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Editorial

«Together, we can build a better future»

West Africa and the Sahel are two important geographical areas in Africa that have the human and economic potential to play a leading role in the development of the continent. However, the two regions remain mired in recurrent problems that hinder their development.

Beyond the challenges of climate change, demographics and lack of development infrastructure, the West Africa and Sahel regions are today confronted with issues as complex as cross-border insecurity, mass migration, multifaceted violence, including violent extremism.

Aware of this reality, the countries of West Africa and the Sahel have

taken and continue to take significant actions to overcome these problems and provide decent living conditions to their populations. However, it must be recognized that one country alone cannot solve this kind of challenges. There is a need for a shared vision: solutions will only come through coordinated mobilization of all actors.

It is against this background that the merger of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the Office of the Special Envoy of the United Nations for the Sahel (OSES) took place in January, resulting in the establishment of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

In coordination with the countries of the region, UNOWAS intends to

UN in Action

● UNESCO trains Security Forces on Press Freedom, Freedom of Expression and the Safety of



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play a key role in contributing effectively to the actions of regional and international stakeholders.

The organization last month in Dakar, in partnership with IPI (International Peace Institute) and the Swiss-government, of a high-level conference on the need to invest in peace and the prevention of violence in West Africa and the Sahel; the recent visit to the G5 Sahel and the support provided during various electoral processes, are testimonies to the will of the United Nations and UNOWAS in particular, to work for peace and prosperity in the two regions.

The task is certainly difficult, but not insurmountable. Together we can build a better future for the people of West Africa and the Sahel.

Mohamed Ibn Chambas

Special Representative of the Secretary-General
and Head of the UN Office for Africa West and the Sahel

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Investing in Peace and the Prevention of Violence in West Africa and the Sahel, a Priority for the United Nations

A high-level meeting on the theme: «Investing in Peace and Violence Prevention in West Africa and the Sahel» was held in Dakar on 27 and 28 June 2016 to identify effective measures to prevent violence, including violent extremism and to explore innovative approaches to invest more in peace in West Africa and the Sahel.



High-Level meeting on the theme «Investing in Peace and Violence Prevention in West Africa and the Sahel», Dakar 27 June 2016

Convinced that insecurity and the various expressions of violence in West Africa and the Sahel cannot be immutable reality, but rather ills that can and must be tackled at the source, the United Nations Office for Africa West and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation, DFAE held a high level meeting on 27 and 28 June 2016 in Dakar. The objective of the meeting was to identify concrete actions that will enable countries in the region to invest more in peace and in the prevention of violence.

Urgency: Indeed, beyond the management of security necessary to thwart the various forms of violence, including violent extremism, the Dakar meeting emphasized the urgency to develop a coherent and effective response that favors investment in peace and in the prevention of violence as a func-

tion of inclusive governance.

In his opening [remarks](#), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office for Africa West and the Sahel, Mr Mohamed Ibn Chambas stated that «the solution is not all-out security. It is urgent to have an integrated approach that takes into account the living conditions of populations and offers a future, particularly to young people».

Local and regional realities

It is in line with this integrated and consultative approach that UNOWAS, together with IPI and FDFA, organized this meeting which was attended by experts from the two regions, regional and international partners and United Nations representatives, because as affirmed by Ms. Dagmar Schmidt, Ambassador of Switzerland «the issue of violence prevention is comprehensive and cross-cutting. It affects members of the United

Nations and all strata of society, and the responses it calls for need to be rooted in local and regional realities».

Recommendations. Inspired by the UN Secretary-General Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism ([A/70/674](#)) dated December 2015, participants were able to discuss, exchange views and develop concrete recommendations in line with the approach advocated by the UN Secretary-General that calls for an innovative, determined and coordinated upstart in the prevention of violent extremism.

The [meeting](#) made recommendations for the development of concrete actions in areas as diverse as youth, the role of the private sector and the media, and the use of national peace architectures.

