



UNOWAS Magazine

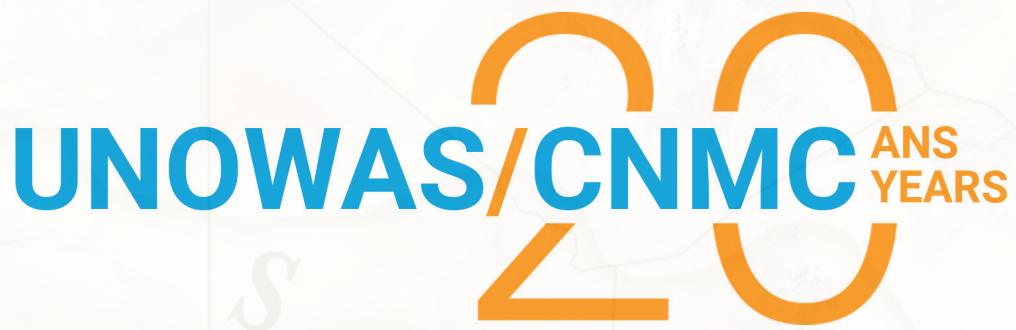
Together for Peace

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

Elections to consolidate Peace and Governance



A woman votes in Nigeria's General Elections



*20 years of commitment for the promotion
of peace and conflict prevention*

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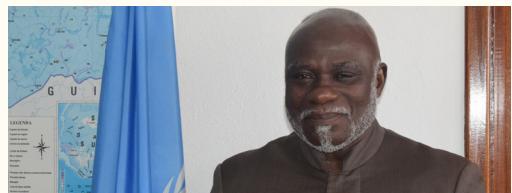
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**Giovannie BIHA**

Représentante spéciale adjointe du Secrétaire général des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest et le Sahel et Cheffe par intérim de l'UNOWAS/CNMC

Elections to consolidate Peace and Governance

The year 2023 is an important year for West Africa and the Sahel. The people of six countries are set to vote in a variety of major elections, the peaceful, credible and inclusive organization of which will play a vital role in consolidating peace and governance.

Nigeria was the first of this series, with presidential elections on February 25 and government elections on March 18. Mauritania (legislative and local on May 13), Gambia (local on April 15-May 20), Guinea Bissau (legislative on June 4), Sierra Leone (general election on June 24), Liberia (presidential and legislative on October 10), and Côte d'Ivoire (local in November-October) will soon follow.

These elections raise great hopes among populations that aspire to peace and development. However, if the principles of freedom, fairness and transparency are not the central tenants of elections, they can also be a source of tension, likely to disturb and

threaten the stability of a country. The United Nations system, through its Resident Coordinators, is often called upon to provide technical and operational support to national partners in their efforts to prepare and organize elections in a peaceful atmosphere.

The United Nations Office in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), also driven by this objective, devotes a large part of its good offices efforts to supporting national authorities and actors in their efforts to organize peaceful, transparent and inclusive elections.

The various good offices missions undertaken before, during and after the presidential elections in Nigeria last February, as well as the support provided to the organization of stakeholder forums, the agreement for peaceful elections by candidates committed to respecting the rule of law and human rights; these all demonstrate UNOWAS' unwavering

desire to mobilize everyone in favor of the consolidation of peace and democracy in Nigeria and the countries of the subregion.

But beyond the need to work towards peaceful elections, we must redouble our efforts to continue mobilizing against the multiple and pernicious challenges facing West African countries. Major challenges persist and require the commitment of all of us to improve the living conditions of the population and the economic situation, strengthen good governance, the rule of law, and consolidate peace.

In coordination with its partners, UNOWAS will continue its commitment to support the organization of peaceful, transparent and inclusive elections, and will remain mobilized through its various activities and interventions to promote peace, development and democracy in West Africa and the Sahel.

Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in Action

Activities	Achievements
Facilitating the withdrawal of troops and transfer of authority in Lake Chad area, along the land boundary and in the Bakassi Peninsula	<p>The CNMC facilitated the peaceful transfer of authority over Bakassi to Cameroon through the Greentree Agreement, in accordance with the judgment of the International Court of Justice.</p>
Demarcation of the land boundary and delimitation of the maritime boundary between the two countries	<p>2,050 kilometers of demarcation have been surveyed and approved by Cameroon and Nigeria out of a total of approximately 2,100 kilometers</p> <p>Delineation of the maritime boundary in accordance with the Judgement of the International Court of Justice</p> <p>Out of a total of 2696 pillars to be built, 1673 pillars have already been built and placed</p>
Addressing the situation of local populations in boundary areas affected by the demarcation activities	<p>The CNMC, in liaison with partners, has developed confidence building programs to mitigate the impacts caused by the demarcation.</p>
Making recommendations on confidence-building measures aiming at promoting peaceful cross-border cooperation	<p>The Mixed Commission also approved the recommendations for crossborder cooperation on hydrocarbon deposits straddling the maritime boundary</p>

14th UNISS Steering Committee meeting



The 14th Steering Committee meeting of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) was held on 16 February in Dakar, to assess the progress made in the implementation of UNISS and providing new orientations. The meeting was co-chaired by DSRSG Giovanie Biha and UNDP Regional Director for Africa Ahunna Eziakonwa, under the overall leadership of Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel. Participants recommended enhancing flexibility and agility of UN interventions in the Sahel, reinforcing cross-border cooperation, and enhancing interventions in the peripheries.

