania, France, Ecuador, Malta, Russian Federation and China).

²⁸⁴ Ibid., (Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), Ecuador and Brazil). See Part I, "Peace and Security in Africa", for further information on the proceedings of the Council in connection with maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., (United States, Albania, France and United Kingdom).

²⁸⁶ Ibid., (Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), Switzerland, Malta, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates and Japan).

UNOWAS mandate, with some addressing the negotiations concerning a presidential statement on the agenda item.²⁸⁷

On 25 July, Council members heard briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNOWAS, and by the President of the ECOWAS Commission.²⁸⁸ The Special Representative welcomed the holding of elections in several countries in the region, which had marked important steps towards democratic consolidation. Nonetheless, the elections had also exposed challenges, which undermined citizens' trust in the electoral process and had to be addressed well in advance of future elections. UNOWAS supported the various electoral processes and was enhancing its partnerships with regional partners to reinforce the rule of law, in light of concerns over the impartiality of the judiciary in parts of the region. The Special Representative emphasized the continued underrepresentation of women in political processes and decision-making and called on all stakeholders to promote legislation and ensure the application of existing instruments on women's empowerment and gender equality. The voice of youth was also not yet being fully heard and UNOWAS had continued to advocate for greater inclusiveness of youth in electoral and decision-making processes.

The Special Representative reported on his introductory visits to the region, noting the determination of transitional authorities in Burkina Faso to reestablish security and address the country's challenges. He further noted the ongoing processes in Guinea and Mali to return to constitutional order within the allotted time and emphasized the major challenges in Mali, given the imminent departure of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The Special Representative acknowledged the determination of regional leaders to tackle the crises and re-establish contact between ECOWAS and the countries in transition, which was reiterated at the sixty-third ordinary summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government. He also stressed that the security situation in the Central Sahel had deteriorated further and appealed to partners to lend robust support to ECOWAS' 2020-2024 Action Plan for the eradication of terrorism. He further emphasized the humanitarian impact of the crisis in the

²⁸⁷ Ibid., Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), Switzerland and Albania.

²⁸⁸ See [S/PV.9384](#).

region, particularly on food insecurity, displacement, and education. The Special Representative concluded by reporting on the progress achieved by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and emphasized the need for financial support to facilitate confidence-building between the affected communities.

The President of the ECOWAS Commission stressed the importance of governance to harness West Africa's potential. He noted that twelve out of the fifteen countries in the region had democratically elected governments with term limits enshrined in their constitutions and that major elections had taken place in the region that year. Nonetheless, the resurgence of the military in the political arena was unacceptable. The President of the ECOWAS Commission urged all three countries in the region under military rule to return to constitutional order within the specified time frames and emphasized the importance of the Council's support on the matter. He further reported on the ongoing insecurity in West Africa and the Sahel, stating that terrorist attacks had expanded to littoral States, and noted the dire humanitarian consequences of insecurity in the region. The various initiatives to respond to insecurity presented challenges concerning coordination, ownership and inclusion and ECOWAS therefore proposed integrating the initiatives into a regional plan of action. In order to facilitate the transition to such an arrangement, the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government had taken decisions related to undertaking a review of the mandate of the regional Standby Force, as well as to the financing for the regional mechanism and the review of the existing plan of action.

The President of the ECOWAS Commission briefed Council members on a meeting by the Heads of State of Nigeria, Benin and Guinea-Bissau, plus Niger, in preparation for an extraordinary summit. The regional leaders had decided to re-engage the three Member States in transition at the highest level and had underscored their resolve to see an expeditious return to constitutional order in those States. They had also reiterated their commitment to credible and inclusive democratic elections in the three countries, as well as their support to the Algiers peace process, which sought to facilitate a peaceful settlement between the Government of Mali and the armed groups. On the security situation, the leaders had stressed the region's resolve to provide a robust response to threats to peace in the region and had expressed their commitment to financing the regional security mechanism from the region's own resources. In addition,

regional leaders reiterated their support for the African Union's request for predictable funding for African-led missions through assessed contributions.