According to participants, a sustained commitment to youth and women's groups, which are both

witnesses, targets and victims of violent extremism, and the necessary drivers of change is paramount, as well as the need to give a new impetus to peace architectures that exist at national level, which several United Nations agencies including the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are already working on. These structures, which include civil society, religious and traditional authorities, must be reconciled with national institutions through exchange platforms, they said.

Participants also stressed the importance of a closer public-private partnership to improve socio-economic conditions through greater access to employment for the youth. The meeting also underscored the importance of the media in promoting positive initiatives in favor of peace, and the need to support community radios as they play an important role in the education and awareness of citizens in the prevention of violent extremism.

Insisting on the priority of prevention and the need to redouble efforts to invest in peace, the Head of UNOWAS undertook to advocate for governments and regional institutions to promote more dialogue and expression spaces with young people and civil society representatives. He also committed to exploring ways to support socially-oriented private investors and entrepreneurs whose commitment is essential, in particular vis-à-vis young people.

For more information on the meeting:

Joint Communiqué:

<http://bit.ly/2a8DL7u>

Speech of Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas:

<http://bit.ly/2akJhU0>

SRSg Mohamed Ibn Chambas OP-ED

<http://bit.ly/2aazf5R>

Speech of Mr. Youssef Mahmoud:

<http://bit.ly/2atNjfi>

Speech of Ms. Dagmar Schmidt:

<http://bit.ly/29ZEQVQ>

Speech of Mr. Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah:

<http://bit.ly/2aazf5R>

They have said



Dagmar Schmidt, Amb. Switzerland to Senegal

«Prevention requires that we work on the causes of violence, not just the symptoms. This often involves a paradigm and attitude shift – and more specifically it involves a willingness to accept plural societies and diverse identities, and to recognize the value of tolerance and dialogue.»



Mahmoud Youssef, IPI Senior Advisor

«Over the past decade, efforts to prevent violent extremism were primarily designed as a complement to anti-terrorist operations. They often mainly resulted in short-term security measures aimed at containing the immediate consequences of violent acts and preventing their recurrence.»



Mohamed Ibn Chambas: SRSg UNOWAS

«To ensure equitable access to resources and sustainable development, pro-active and responsible policies – positioning the individual as an actor of development and matter as a development tool - must be at the core of all economic actions and plans of the States in the region.»

UNOWAS and G5 Sahel strengthen their partnership

For his first visit to the G5 Sahel countries ([Burkina](#), [Niger](#), [Mali](#), [Mauritania](#) and [Chad](#)) since the establishment of UNOWAS in January, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, called for a stronger partnership between the countries of G5 Sahel and the United Nations.



Priority. Recognizing the importance for the countries of the G5 Sahel and for the United Nations, to continue the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel in particular after the merger of the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES) and the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the creation of UNOWAS, it was necessary for the Head of the new entity to renew the UN's commitment and exchange views with the leaders of the five countries on actions to be undertaken to further strengthen the partnership with the UN.

During the visits conducted from May 26 to June 2, Mr Mohamed Ibn Chambas endeavored to meet all stakeholders, particularly Mr Najim Elhadj Mohamed,

Permanent Secretary of the G5 Sahel and his team with whom he discussed UNOWAS determination to accelerate the implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the various projects developed in coordination with G5 Sahel.

Coordination and Partnership

Indeed, strengthening the partnership with the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel is a priority for UNOWAS. The establishment of a UNOWAS Liaison Unit (see article P4) with the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat in Nouakchott is a testament to this.

This first visit enabled the Head of UNOWAS to assess the situation in the region and evaluate significant actions undertaken by the G5 Sahel countries, particularly in

areas of security and governance. In this regard, the interlocutors of Mr. Ibn Chambas, in particular the presidents of Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and the Prime Ministers of Chad and Mauritania renewed their commitment and determination to strengthen their collaboration with the United Nations through a privileged partnership with UNOWAS.

In regional and international contexts marked by increased violence and insecurity, as well as economic difficulties that slow or even prevent any possibility of development and improvement of living conditions, coordination and strategic partnerships are indeed more than ever to address the complex challenges facing the countries of the G5 Sahel.