Climate change and Security – Technical mission to Mauritania



UNOWAS undertook, from 19 to 25 March, a technical mission in Mauritania which visited the Hodh Ech Chargui region, including Bassikounou, Fassala and the refugee camp of M'bera. Recognizing climate change as a risk multiplier, the mission observed the aggravation of the security situation and the impact of climate change on livelihood activities, water resources, farmer-herders cohabitation, thereby limiting or reversing stabilization efforts. Also, the mission assessed the regional conflict dynamics, with an emphasis on the arrival of displaced populations from Mali since the beginning of 2023. International partners expressed concern over limited donor engagement to address the impacts of the Malian crisis on Mauritania.

G5-Sahel Executive Secretary visits UNOWAS



On 03 March, the DSRSG met with G5-Sahel Executive Secretary Eric Tiare in Dakar to discuss the recommendations of the recent G5-Sahel Extraordinary Summit and meeting of defense ministers; and G5-Sahel/UN cooperation. The Executive Secretary emphasized the solidarity prevailing among its member states, and the concern related to the current security situation in Burkina Faso. Mr. Tiare indicated that the next Council of Ministers, scheduled for 20 March, would review priority development projects submitted by each country. Further G5-Sahel/UN exchanges will take place in the context of the forthcoming review and lessons-learned of the 8th anniversary of the G5-Sahel, which will include an assessment of its mechanisms.

UNOWAS Mission to Mali



From 12 to 16 March, UNOWAS conducted a mission to Mali to engage with MINUSMA, UN agencies and partners with a dual objective: 1) assess regional implications of the crisis in Mali; 2) identify areas of support to MINUSMA on the climate-security nexus. UNOWAS and MINUSMA exchanged on the situation of the border zones with Mali and Burkina Faso, the recent spate of attacks in Togo and the responses of coastal countries, ongoing clashes between Da'esh and Al Qaeda affiliates, and the displacement of approximately 5000 Malians to Mauritania following a rise of insecurity. In relation to climate change, MINUSMA and UNOWAS noted its multiplier effect on insecurity, affecting livelihood activities, water resources, farmer-herders' tensions, and hampering the efforts of stabilization.

The Peacebuilding Commission Configuration: mobilizing further support in Guinea-Bissau.



Between the 14 - 15 February, Deputy Special Representative BIHA took part in a high-level delegation alongside the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission H.E. Mr. Ronaldo Costa Filho and the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Ms. Elizabeth Spehar. The visit centered around the upcoming elections in Guinea-Bissau that have been the cause of some tension due to their postponement from the original date of 18 December 2022. The delegation's meetings included the President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, senior government officials, political parties, as well as and key international development partners.

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. Ms. Giovanie BIHA is the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer in Charge of UNOWAS/CNMC.
- ◆ UNOWAS is mandated by the Security Council to act for the prevention and resolution of crises and conflicts through an active role in preventive diplomacy, good offices, and political mediation.
- ◆ UNOWAS implements its mandate in 16 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo-Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and (Chad).
- ◆ 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 16 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 contributes to the analysis and assessment of the impact of climate change on security and stability in the sub-region. UNOWAS also 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 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 (CMCN), 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 response to the needs of populations affected by the demarcation. Since its creation, CNMC has been able to demarcate 2050 km out of an estimated borderline of 2100 km.

At the Security Council, UNOWAS calls for inclusive and transparent elections in 2023

On January 10, 2023, the Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovanie Biha, presented the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council. The report covers developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel in the second half of 2022. Politics and governance, socio-economic, security and humanitarian situation, elections, human rights, gender, are some of the issues addressed during the Security Council briefing.



Worrying security and humanitarian situation

In her intervention, Ms. BIHA stressed that some countries in West Africa and the Sahel have continued to make democratic progress, while others still face insecurity combined with humanitarian crises as well as a deficit of good governance.

The security situation in the subregion continued to deteriorate, particularly in the central Sahel, especially in Burkina Faso and Mali. “Despite the efforts of national security forces and international partners, insecurity has deteriorated again in much of the region,” Ms. BIHA told Security Council members. The Special Representative stressed that the humanitarian situation is alarming in the Central Sahel

region, which continues to “face multi-dimensional challenges, unprecedented levels of security and humanitarian challenges, socio-political instability, further aggravated by the impact of climate change, and food insecurity exacerbated by the Ukraine-Russia conflict”.

She drew attention to the situation of millions of children in the region

who do not have access to education following the closure of ten thousand schools due to insecurity. “Non-state groups are fighting each other for supremacy, pushing states to the margins and causing untold misery to millions of people who have had to leave their communities to seek safety,” she said.

In this regard, Ms. BIHA encouraged leaders of the region “to intensify the hard collective efforts to fight insecurity within the framework of the Accra Initiative. “A holistic approach is needed, and the creation of the Initiative’s Joint Force is an important development in this regard,” she stressed.

Continuing partnership

At the political level, Ms. BIHA stressed that “UNOWAS is working with national stakeholders and partners to promote political consensus and ensure a level playing field ahead of the elections scheduled for this year in the sub-region”. Nigeria held presidential elections on 25 February 2023 and legislative elections were held in Benin on 8 January 2023. It also welcomed the efforts of national actors, regional

and international institutions, which have resulted in agreements on the duration of transitions in Burkina Faso and Guinea.

She assured of the active and continuous engagement of UNOWAS “in the monitoring and evaluation mechanism agreed between Burkina Faso and ECOWAS, and in the operationalization of the transition calendar in Guinea”. The Deputy Special Representative further encouraged “the UN system to continue to support the countries concerned by focusing on addressing the grievances that are at the root of coups”.

Ms. BIHA also welcomed the fact that “several countries in the region have adopted new national legislation in favour of parity in participation in political decision-making, after years of sustained advocacy”.

Concluding her statement, the Deputy Special Representative reiterated UNOWAS’ commitment to continue to support national and regional actors to strengthen peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel, while mentioning

that “UNOWAS works with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel as well as with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)”.