During the deliberations following the briefing, most Council members welcomed the holding of elections in several countries in the region. Nonetheless, some Council members expressed concerns about the underrepresentation of women in political and decision-making processes,²⁸⁹ as well as the shrinking of the political and civic space in some countries.²⁹⁰ Most Council members also discussed the political transitions in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, with some calling for a return to constitutional order.²⁹¹ In this context, most Council members continued to welcome the efforts of UNOWAS and ECOWAS to support the political processes underway in the region. In addition, multiple Council members emphasized that the security situation in the region had deteriorated.²⁹² Specifically, Council Members discussed the impact and risk of an expansion of instability to coastal States,²⁹³ as well as matters related to regional security cooperation.²⁹⁴ Several Council members also stressed the need for security operations to adhere to human rights and international humanitarian law,²⁹⁵ with some expressing concern over the Wagner Group's actions, highlighting its negative impact on human rights, security and stability.²⁹⁶

Most Council members addressed the withdrawal of MINUSMA, and some called for continued support to and engagement with Mali.²⁹⁷ In the context of MINUSMA's withdrawal, Council members also discussed possible adjustments to the role of UNOWAS.²⁹⁸ Most members addressed the worrisome humanitarian situation in the region, highlighting various issues ranging from food insecurity to displacement and humanitarian access. They further

²⁸⁹ Ibid., (Switzerland, Malta and Albania).

²⁹⁰ Ibid., (Malta, Albania, Brazil and United Kingdom).

²⁹¹ Ibid., (Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), United States, Japan, Ecuador and Albania).

²⁹² Ibid., (Japan, Ecuador, Albania, Brazil and United Kingdom).

²⁹³ Ibid., (United States, Japan, Ecuador, France and United Kingdom).

²⁹⁴ Ibid., (Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), United Arab Emirates, China, Ecuador, Albania, and United Kingdom).

²⁹⁵ Ibid., (Japan, Malta and Albania).

²⁹⁶ Ibid., (United States, Albania and France).

²⁹⁷ Ibid., (United Arab Emirates, China and Russian Federation).

²⁹⁸ Ibid., (Ghana, (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), Switzerland, United States, Russian Federation and United Kingdom).

addressed the effects and implications of climate change, with some Council members calling for holistic, comprehensive or multisectoral approaches to address the challenges in the region.²⁹⁹ Lastly, most Council Members discussed the possible adoption of a presidential statement on the agenda item.

By an exchange of letters between the Secretary-General and the President of the Council dated 20 and 27 January respectively, the Council extended the mandate of UNOWAS for three years, until 31 January 2026.³⁰⁰ In renewing the mandate, the Council reiterated that, with certain modifications, the mandate would focus on four core objectives, namely: (a) monitoring political developments in West Africa and the Sahel and carrying out good offices and special assignments on behalf of the Secretary-General to support conflict prevention, peacebuilding, sustaining peace and mediation efforts in the subregion, in partnership with regional and subregional entities and other national and international actors, with specific attention to countries in which the United Nations presence is undergoing reconfiguration or transition, while being mindful of the sustainable development context in the region; (b) enhancing regional and subregional partnerships to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel, in particular with regional and subregional entities; (c) supporting, through political advocacy and playing a convening role, the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, enhancing collaboration across the United Nations system and promoting coherence in the international and regional response to the root causes and impact of conflict in the Sahel; and (d) promoting good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and the mainstreaming of gender in conflict prevention, management and resolution initiatives in West Africa and the Sahel.³⁰¹

Meetings: Peace consolidation in West Africa, 2023

<i>Meeting and date</i>	<i>Sub-item</i>	<i>Other documents</i>	<i>Rule 37 invitations</i>	<i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i>
S/PV.9238 10 January 2023	Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the			Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-	13 Council members, ^a all invitees	

²⁹⁹ Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), Switzerland, Japan, Malta and Albania.

³⁰⁰ [S/2023/70](#) and [S/2023/71](#).

³⁰¹ [S/2023/70](#), annex, objectives 1-4. For more information regarding the mandate of UNOWAS, see part X, sect. II.

	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2022/1019)	General and Officer- in-Charge of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States
S/PV.9384 25 July 2023	Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2023/490)	Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNOWAS, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States
		13 Council members, ^a all invitees

^a Albania, Brazil, China, Ecuador, France, Ghana (also on behalf of Gabon and Mozambique), Japan, Malta, Russian Federation, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States.