UNOWAS establishes a Liaison Cell in Nouakchott

The newly established UNOWAS Liaison Cell in Nouakchott will help reinforce an enhanced collaboration and partnership between the UN and the G5 Sahel.



The UNOWAS delegation meet with the G5 Sahel team in Nouakchott

Since the creation of the **G5 Sahel** in 2014, the UN has established a strategic partnership with this regional organization, which regroups the five core countries of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), namely Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mali and Niger.

In the context of a challenging socio-economic conditions and deterioration of the security situation, the G5 Sahel demonstrated a strong political will to integrate and promote a regional approach to tackle security and development challenges in coordination with the international community. In this regard, the Security Council requested UNOWAS to “work clo-

sely with the G5 countries as well as other countries of the region, and regional and international actors to tackle threats to peace and security in the Sahel region.

Solid Partnership

In his capacity of the new Special Representative and Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas seized the opportunity during his first high-level tour to the G5 Sahel member states to reaffirm the continued strategic partnership between the UN and the G5 Sahel.

During his meeting with the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretary, Mr Najim Elhadj Mohamed on 1st June in Nouakchott, Mohamed Ibn Cham-

bas underlined the importance of a strong partnership between the two entities and the determination of UNOWAS to enhance its coordination with the Permanent Secretariat office through the newly established UNOWAS Liaison Cell in Nouakchott, which will ensure close liaison and facilitation of collaboration with the G5 Sahel, coordination and facilitation of UN efforts to enhance the G5 Sahel's capacities for conflict prevention and to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security as well as facilitating the linkage between the G5 Sahel and other regional initiatives, through the Ministerial Coordination Platform for Sahel Strategies.

USG Jeffrey Feltman: *“In countries where there has been stability, respect for human rights, democratic elections, there has also been a good record of social and economic progress.”*

At the conclusion of his tour in Central and West Africa regions on 25 July, Mr. Jeffery Feltman, United Nations' Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs spoke to UNOWAS E-Magazine in Dakar about the objectives of his visit and the role of UNOWAS in the region. Interview.



Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs during the interview at UNOWAS HQ in Dakar - 25 July 2016

UNOWAS E-MAG: On Monday (25 of July), you have concluded your tour in the region by a meeting with the President of the Republic of Senegal, Mr Macky Sall. What have you discussed?

Mr. Jeffrey Feltman: I congratulated the President of Senegal for the successful chairmanship of ECOWAS by Senegal that has just ended. I also welcomed the active role that Senegal is currently playing in the Security Council for peace and security in the region and worldwide. We discussed the current situation in the

region. We agreed, for example on the importance of stability, development and reconciliation in Guinea Bissau. I also thanked the President for his support and that of Senegal to the work of the United Nations in the world.

UE-M: What is your assessment of the work of the UN in West Africa and the Sahel?

JF: I think what is clear is that throughout West Africa you can see examples where peace and stability has allowed real development, real economic and social progress. In countries where there has been

stability, respect for human rights, democratic elections, there has also been a good record of social and economic progress.

Development and stability go hand in hand. We have seen other places where it has been clear that the instability has contributed to problems, like in Mali for example. I think that there are many examples in West Africa, where one can see that the UN is working in ways that member States are expecting us to work with the sustaining peace resolutions and the 2030 agenda.

And I would look at UNOWAS as being a good example of this.

UE-M: More specifically, what role could or should UNOWAS play following the merger between OSES and UNOWA?

JF: UNOWAS is working with the regional offices of the agencies' funds and programs and with the County Teams to promote the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel in order to address across the board weaknesses and challenges that transcend boundaries, both geographic boundaries as well as subject boundaries that often have been dealt in a very silo approach to the UN.

There is a clear connection between the peace, security and prevention side of the work in UNOWAS with the promotion of the Integrated Strategy for the Sahel part of UNOWAS. I think it made a lot of sense when Member States decided to do the integration of the two offices.