The members of the Security Council commended UNOWAS for its work and expressed their support for the renewal of its mandate.



Despite the efforts of national security forces and international partners, insecurity has deteriorated again in much of the region



Displaced people wait in line for food distribution in Gorom-Gorom, Burkina Faso.
Photo: WFP/Cheick Omar Bandaogo

UNOWAS and Mauritania strengthen their partnership



In the run-up to the legislative and local elections scheduled for May 13, and following Mauritania's assumption of the rotating presidency of the G5 Sahel, the Deputy Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovanie Biha, conducted a three-day working visit to Mauritania. The objective was to renew the commitment of UNOWAS and strengthen the partnership with Mauritania.

The presence of the United Nations in Mauritania is a testimony to a quality partnership. For years, seventeen UN agencies, funds and programs have been working together to contribute to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), taking into account the national priorities of the government of Mauritania, including inclusive growth, human capital and access to basic social services, and improved governance. In addition to these priorities, there are other regional priorities, particularly following Mauritania's assumption of the rotating presidency of the G5 Sahel last February, and another national priority, the organization of legislative, local, and municipal

elections on May 13. In this context, it was necessary for the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to engage with the Mauritanian authorities in order to discuss the support that the United Nations and its partners can provide to strengthen the role of the G5 Sahel, on the one hand, and to strengthen the role of governance through the holding of credible and transparent legislative and local, on the other.

Leading role

It is with this objective in mind that the Deputy Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovanie Biha, made a

three-day working visit (March 27-29) to Mauritania during which she was received in audience by His Excellency Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. She also had a series of meetings with various members of the government, including Mr. Salem Ould Merzoug, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritanians Abroad; Mr. Hanena Ould Sidi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritanians Abroad; Mr. Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritania. Hanena Ould Sidi, Minister of National Defense; Ms. Saviya Mint N'Tehah, Minister of Social Action, Childhood and the Family; Mr. Moha-

med Ahmed Ould Mohamed Lemine, Minister of Interior and Decentralization; and Mr. Ousmane Mamoudou Kane, Minister of Economic Affairs and Promotion of Productive Sectors Ms. Biha also met with the President of the CENI, Mr. Dah Ould Abdel jelil, as well as with the civil society organization, the Mourchidâtes women's initiative.

Indeed, the partnership between Mauritania and the United Nations, the national and regional situation, including the upcoming legislative and local elections, and support for the G5

Sahel to advance peace and development in the Sahel, were among the topics discussed during the various meetings. While praising the leading role of Mauritania in the fight against terrorism and insecurity, Ms. Biha reiterated the support of the United Nations to the Mauritanian presidency of the G5 Sahel, which she said, will make a major contribution to the revitalization of the organization.

Regarding the holding of legislative and local elections, Ms. Biha reaffirmed the support of the United Nations

to accompany the commitment of the Mauritanian authorities in organizing credible, inclusive, and transparent elections.

UNOWAS, in coordination with the United Nations system in Mauritania and other partners will remain mobilized to support the tireless efforts of the Mauritanian authorities and people to further consolidate peace and development.

The United Nations in Mauritania, serving peace and development.

The Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Mauritania, in coordination with 17 resident and non-resident agencies, funds and programs which represent the UN country team, work actively together to address, and respond to the humanitarian and development challenges it faces the country.

As part of the Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development, the United Nations system offers Mauritania a unique pool of skills and resources, and is committed to ensuring a more effective, rational, coherent and concerted presence in the country, in line with the United Nations reform policy, and more particularly with the «Delivering as One» approach which contributes to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), taking into account the Mauritanian Government's national priorities.

The office of the Resident Coordinator in Mauritania, led by Ms. Lila Pieters Yahia, has been active and engaged in supporting the Government and other stakeholders of Mauritania in their efforts to prepare and organize the upcoming legislative and local elections in Mai, in line

with the recommendations of the Needs Assessment Mission (NAM).

To that effect, Ms. Lila Pieters Yahia has been engaging regularly with relevant Ministers and the President of the CENI, as well as with heads of political parties, and representatives of civil society, in particular women's organizations, to listen to their needs and to reiterate the importance of transparency and inclusivity. This has included for example advocating for extending voter registration to allow as many people as possible to vote, raising concerns over the potential for women's representation to decrease, and drawing attention to the risk of a high percentage of invalid ballots due to the need for voters to cast six different ballots at the same time.

The UN Resident Coordinator has also played an active role in encouraging the UN System to step up its support to Mauritania in advance of the elections, in particular UNDP, OHCHR, UNESCO and UN WOMEN, in the areas of technical electoral support, human rights, communications and women and youth 's political participation.

A democratic change in Nigeria

For the 6th consecutive time since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria held on February 2023, presidential, legislative, and senatorial elections, and on 17 March 2023, gubernatorial elections. These elections are important for Nigerians and for West Africa, which is facing tensions related to unconstitutional changes.



The most populous country in Africa, or even the largest economic power in Africa, are all terms used to talk about Nigeria. The West African country, a multi-ethnic and diverse federation of 36 autonomous states, is enjoying two decades of elections and peaceful political transitions after a long period of military rule.

Rich in natural resources, a young and enterprising population, and a vibrant private sector, nonetheless, according to the World Bank, Nigeria is home to the second largest population of poor people in the world with more than 40% of its population living in poverty. With this context, combined with var-

ious challenges, particularly security, these elections had become major focus of Nigerians and the international community.

Strong youth mobilization

More than 93 million Nigerians across the country were called to vote on Saturday 25 February to elect among the eighteen candidates, the new Head of State who will succeed the outgoing President, Muhammadu Buhari.

