

Statement by the President of the Security Council

The Security Council welcomes the appointment of Leonardo Santos Simão on 2 May 2023 as Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for West Africa and the Sahel, Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and Chair of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and calls on all relevant stakeholders to engage constructively and fully with the SRSG in the fulfilment of the mandate of UNOWAS.

The Security Council welcomes the reports of the Secretary-General on the activities of UNOWAS (S/2023/1075, S/2023/490, S/2022/1019) and the latest briefing provided on 11 January 2024 by Special Representative Simão, and expresses full support to his efforts in carrying out the mandate of UNOWAS. The Security Council recognises that responsible and credible preventive diplomacy and good offices require, inter alia, national ownership, the consent of the parties to a particular dispute or conflict, and respect for national sovereignty, as set out in A/RES/70/304.

The Security Council recalls its resolutions 2690 (2023), 2640 (2022), 2634 (2022), 2584 (2021), 2531 (2020), 2512 (2020), 2480 (2019), 2423 (2018), 2391 (2017), 2359 (2017), 2349 (2017) and 2320 (2016), and previous presidential statements on this agenda item.

The Security Council reaffirms that development, peace and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and welcomes the written advice by the Peacebuilding Commission from January and July 2023, as well as all its previous advice on UNOWAS, and encourages continued close and effective cooperation between UNOWAS and the Peacebuilding Commission in support of sustainable peace in West Africa and the Sahel.

Security

The Security Council acknowledges the challenging security situation in West Africa and the Sahel, including armed conflicts, the spread of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, and transnational organised crime. The Security Council strongly condemns continued violations of international humanitarian law, including those involving attacks against civilians and civilian objects, such as schools, as well as hospitals, representatives from local, regional and State institutions, humanitarian, educational and medical personnel, as well as UN personnel. The Security Council strongly condemns the increase in civilian casualties recorded in the region, and expresses the need for accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law, and violations and abuses of human rights.

The Security Council notes the growing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons and reiterates that the primary responsibility for the stabilisation of the security situation and protection of civilians in this region lays on the respective States. This responsibility requires a fully integrated response, led by respective national authorities, including those in transition, with the support of UNOWAS, regional organisations, civil society and the international community. This response is therefore best conducted through simultaneous pursuit of progress on security, democratic governance, sustainable development, accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, humanitarian assistance and protection, reconciliation and the respect and protection of human rights, and further stresses the importance of preventing conflict by addressing its root causes and building peaceful, just, inclusive and resilient societies.

The Security Council expresses great concern at the violent actions of non-State actors, including individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida, as designated by the Security Council, whose activities, including those in violation of international humanitarian law, further exacerbate challenges to the return of State authority, the rule of law, and the

restoration of basic social services in areas throughout the wider region, as well as international, regional and national efforts to restore stability in the region. The Security Council reaffirms the centrality of inclusive dialogue at national and local levels to promote sustainable peace and security. Furthermore, the Security Council recognises the importance of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, including its subsequent reviews, and takes note of the steps taken by ECOWAS to fully operationalize its priority Action Plan 2020-2024 to eradicate terrorism in the region and reaffirms the importance of addressing, in a manner consistent with international law, the underlying conditions conducive to terrorism, including by implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and its support plan.

The Security Council acknowledges the closing of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on 31 December 2023 and reiterates its deep appreciation to UN personnel as well as troop and police contributing countries for their dedication in implementing the mission's mandate under very challenging circumstances. The Security Council notes the need for continued cooperation with the UN during of the ongoing liquidation process as per the provisions set out in resolution 2690 (2023).

The Security Council expresses its deep concern about the intensification of intercommunal violence, in particular in the central Sahel. It is also deeply concerned by increased tensions and conflicts between farmers and herders in the region. It welcomes UNOWAS, UNOCA, ECOWAS and ECCAS joint efforts and cooperation, within their mandates, in support of efforts to promote good practices in resolving farmer-herder conflicts in West and Central Africa.

The Council recalls that the illicit diversion and transfer of small arms and light weapons poses a threat to peace and security in the region and recalls its resolution 2616 (2021) and requests UNOWAS to facilitate with ECOWAS exchanges on national and regional efforts to prevent and address the illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition.