Now, changes in structure are always difficult. They always cause some sort of disruption. I would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate my colleagues in UNOWAS for their efforts and dedication. I am convinced that with the professional staff and experience that is located in UNOWAS, this Special Political Mission will be able to contribute in a profound way to peace and security in the region and to development in the region. Even though implementation under the development and humanitarian side falls to others, the coordination and catalytic promotion of the development and humanitarian side can come very well from this office.

Cameroon and Nigeria mobilized to complete the demarcation of their shared land border

Under the leadership of the Chair of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC), Mr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the two delegations met in Yaoundé, Cameroon on 6 June to discuss outstanding issues and decide on a roadmap to ensure a peaceful and final settlement of the demarcation of the land border between the two neighbors.



Pillar construction project at Taraba State (Nigeria)/North West Region (Cameroon): Nigerian customs officer (right) of Cross River State's local Boki government inspects location of newly erected Primary Pillar. Credit: UN Photo/MABAYA

Roadmap

In Yaoundé, the meeting of heads of delegations, the second of the kind, made it possible to reach a common understanding about the concerns raised and solutions proposed by the two neighbors. Both heads of delegations and their teams demonstrated readiness in overcoming differences and reaching a common position for the benefit of both countries and the populations living along the border.

Mr Mohamed Ibn Chambas praised the positive spirit of the two heads of delegations and commended them for their strong commitment to complete the border demarcation and strengthen assistance to affected populations. Indeed under the leadership of the Chair of CMCN, the two delegations agreed to put in place a pragmatic roadmap prioritizing the completion of the demarcation of the land border on the remaining 100 kilometers, the launch of socio-economic projects to build the confidence of populations affected by the demarcation process, and the need to contribute to the Investment Fund to implement the already initiated activities.

The two heads of delegations have agreed to meet in November in Abuja to assess the progress made in the implementation of the roadmap.

Positive Spirit

A long time has passed since the two delegations last had an opportunity to discuss what should be called «the last phase of the demarcation». Naturally, disagreements have emerged but they have not altered the determination and commitment of the two neighbors to finalize this process in a responsible and peaceful manner.

Building on this determination and the positive spirit, Mr Mohamed Ibn Chambas for his first meeting as Chair of the CMCN and Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for West Africa and the Sahel wanted to consult and discuss with the two delegations in order to clear up misunderstandings and resolve disagreements that could further delay the finalization of the land border demarcation process.

UNESCO trains Security Forces on Press Freedom, Freedom of Expression and the Safety of Journalists in Mali

The UNESCO Office in Bamako, in partnership with EUCAP Sahel Mali and the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, organized, from 13 to 18 June 2016 at the Peacekeeping School, a training workshop for security forces on press freedom, freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. This training workshop, which gathered sixty participants from all regions of Mali, aimed to strengthen the skills of security forces to ensure the right of citizens to freedom of expression and information, thus improving the safety of journalists, in the framework of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. *(By UNESCO)*



UNESCO/Sébastien Rieussec

The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, coordinated by UNESCO and approved by the Executive Board of the Secretariat of the United Nations, on 12 April 2012, is the first UN Plan at a system wide level that aims to create a safe and secure environment for journalists and media professionals, including social media producers, in conflict and non-conflict situations. In the framework of this plan of action, the workshop aimed to promote an enabling environment for freedom of expression, press freedom and the safety of journalists by facilitating media pluralism and par-

ticipation, and by supporting sustainable and independent media institutions..

The safety of journalists is a priority for media organizations that support freedom of expression. In order to ensure successful democratic transition, it is essential to encourage the respect of human rights and of democratic principles, freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

The [Carthage Declaration](#), adopted during the UNESCO International Conference on World Press Freedom Day in Tunisia, 3-5 May 2012, highlighted the need to strengthen

press freedom and to improve the safety of journalists. The Carthage Declaration called on all stakeholders “to create a free and safe environment for journalists, media workers and social media producers to produce information through traditional or new media, and to support implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity”. The Carthage Declaration also specifically called on UNESCO Member States to train security forces to interact positively with media professionals, especially during peaceful demonstrations and civic protests.