On the morning of election day, Nigerians rushed to the polling stations to fulfill their civic duty. Across the country, there were long lines of women,

men, the elderly and young patiently waiting their turn to cast their ballots and choose one candidate from among the contenders for the presidency, and 469 members of the National Assembly from among the 4223 nominees.

This year, these elections took on a special touch with a high participation of young people. According to statistics from the Independent Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC), 75% of all voters are under the age of 50. Nigeria is one of the fastest growing countries in the world. With a current population estimated at 2.16 million, 42% are under the age of 15 and 70% are under 30. Young people have not

only made a massive commitment to make their voices heard but they have also been active throughout the electoral process.

The same cannot be said for women, who make up 50% of Nigeria's population. Some believe that women's political participation in Nigeria is below global standards. And these latest elections confirm these assertions. There is only one woman among the 18 candidates, Ojei Chichi of the Allied People's Movement (APM). In the aspirations for governorship, across Nigeria's 36 states, only one woman is a candidate, Aisha Binani of the All-Progressive Congress (APC) in Adamawa State.

Low turnout

The voting system in Nigeria is like the one of the United States. The 93 million registered voters were to elect by direct universal suffrage the President of the Republic and the Vice-President, 360 Deputies, 109 Senators and 36 Governors of the federated states and the Assembly of each state. With 25% of the vote in at least two-thirds of the thirty-six states and the federal capital and a simple majority of votes, a presidential candidate is elected in the first round. Otherwise, a second round is required.

Held in a context of economic crisis marked by shortages of gasoline and banknotes, and insecurity, these elections have, unfortunately, seen a low turnout. Indeed, nearly 25 million of the total number of registered exercised their civic duty, bringing the participation rate to 26.7%.

Several observation missions such as the Commonwealth, the African Union, ECOWAS, the European Union, the United States, said that the elections were peaceful, but not without

concern. They noted logistical and security problems which, in some places, marred the smooth running of the vote. Shortages of monetary liquidity caused by the overhaul of the Naira (national currency) did not facilitate the movement of populations to polling stations. This could probably explain the low voter turnout, observers say.

Despite the willingness of the INEC to improve the voting process and make it more transparent through the implementation of a high-tech electoral management system, the stage of collecting and counting votes was, according to the observation missions carried out in a tension. Five days after the presidential election on 25 February, Mr. Bola Tinubu, candidate of the ruling APC party, was declared the winner by INEC. Tinubu won in the first round with 8.7 million votes, or about 36% of the vote.

Due to technical problems, INEC had to delay, for a week, the gubernatorial elections that were originally scheduled to be held on 11 March 2023. Voters went to the polls on Saturday 18 March to choose 28 governors for the 36 states of the country. According to the observation missions, violence was reported, forcing an interruption of the vote in several areas. The gubernatorial elections recorded an even lower turnout than the presidential vote.

A commitment to peace

The United Nations Country Team in Nigeria and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) have consistently demonstrated commitment to peacebuilding in Nigeria. This is evidenced by the good offices conducted since 2022 by the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Na-

tions at the time, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, and now by the Deputy Special Representative, Giovanie Biha, which have reinforced the message of peaceful elections and reminded key actors of their responsibilities in this regard.

To support the organization of peaceful, credible, transparent and inclusive elections, UNOWAS, in collaboration with the United Nations Coordination Office in Nigeria, supported the National Peace Committee, in the organization of five high-level stakeholder forums in Kaduna, Kano, Cross River, Enugu and Oyo states, and the signing, on 29 September 2022 and 23 February 2023, of the two peace agreements between the different candidates.

Through these 2023 general elections, Nigerians reaffirmed their commitment to peace, making this peaceful political transition a banner for development and prosperity in Nigeria and the sub-region.

The new president-elect, as well as the new governors will have to meet the expectations and aspirations of the population. "I shall be a fair leader to all Nigerians. I will be in tune with your aspirations, charge up your energies and harness your talents to deliver a nation that we can be proud of," said President-elect Bola Tinubu.



Some believe that women's political participation in Nigeria is below global standards. And these latest elections confirm these assertions.

Townhall dialogue with women and youth in the context of the 2023 General Election in Nigeria



A young woman waving the Nigerian flag

In collaboration with UN WOMEN and in the context of the elections in Nigeria, UNOWAS supported the Nigerian chapter of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel (WGWPYS-WAS) on February 8, 2023, in hosting a Townhall Dialogue with country's Women and Youth.

Issues of political inclusion were at the core of the event, particularly the inclusion of women and young people in the general elections. Security threats disproportionately affect women and young people, therefore reviewing such threats from a women and youth perspective was a primary focus. Similarly, the importance of advocating for an active role for women and young people in the process of ensuring peaceful and inclusive elections was highlighted and engaging with politicians to share perspectives on the Women,

Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda was promoted. As Dr. Lydia Umar, Representative of the Working Group in Nigeria, outlined in her opening address, the Townhall Dialogue was as an opportunity to provide a medium where women and youth can express their electoral concerns and identify a way forward.

110 participants attended this session. Interest ranged from civil society organizations, women, youth, peace and security agencies, the Nigerian Police Force, Civil Defense Corps,

political party representatives from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress (APC) and Young Progressives Party (YPP), women and youth election candidates and media representatives. There were also special guests at the event which included representatives from ECOWAS, UNOWAS, UN Women, the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolutions and the Nigerian Trust Fund.