The Security Council expresses concern at the grave threat that piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea pose to international navigation, security, and sustainable development of States in the region. It welcomes improvements in the security situation in the Gulf of Guinea and encourages continued joint efforts by UNOWAS and UNOCA, within their mandates, in support of continued coordination between the states in the region, ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC in their fight against piracy and other forms of maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea. It further welcomes the adoption of resolution 2634 (2022) on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, and calls for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report submitted to the Council pursuant to paragraph 16 of the resolution, in particular its focus on the underlying causes as well as on the United Nations support and contributions which provide a good basis for enhancing regional efforts in consolidating the gains made in combating this menace. The Security Council welcomes ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC joint efforts toward maritime safety and security in the region via the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Safety and Security and calls for further progress in ensuring that the Architecture can fulfill its operational mandate for inter-regional maritime cooperation against maritime safety issues and security threats.

The Security Council welcomes efforts by countries in West Africa and the Sahel as well as by ECOWAS and the African Union to strengthen regional cooperation in preventing and addressing security challenges. It also welcomes efforts to enhance cooperation between UNOWAS and sub-regional organisations including ECOWAS, ECCAS as well as UNOCA and other relevant stakeholders in the development of coherent sub-regional approaches in dealing with security challenges in the region. The Security Council welcomes the role played by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the fight against individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida, as designated by the Security Council, in the region. It commends the intensified efforts to increase collaboration to prevent and address the spread of violence to the coastal states under the Accra Initiative. Furthermore, the Security Council calls for the full implementation of the Regional

Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko-Haram affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin and welcomes the decision by UNOWAS and UNOCA to enhance advocacy in this regard.

The Security Council reaffirms that Member States must ensure that any measures taken to counter terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular, international humanitarian law, international refugee law and international human rights law.

The Security Council welcomes the continuing important efforts and enhanced role of the African Union, sub-regional organisations and regional mechanisms in peace operations in accordance with Security Council resolutions and decisions.

The Security Council recalls the adoption of Resolution 2719 (2023) on the financing of African Union-led Peace Support Operations authorized by the Security Council.

The Security Council is particularly concerned by the situation of children in some parts of the region, and calls upon all parties to armed conflict to end and prevent all six grave violations against children and urges all parties to comply with their obligations under international law, and in particular to respect the rights of the child, including the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and to education. The Security Council supports efforts to uphold the timely and accurate monitoring and reporting of instances of six grave violations where committed in the region, in line with SC resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015), 2427 (2018) and 2601 (2021). The Security Council also reaffirms the contribution of education to the achievement of peace and security, and expresses concern at the continued increases in school closures in the region, resulting in an alarming number of children being denied their right to education. It reiterates its strong condemnation of attacks and threats of attacks against schools, children, and educational personnel, as expressed in Security Council Resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2601 (2021) and calls on all parties to safeguard, protect, respect, and promote the right to education, including during armed conflict.

The Security Council commends the efforts of civil society and religious and community leaders to resolve conflict in the Sahel. The Security Council also emphasises the importance of the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women and youth in all stages of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes, consistent with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security and welcomes the continued efforts of UNOWAS in this regard.

The Security Council recognises the adverse effects of climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters, including through floods, drought, desertification, and land degradation, as well as their exacerbating effects on food security and on other humanitarian, social and economic challenges, which impact the security and stability of West Africa and the Sahel region. The Security Council continues to stress the need for long-term strategies, based on comprehensive risk assessments by governments and the United Nations, to support stabilisation and build resilience, and encourages UNOWAS within its current resources, to continue to integrate this information, as appropriate, in its activities. The Security Council takes note of efforts to develop region-specific approaches and initiatives towards comprehensive risk assessments, climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience in West Africa and the Sahel, and encourages UNOWAS' continued advocacy for efforts, within its current mandate and resources, to scale up international action and support, through inter alia, humanitarian and development action, the development, voluntary transfer and deployment of technology on mutually agreed terms, resource mobilisation and capacity-building, including on renewables-based energy transition, and energy efficiency in line with existing commitments to enhance the adaptive capacity of countries from the region and to reduce their vulnerability to climate change. The Security Council stresses the particular relevance of the above elements to the specific situation in West Africa and the Sahel region. The Security Council acknowledges the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement as the primary international, intergovernmental forums for negotiating the global response to climate change.

The Security Council commends UNOWAS and other relevant UN entities for their efforts to implement recommendations addressing intercommunal violence, including through the Liptako-Gourma Stabilisation Facility and stabilisation efforts in the Lake Chad Basin. It calls for these efforts to be further supported and enhanced and welcomes updates on progress made in subsequent reports. It also welcomes the progress achieved by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and commends its continuing efforts toward a conclusive demarcation of the border between the two countries, demonstrating how the peaceful settlement of border disputes can build trust and bilateral cooperation between neighbouring countries.