Project Module

This training program is part of UNESCO's global actions in this field. A training for security forces of the Ministry of Interior on freedom of expression, press freedom and security of journalists was already implemented by UNESCO in Tunisia. Similar trainings on the safety of journalists have already been organized by UNESCO and their partners in Cote d'Ivoire, Somalia, Rwanda, and South Sudan.

Two training sessions were organized around the theme: "journalists and law enforcement". The first session, which took place from 13 to 15 June, aimed to sensitize senior security officials on freedom of expression, press freedom and the role of journalists in a democracy. The training will also strengthened the capacity of agents of the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection in communications techniques and press relations.

The second session took place on the 16, 17 and 18 of June, and aimed to strengthen the capacity of trainers and pedagogues of the

Ministry of Security and Civil Protection on press freedom, freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, to ensure the scale-up of this training and related curricula.

As a result of these capacity building initiatives, participants developed and adapted a training module on freedom of expression, the safety of journalists, and press relations intended for use in training schools of Malian security forces.

Following the 6 day training, the Head of Mission of EUCAP Sahel Mali welcomed the collaboration of his Institution with the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection and the UNESCO Bamako Office, and reiterated his wish to transform this initiative into a sustainable training programme.

Concrete recommendations

The Minister of Security and Civil Protection, Colonel Salif Traoré, thanked the UNESCO Bamako Office and the other partners for their joint effort: "I am glad that UNESCO provided its support to

this training in Bamako. We need other trainings of this kind and it is a duty of each participant present to share with their colleagues the knowledge acquired during this training." The Minister then urged the UNESCO Bamako Office to plan and support specific trainings on media and security intended for Malian security forces.

During the training, contents covered the following themes: security procedures in the field; ways to guarantee journalists access to the information they need; communication with media; journalism, democracy and freedom of expression.

Commander Ian Lafrenière, the principal trainer from the Quebec Police, used a mixed pedagogical approach (presentations, group discussions, sessions of questions and answers and practical exercises) to enable participants to understand the different concepts and topics addressed during the workshop.

Concrete recommendations resulting from the training included the need to strengthen confidence and communication between police and journalists, the need to ensure training on the safety of journalists is institutionalized in training institutes of security forces in Mali, and the need to further strengthen the training and professionalism of journalists concerning conflict-sensitive reporting.

As follow up to this initiative, UNESCO plans, in partnership with the UN Family, to upscale the training to the Regional level to further support the important link between ensuring security, access to public information, freedom of expression, and the safety of journalists.

OCHA: The First World Humanitarian Summit

With the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and related funding requirements hitting record highs in the past decade, the UN Secretary General called for a World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), to discuss new approaches on how and what must be done better to end conflict, alleviate suffering, and reduce risk and vulnerability. *(By OCHA)*



The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, Toby Lanzer, with Civil Society Representatives Samba Cissé from Mali, and Aishatu Margima from Nigeria. Credit: OCHA

On 23-24 May 2016, more than 9,000 representatives from Member States of the United Nations, local and international NGOs, the private sector, affected communities and other stakeholders congregated in Istanbul for the WHS, demonstrating an overwhelming support for the Agenda for Humanity. The diversity of voices heard at the Summit, and their convergence around strategic issues and ideas, was a first for the humanitarian sector. More than 1,500 pledges and commitments were made on how to better address the unprecedented levels

of suffering and vulnerability of people caught up in natural disasters and conflicts; to empower them as agents of their own recovery; and to summon greater political will to prevent and end the wars which are causing so much distress.

West and Central Africa at the Summit

The West and Central Africa region was represented at the highest level. Presidents from the Central African Republic, Mali, Mauritania and Niger attended the Summit, as well as high level mission from most other countries of the region. The Economic Community of

Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were also present and particularly engaged in the new Regional Organisations for Humanitarian Action Network (ROHAN).