A Women and Youth Perspective

The day's proceedings included several panel discussions on key issues and concluded with youth representatives providing recommendations for the effective implementation of the Women, Peace and Security, and Youth, Peace and Security agendas in Nigeria. These recommendations included the need for continuous sensitization of women and young people in efforts to promote non-violence

during elections, the strengthening of women's groups in Nigeria to participate in electoral observation, a government declaration of a holiday for students during elections to facilitate increased participation and for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to take definite steps to control the excessive monetization of elections and increased governmental impartiality in electoral conduct. Taking steps such as these would improve the participation

and security of women and young people during elections.

This event marked the commitment of UNOWAS, UN Women and the WGWYPS-WAS to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2250 (2015), and continued efforts to offer women and youth meaningful and active participation in political and peacebuilding process in Nigeria, and throughout West Africa and the Sahel.



“My priority is to support Guinea-Bissau’s efforts towards free, fair, and inclusive legislative elections.”



Anthony Ohemeng-Boamah
UN Resident Coordinator
in Guinea-Bissau

UN Resident Coordinator in Guinea-Bissau since April 2022, Anthony Ohemeng-Boamah draws on more than 25 years of experience in international development as he provides an optimistic assessment of Guinea-Bissau's future. Interview.

As the RC in Guinea Bissau, what can you tell us about this country?

Guinea-Bissau is a dynamic country in West Africa with a fast-growing population of approximately 2 million peoples, the majority of which are young people. The country's land mass includes around 80 islands that form part of Bijagos Archipelago and is endowed with a diverse range of natural resources, including fertile land, forests, minerals, and water resources. Some islands in Bijagos, for instance, are sanctuaries for five of the most

endangered sea turtles in the world. Agriculture is the backbone of the Guinean economy, accounting for 45 percent of GDP and employing more than 80 percent of the workforce in various low-value-added activities. The country is one of the leading exporters of cashew nuts. Guinea-Bissau also has significant fishery resources, with its coastline extending over 350km along the Atlantic Ocean.

The country has a relatively underdeveloped mining sector, but it has significant deposits of bauxite, phosphates,

and small amounts of gold as well as potential oil and gas resources. The forestry sector is also a significant contributor to the economy. Guinea-Bissau has designated 26% of its land area as protected areas. These protected areas include national parks, nature reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries, which are intended to conserve the country's rich and unique biodiversity.

Guinea-Bissau is well positioned in the region. It is one of two Lusophone countries in the ECOWAS and member of the West African Monetary Union

(UEMOA). President Umaro Sissoco Embalo currently is the Chairman of the Authority of Heads of State and Government.

The United Nations system has been active in this country for decades, what is your assessment of the role of the UN?

Guinea-Bissau is one of the few countries in Africa to have waged a bloody liberation war to gain its independence from Portugal. The UN support at post-independence consisted mostly of institutional capacity building, training of public servants and assistance in the social sectors, health and education.

The UN was instrumental in helping to stabilize the macro-economic dynamics in the country in the 1990s including supporting its transition from the national currency peso into the CFA zone. The UN also played an important role in the transition to multi-party democracy including the holding of the first multi-party election in 1994.

Unfortunately the initial periods of democracy also coincided with periods of instability. The period of the mid-90s to the 2000s were marred by a civil war, coup d'états and assassinations creating a volatile and unstable social and political context. During this turbulent period the presence of the UN was changed into a Special Political Mission to emphasize the quest for peace and stability. The interventions, covering the peace-security-development nexus, consisted of supporting several peace agreements and aiding their implementation. This included the 1998 Abuja Agreement, which aimed to end the country's civil war. The Abuja Peace Agreement and the establishment of United Nations Integrated Peace Building Office (UNOG-BIS) remain significant milestones in

the efforts to bring peace and stability to Guinea-Bissau (1999-2021). The UN continues to provide support to the country's political and security institutions to strengthen their capacity to maintain peace, stability, and protect human rights.

With the advent of relative peace and stability since 2015, the UN reverted to a normal country presence from 2021. The Resident Coordinator is mandated to implement the UN Reforms and ensure the implementation of transformative initiatives to advance Guinea-Bissau towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The ongoing UN Sustainable Cooperation Framework covering the period 2022-2026 has three strategic priorities which are: transformational and inclusive governance; structural economic transformation & inclusive green and resilient growth; and human capital development. The inter-linked and interdependent priorities all embed the peacebuilding priorities to strengthen peace and stability.

The Cooperation Framework is explicitly aligned with the National Development Plan 2020-2023 and is the primary instrument of the UN System to support Guinea Bissau to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. It mainstreams principles of 'leave no one behind', gender and human rights.

To conclude, over the decades since independence in 1974, the UN has played an important role building institutional capacity for the newly-independent nation to function. The UN has accompanied Guinea-Bissau through its democratic transitions scattered with conflict and instability, ensuring that dialogue, peaceful co-existence, inclusive and participatory democratic governance become pos-

itive hallmarks to use to leverage development and socio-economic progress. With the emergence of peace and stability, and reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the UN is assisting Guinea-Bissau by developing its potential to compete effectively in the international economy through assisting with economic transformation, human capital development and institutional modernization.

What are the main challenges facing Guinea-Bissau?

Despite its rich natural resource and human potential, Guinea-Bissau faces numerous challenges.

The principal challenge is eliminating political instability and ensuring durable peace for the long term. Linked to that is the imperative to strengthen and modernize institutions of governance to reinforce political stability.

The country also has the challenge of improving infrastructure for commerce and social interactions. The road networks, for instance, in many places are in a state of disrepair. These hamper the ability to improve agriculture. While the country has made significant improvements, it ranks 43 out 55 countries in Africa in terms of infrastructure development.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need to diversify agricultural production, and eliminate the dependence on a mono crop, that exposes the country to the vagaries of international trade. As a net food importer, the country is very vulnerable to shocks in global food markets. Guinea Bissau imports over 43 percent of cereal consumed in the country (and 100% of wheat).