Political

The Security Council commends progress made to preserve and advance democracy in several countries in the region, including the peaceful conduct of elections, dialogue, reconciliation processes and transitional justice. It further emphasises the importance of inclusive political dialogue and consensus building on key national priorities among all stakeholders to achieve sustainable reconciliation. The Security Council reaffirms its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of all States in the region and emphasises the need to respect the principles of non-interference, good neighbourliness and regional cooperation. The Security Council stresses that good governance and democratic transitions as well as respect for the constitutional order, the rule of law, and human rights, including the rights to freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, are critical for long-term peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel. The Security Council further underlines the importance of mitigating shrinking civic and political space.

The Security Council expresses serious concern at the unconstitutional changes of governments and attempted coup d'états. The Security Council underscores the importance of the timely, nationally owned transition processes and restoration of constitutional order in the concerned regional countries.

The Security Council takes note of the outcomes of the Ordinary and Extraordinary Sessions of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS held in 2022, 2023 and 2024 respectively. The Security Council also takes note of ECOWAS' efforts to ensure political stability in the region, including by mediation and facilitation activities as well as by supporting national efforts to prevent election-related violence and improving dialogue with countries in political transition. It further commends the good offices role provided by UNOWAS in supporting good governance, democratic practices, institution building, reconciliation, social cohesion and inclusion. The Security Council also commends the collaborative efforts between UNOWAS and ECOWAS on promoting human rights, the rule of law and independence of the judiciary, as well as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. It encourages continued work towards the establishment and full operationalization of a regional platform of Ministers of Justice.

Furthermore, it calls for the operationalisation of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and encourages ECOWAS and the African Union to continue to promote preventative diplomacy efforts with the support of UNOWAS and the international community.

The Security Council expresses the importance of UNOWAS's good offices roles to prevent conflict, and, as appropriate, election- and transition-related tensions, as well as to sustain peace and consolidate peacebuilding efforts and political stability.

The Security Council commends and calls for the further strengthening of efforts by the countries of the region to advance the full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of women in political processes, and decision-making, including with a view to increasing the number and participation of women in senior government positions and elected offices more broadly, consistent with their respective constitutions and laws, and national, regional and global commitments. The Council welcomes the Secretary General's report and encourages UNOWAS to continue its gender-sensitive reporting in accordance with its mandate.

The Security Council recognises the growing youth population and underlines the need to promote their positive contribution to peacebuilding efforts in line with resolution 2250 (2015) and its subsequent resolutions 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) on Youth, Peace and Security. The Security Council emphasises the importance of promoting the positive engagement of young people in communities, including through education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. In this respect, the Security Council takes note of the *Mindelo Call to Action* adopted in Cabo Verde in July 2023.

Humanitarian

The Security Council expresses serious concern at the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in some parts of the region, caused by armed conflicts and exacerbated by violations of international humanitarian law, climate change, and development, social and economic challenges which are characterised by increasing forced displacement, extreme poverty, food insecurity, water scarcity, water quality issues, floods, droughts, desertification and land degradation that is particularly severe in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, social inequalities and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence and reaffirms the need to ensure access to education and healthcare. The Security Council calls for the full, safe, rapid and unhindered access for the delivery of humanitarian and medical aid to all persons in need, including timely access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, mental health and psychosocial services for survivors of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations without any discrimination.

The Security Council condemns all forms of violence and threats against humanitarian personnel and medical personnel, and encourages efforts by States in the region to ensure that perpetrators of such acts are brought to justice, as provided for by national laws and consistent with their obligations under international law. It further calls for significant and coordinated humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, mobilization of resources for funding the Humanitarian Response Plans, as well as the disbursement of previously pledged funds.

The Security Council reiterates the importance of expediting implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSPS) and welcomes the development of a common chapter to enhance national ownership of the strategy. It also welcomes the collaboration between UNOWAS and the Office of the Special Coordinator for development in the Sahel as well as the United Nations Country Teams in the region in supporting a scaled up United Nations development response.

The Security Council requests the Secretary-General to continue to provide information on UN efforts with respect to aspects highlighted in this statement and the UNOWAS mandate, on the overall security, political and humanitarian situation in the region.