In collaboration with Governments, United Nations, INGOs and Civil society organisations, the region held two side events featuring panel discussions and representatives from affected communities on the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin, and on Mali and radicalization and stability in the Sahel.

The way forward

Whereas many initiatives were launched at the summit, a couple stood out in significance. The launch of the “Grand Bargain” was ground breaking and aimed at ensuring efficiency and transparency by investing in front-line humanitarian action over the next five years. Donors also committed to new funding initiatives to protect women and girls from gender-based violence; to ensure that millions of children in crisis can continue their education; address one of the most urgent priorities of refugees and displaced people around the world; and bridge the gap between humanitarian and development work by creating a new way of working together to reduce needs, manage risks and reach common goals to end the need.

Read More: <http://bit.ly/2bj0ooG>

Brothers run again and again as Boko Haram terror spreads

Diffa, Niger – Bala never imagined he would have to step over dead bodies to save his life. His brother Mahamadou never thought he would have to hide beneath them to save his. (By UNHCR)



Brothers Bala (left) and Mahamadou narrowly escaped attacks by Boko Haram. © HCR/Helene Caux

“They were killing children in the streets. They were shooting at pregnant women,” says Bala, 50, remembering how Boko Haram tore through his town, in northern Nigeria.

“Everyone was terrified, running in any direction. It was chaos. People were being killed in front of me. They were collapsing in front of me. I panicked and I recall stepping over several dead bodies to escape. Bullets were flying around me.”

“They were killing children in the streets, they were shooting at pregnant women. Everyone was terrified.”

Mahamadou, 63, picks up the story, describing how he faced a barrage of Boko Haram gunfire as he ran from the same attack to the Komadougou River to escape to neighbouring Niger.

“I was lying on the grass, under

dead bodies, pretending I was also dead,” he says. “I saw people being massacred. I never thought I would make it out alive. I remained hidden under the bodies, silent.”

The violence meted out by the Boko Haram insurgency is well known. What is less reported is what happens to the 2.7 million people like Bala, Mahamadou and their families across Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon who have survived the sect’s attacks, but were forced to flee, frequently more than once.

“For months after the attack, I had nightmares,” says Bala, who owned a shop selling motorcycle spare parts at home in Damassak, a town in Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria. He and his brother spoke on the condition their full names were not used. Despite Boko Haram’s widely publicised kidnapping of women and schoolgirls, its main targets are also men and boys.

“I spent nights counting the num-

ber of people who were being killed in front of me,” Bala continues. “I was depressed. And at the same time, I felt so lucky to be alive.” After the initial attack, in November 2014, he and his family first found safety in a nearby village. For more than a year, it was a refuge.

But then, towards the end of March this year, gunmen on motorcycles and in pickup trucks came again, attacking the village where he was sheltering just like they had before: shooting in the air, killing people, burning houses, stealing livestock.

“I spent nights counting the number of people who were being killed in front of me.”

As soon as Bala heard the gunshots, he fled with his wife and four children, further this time, across the river and into Niger. They stretched a rope between the two banks of the river to help their children cross. Eventually



they stopped, exhausted, at a settlement called Gagamari, close to the town of Diffa.

There they joined more than 157,000 people who have fled Boko Haram's terror – often several times – and found an uncertain safety in 135 separate makeshift encampments strung along 200 kilometres of a major road inside Niger running parallel with the border with Nigeria, called Route Nationale 1, or RN1.

They are a mix of refugees from Nigeria, internally displaced people (IDPs) from within Niger, and Niger nationals who returned from Nigeria. Most fled renewed attacks last year in Nigeria that at times spilled into Niger, and some had escaped kidnap. They had little choice but to settle along the highway, because earlier violence pushed people into villages and towns that are today too overcrowded to absorb new arrivals.

Living along the road has its benefits. It is a key link to aid agencies, government authorities and traders. But conditions are harsh: in this remote and semi-desert environment, temperatures can reach 48 degrees Celsius during the current dry season. The rains that follow often flood the ramshackle settlements.