Likewise, for a country rich in fishery resources, the lack of infrastructure

and transformation curtails the added value of this important sector for growth. In 2019, 165,000 tons were produced out of a potential of 300,000 tons. While the fisheries sector contributes some 10 to 15 % of government revenue, local value added to fish products, and fish exports (and therefore contributions to foreign exchange) remain very limited.

Fourthly, infrastructure in social sectors also needs improvement to accompany the development of the human capital potential in the country. Education and health require adequate attention to develop the human capacity needed for the Guinea Bissau of tomorrow. Some 28% of children are not in primary school and 23% of young people are not in

secondary school. Maternal mortality is extremely high due to difficulty accessing health centres, averaging 667 per 100000 live births. Under five mortality remain very high at 74 per 1000 live births. More than half of the population suffers from malnutrition, a quarter are chronically malnourished.

What are your priorities for 23/24?

My priority as United Nations Resident Coordinator is to support Guinea-Bissau's efforts towards free, fair, and inclusive legislative elections. Second, is to facilitate the implementation of the programmes emanating from the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, to identify accelerators and transformative programmes for the achievement of SDGs. For

instance, we are working on Primary health care which holds the promise of changing health outcomes for most of the population. My third priority is to put in place effective systems for collecting and analyzing data to inform policy, planning and implementation. We assisted the country in preparing its very first SDG Voluntary National Review Report, and the paucity of data compounds measuring success. In this regard, the UN is supporting the conduct of a general population census to bridge some of the data gaps. My fourth priority is to put in place effective structures to coordinate partners interventions in ways that support the government leadership to implement the priorities of the National Development Plan.



Bijagos Archipelago- Guinea Bissau
Image - Trvlr



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 	
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“Guinea must be reborn with roots in peace and a commitment to maintain peace”



Jointly launched by the transitional authorities and the United Nations, the promoting inclusiveness and social cohesion project ended on 19 January 2023 in Conakry, with a series of recommendations, following a year of consultations and exchanges between different communities.

“Peace is a driving force. Without it, there is no development or fulfillment in life. We must work to maintain peace.”

These plea-like words are from a young leader of Dabola. 25-year-old Mamadou Djan Cisse explains how his native city Dabola and his country Guinea, “need to move forward. And it’s all possible through peacebuilding.”

A peace caravan throughout Guinea

Mamadou Djan Cisse participated in exchange and dialogue sessions during

this caravan on “Promotion of inclusiveness and social cohesion in Guinea” organized in his city of Dabola. The social cohesion project is part of the United Nations conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategy and supports countries in the subregion in their efforts to strengthen social cohesion.

This cultural caravan, aimed at raising awareness on Social Cohesion in Guinea, launched in November 2021 in Nzérékoré. Throughout 2022, it crossed conflict-prone areas, including Macenta, Siguiri, Kankan, Mamou, Labé, Koundara, Boffa, Kindia, and

Conakry. Its objective was to promote reconciliation processes at the national and community levels while also strengthening and promoting human rights and social cohesion, through the involvement of local cultures.

Through exchange and dialogue forums, local communities mainly debated issues that threaten social cohesion, particularly land and state conflicts, relations between mining companies and populations, youth unemployment, and gender-based violence. Aissata Onivogui, who is in her twenties and a member of the

‘Young Women Leaders of Guinea (YWLG) organization, believes that the presence of the caravan in her town of Macenta was beneficial. “We have raised awareness in schools, and even hairdressing salons. We talked to young people about tolerance and peaceful coexistence as the best way to keep the peace. Young people were asked to reject messages of hate and to try to avoid being manipulated by politicians,” says Aissata.

Cultural diversity at the core of peace

In some localities, cultural and social practices that promote and strengthen social cohesion were highlighted, with, among other things, the upgrading of community “living together” pacts, grassroots sport, cultural and traditional events.

Koumanthio Zeinab Diallo, author and co-founder of the Fouta Djallon Museum and the famous Museum Theater in Labé, considers herself as a guardian of Guinean cultural heritage. As part of this project, she strove to interact with the population to raise awareness and demonstrate that through cultural heritage, the Guinean people can rebuild peace.

“We asked people what type of Guinea they wanted to build. For my part, I urge everyone to think about a Guinea that will rebuild itself, drawing from cultural elements, the peace pacts that have been signed and ties that must not be cut,” says the writer.

“I am one of the actors of the caravan launched by the United Nations,” says the Imam of the Labé Mosque, El Hadji Mamadou Diallo, right after Ms. Diallo. “For us, our role to find peacekeeping solutions is not difficult and is not a secret,” says the religious leader. He explains that “God created us all as equal human beings, so that we could live

together in cohesion. And we need to stay away from anything that can hurt that mutual understanding. »

The place of women in the pursuit and keeping of community harmony was also widely discussed. For Ms. Kaba Djessira, “the role of women in peacebuilding is paramount.” “A woman who has a culture of peace benefits the whole community,” she adds. In line with Ms. Djessira, author Zeinab Diallo states that “women play an extremely important role, simply through oral transmission. For example, already in the mother’s womb, a child begins to hear their mother and listen to her. As such, as the family peacebuilder, the mother inherently conveys the different cultural virtues to her child.”

Recommendations for the future

At the closing ceremony, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Acting Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Ms. Giovanie BIHA said that “the project on social cohesion was carried out thanks to the will and commitment of all Guinean actors.” The Special Representative also stressed the importance of implementing the recommendations, which are the result of several months of reflection and discussion.

The people of the towns that were visited, among other things, advocated inclusiveness and transparency in political, social, and economic processes. They called for territorial equity, increased access to basic social services, equitable distribution of national wealth, and respect for human rights. The strengthening and amplification of cohesion-building initiatives by building on the messages launched by the activities during the implementation of the activities was also strongly encouraged.

For his part, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Kabele SOUMAH welcomed the results of the project. “I reiterate the government’s commitment to support them, in line with efforts to promote national reconciliation, including with the Guinean diaspora,” he said.

These recommendations, which were presented at the closure of the project, have been relayed to the transitional authorities of the Republic of Guinea.

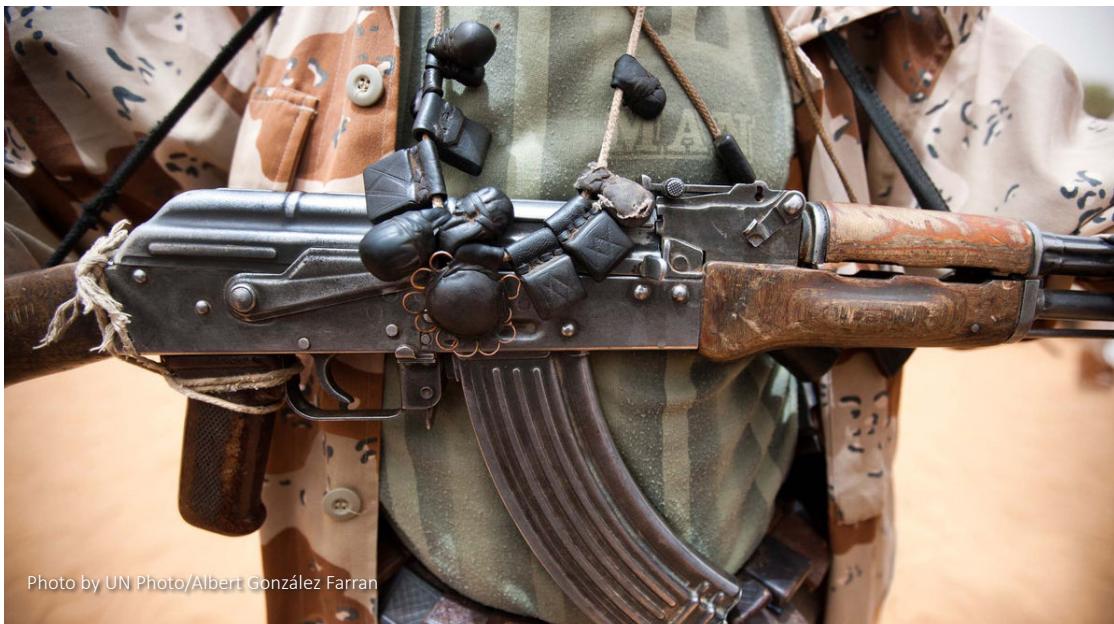
Local communities hope to continue to create inclusive spaces for exchange and dialogue at the local level to discuss social cohesion concerns and identify local solutions. “We intend to identify target groups in each neighbourhood to strengthen conflict prevention. The idea is really to involve young people in the promotion of peace,” said Djan Diallo, a young person from Labé who was chosen to be trained as a facilitator.

“We have tried to create a dialogue on everyday life that promotes consensus and can align the fragments of society,” said Zeinab Diallo, before adding that “Guinea must be reborn with roots in peace and a commitment to maintain peace, it is this rare commodity that we seek and must protect.”



Peace is a driving force. Without it, there is no development or fulfillment in life. We must work to maintain peace.

Grand Rendez-vous to strengthen prevention efforts against violent extremism in West and Central Africa



From 28 February to 2 March 2023, a three-day meeting in Dakar was organized to evaluate efforts being made towards the prevention of violent extremism in West and Central Africa. It brought together more than a hundred experts, representatives of governments, defense and security forces, civil society, traditional and religious leaders, as well as representatives of regional and international organizations.

In 2015, the former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon appealed to the international community, asking for action to prevent and counter violent extremism. This appeal evolved into the 'United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism', which calls for a comprehensive approach and the establishment of effective measures to address the root causes of this scourge. Seven years later, a re-evaluation was required to take stock of initiatives undertaken in this context and to formulate guidelines aimed at improving the approach to violent extremism; an issue which still prevails at community, national and regional level.

Realities and perspectives of violent extremism

Today, the security situation continues to deteriorate in large parts of the Sahel. Victims of violence are increasing, especially among women and children, while the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea are also suffering an increased number of attacks among their territories.

It is in this context that the Grand Rendez-vous on the prevention of violent extremism in West and Central Africa took place. This meeting was jointly organized by The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the Federal Department

of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) of Switzerland and the Center for Advanced Defense and Security Studies (CHEDS) of Senegal. It was held in Dakar under the co-presidency of Brigadier General Jean DIEME, Director General of the Centre des Hautes Etudes de Défense et de Sécurité du Sénégal (CHEDS), H.E. Mr Simon GEISSBÜHLER, Deputy State Secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, H.E. Mr Jean-Antoine DIOUF, Chief of Staff of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad of Senegal, representing H.E. Ms. Aïssata TALL SALL, and Ms. Giovanie BIHA, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for West Africa and the Sahel.

In her opening remarks, the Acting Head of UNOWAS, Ms. Giovanie Biha, noted the importance of “placing the issue of violent extremism in the context of the political, economic and social governance deficits of the States it destabilizes, and thinking about prevention policies and efforts through this prism. She added that “the prevention efforts of affected governments and societies must be directed towards better economic governance, targeting in particular young people as well as peripheral and border areas.”