Shelters are made of dried grass, and sanitation is basic, with few toilets or washing facilities. Children are missing education because schools in nearby villages are already full. Food supplies are irregular, and the local population is not always able to share their meagre resources with the displaced.

“I don't know how I am still alive, I was completely overwhelmed by what was happening around me.”

The increasing insecurity, the huge

number of settlements and a lack of funding means aid agencies including UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, are struggling to give as much help as people need. Less than one dollar in every six of the US\$112 million required by 22 aid agencies, including UNHCR, for the Niger operation in the Diffa region has been received to date.

After he arrived in Gagamari, at least Bala was able to find his brother Mahamadou, who had fled to Niger with his wife and seven children immediately after the first attack on Damassak. Mahamadou, too, has struggled with the mental scars of surviving Boko Haram's raids. His voice shakes as he describes how he watched an armed insurgent wrench a baby from its father's arms, throw it to the ground and then shoot the father dead.

“I don't know what happened to the baby,” Mahamadou says. “I



Niger: Refugees Find Safe Haven. © HCR

don't know how I am still alive. I was completely overwhelmed by what was happening around me. There were dead bodies of men, women, children around me. I spent the night without eating, without drinking. The insurgents who had remained by the river were finishing the survivors."

The attack happened close to a year-and-a-half ago, but "it is still a huge trauma," he adds. "The children also remain very anxious, especially when they hear loud noises or screams. They are always on their guard. Even though we feel safer here in Niger, we are still afraid that the insurgents could hurt us somehow."

Those fears are valid. In February 2015, Boko Haram attacked Diffa

town, before being repelled by the army. Recently, security in the region around Diffa and Bosso has deteriorated, with a succession of incidents including suicide attacks near villages and sites where both Nigerian refugees and IDPs are sheltering. Two major markets along the main road have been closed since April for fear infiltrated insurgents could target them. A 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew is in force across in the region.

"The security situation in the Diffa region remains very volatile and unpredictable," says Karl Steinacker, the UNHCR Representative in Niger. "More people, residents and refugees alike, are asking to be moved further away from the border, fearing Boko Haram could

attack their settlements in Niger, as they did in in Nigeria. Their fear is palpable."

In mid-May, at the Government's request, UNHCR started to relocate hundreds of refugees who preferred to live at a camp 50 kilometres from the border that now hosts at least 3,000 people. Among the first to opt to move were Bala and Mahamadou, and their families.

"We feel safer here. We have proper shelter, access to a clinic and food. The children just enrolled in school," Bala says. "What I really wish now is that decision makers in this world act quicker and more efficiently to prevent insurgents from killing more innocent men, women and children in Nigeria. We are just exhausted and horrified by so much violence."

A lire



Food Security and Humanitarian Implications in West Africa and the Sahel

This period is marked by the end of the off-season harvest and the gradual onset of the rains corresponding to the start of the 2016-2017 Agropastoral campaign. In the Gulf of Guinea countries, medium to normal rainfall are observed in this early season, while across the Sahel, average rainfall to slightly above average are very likely.

<http://bit.ly/2aeLwdA>



UNOWAS

Together for Peace

KEY ACTIVITIES



Good Offices, Mediation and Preventive diplomacy



Enhance sub regional capacities to address cross border and cross-cutting threats to Peace and Security



Support the implementation of the **United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS)**



Promotion of **Good Governance, Respect for the Rule of Law, Human Rights**, mainstreaming of **Gender** in **Conflict Resolution**



Facilitation of the implementation of the 10 October 2002 **Judgement of International Court of Justice (ICJ)** on the **Cameroon-Nigeria** boundary dispute

UNOWAS' MANDATE

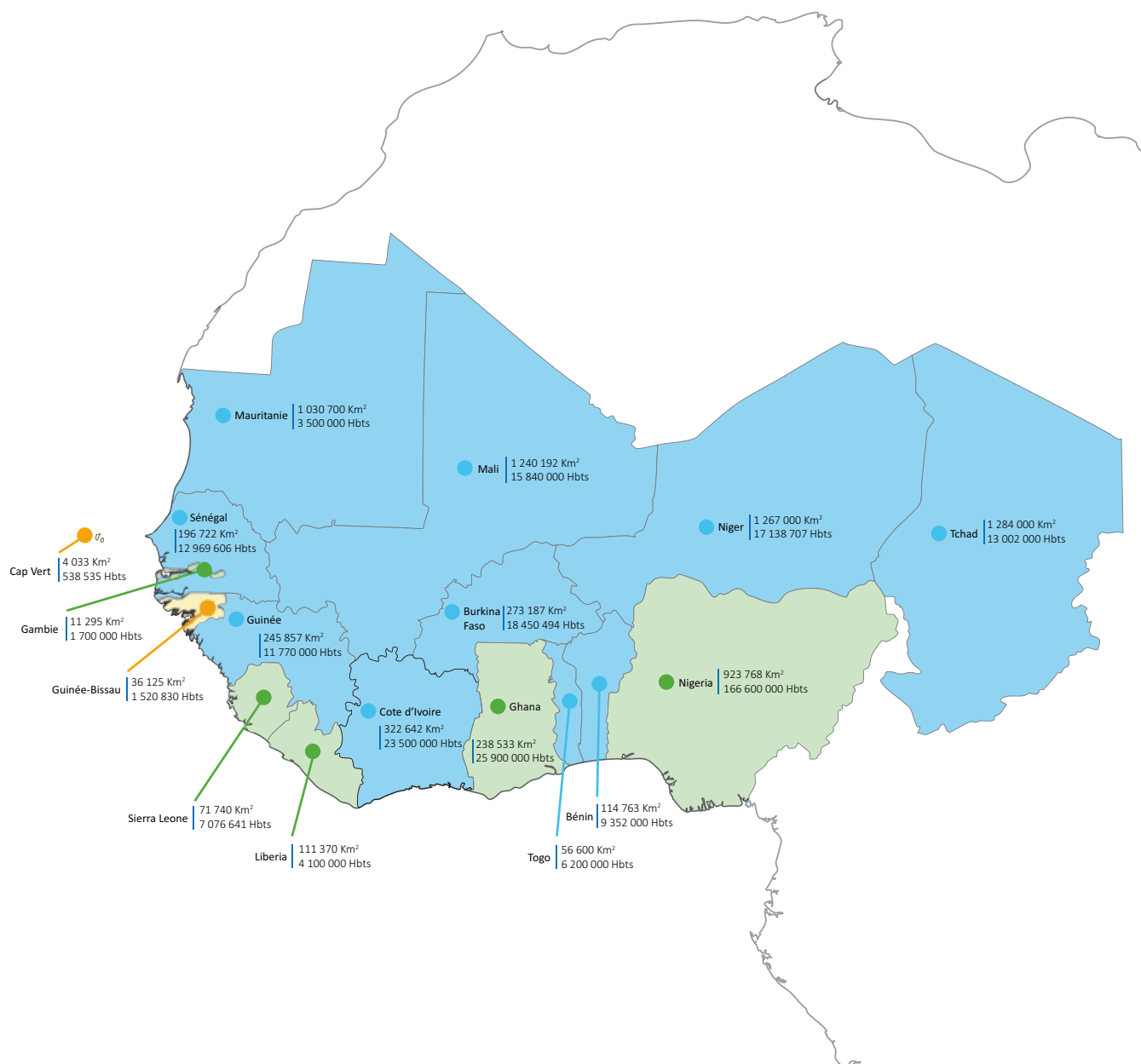
The figures Coverage

17 Countries

2 lusophone countries

5 anglophone countries

10 francophone countries



Area:

7 428 527 Km²

Population:

339 158 813 Hbts

Density:

45 hbts/km²

GDP:

679 milliards de \$ USD

Sources: UNDP, WIKIPEDIA