Dialogue: A Key Prevention Tool

During discussions on the prevention of violence, participants shared the experiences of their respective countries and institutions adopting public policies and implementing various concrete measures for inclusive political dialogue. Indeed, dialogue was cited as a primary tool for preventing violent extremism. For this, it is fun-

damental to involve local communities as well as traditional and religious leaders and also to strengthen the existing platforms and mechanisms. In this context, participants stressed that strengthening the role of women is paramount.

The various analyses and recommendations resulting from the meeting have emphasized the need for systematic, concerted action by all relevant actors to determine the root causes of violence and work towards their reduction. Participants conveyed the importance of integrating perspectives on the prevention of violent extremism into the public policies and strategies of States, as well as regional organizations, in particular the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the African Union.

Concrete recommendations were formulated around the main measures to be strengthened. First and foremost, permanent dialogue and public governance, in particular dialogue between politicians, populations and defense and security forces, women, and young people in actions to prevent violent extremism. The role of defense and security forces as actors in the prevention of violence was also highlighted, along with the necessity to meet social justice needs and coordinate towards the definition and implementation of national and regional policies for prevention.

At the end of the Grand Rendez-vous, a summary of the conclusions was published. These conclusions call on the States of the region, regional and subregional organizations, political, security and civil society partners and leaders to act together to improve the situation in an effective and sustainable manner.



An alert for the children of Central Sahel



Children in the central Sahel are increasingly caught up in armed conflict and is putting their lives and futures in extreme jeopardy. UNICEF calls for urgent support to respond to the crisis.

“That night, we were sitting at home when the bandits came,” says Foune Sanogo 11, when describing how she fled her village in Koro, central Mali. “People screamed and hid in their houses and locked the doors. When the attack was over my mother and father said we needed to flee because it was too dangerous.”

For children in the central Sahel, the growing conflict is having a massive impact, including through the deliber-

ate targeting of schools. Foune is one of nearly 2.7 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger forced off their land by armed conflict and insecurity into displacement camps or vulnerable host communities across the three countries.

“When the bandits came,” says Foune, “they said to everyone that if anyone goes to school, they would kill them. So, everyone was afraid, and no one went to school.”

Over 8,300 schools have shut down across the three countries because they have been directly targeted, teachers have fled, or because parents were displaced or too frightened to send their children to school.

Burkina Faso is home to almost half of closed schools in Central and West Africa: Over a million children are currently affected by school closures with 6,134 academic institutions shut as of February 2023, an increase of over

40 per cent since the end of the last school year.

As highlighted in a new UNICEF report on the central Sahel and spillover countries, released on 17 March 2023, ten million children in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are in need of humanitarian assistance – twice as many as in 2020 – largely due to spiralling conflict. In neighbouring coastal countries, nearly 4 million children are at risk as hostilities between armed groups and national security forces spill across borders.



With local partners, UNICEF Mali reached over 440 children released from armed forces or groups with protection or reintegration support in 2022.

“Children are increasingly caught up in the armed conflict, as victims of intensifying military clashes, or targeted by non-state armed groups,” said Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “The year 2022 was particularly violent for children in the central Sahel. All parties to the conflict need to urgently stop attacks both on children, and their schools, health centres, and homes.”

In Burkina Faso “only about a quarter of the children driven out-of-school have been given new classrooms,” said Hassane Hamadou, Norwegian Refu-

gee Council’s Country Director. “The majority are left without access to education, robbing them of their childhood and of their chance to become independent adults and citizens.”

Three times more children were verified as killed in Burkina Faso during the first nine months of 2022 than in the same period in 2021, according to UN data. Most of the children died from gunshot wounds during attacks on their villages or as a result of improvised explosive devices or explosive remnants of war.

Hostilities are spilling over from the central Sahel into the northern border regions of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo – remote communities with scarce infrastructure and resources, where children have extremely limited access to essential services and protection.

“The scale of the crisis in the central Sahel and, increasingly, in neighbouring coastal countries urgently requires a stronger humanitarian response as well as long-term flexible investment in resilient essential social services that will help consolidate social cohesion, sustainable development, and a better future for children,” said Ms Poirier.

UNICEF is urging Governments across the central Sahel and affected coastal countries, along with technical and financial partners, to significantly scale up investment in expanding access to essential social services and protection, as key pathways to peace and security.

UNICEF also calls on all parties to the conflict to fulfil their fundamental moral and legal obligations toward children under international humanitarian and human rights law. This includes ending attacks on children and

the services they rely on. With local partners, UNICEF Mali reached over 440 children released from armed forces or groups with protection or reintegration support in 2022. Over 2,000 unaccompanied and separated children were reunited with their families or provided with suitable alternative care.

Through close coordination, UNICEF is also working within the UN family to promote resilience among communities in the central Sahel, invest in long-term development, and work closely with adolescents and young people as agents of change in the Sahel.

In the central Sahel, UNICEF in 2022 supported 1.2 million children to access formal or non-formal education, including early learning. In Mali, Foune is displaced but she is back in school and is doing well: she’s top of her class with dreams of becoming a firefighter.



Over 8,300 schools have shut down across the three countries because they have been directly targeted, teachers have fled, or because parents were displaced or too frightened to send their children to school.

Fatou Jeng : “The youth are powerful agents of change”



Fatou Jeng

Founder - Clean Earth Gambia

On 17 March 2023, UN Secretary General António Guterres announced Fatou Jeng had been selected as one of the young climate leaders to serve on his Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change. As the founder of Clean Earth Gambia, one of the largest youth-led environmental NGOs in The Gambia, Fatou is one of the most influential youth climate leaders on the African continent. A proud Gambian, flying the flag for her country on the world stage and representing the youth and women of the region, she is on the frontline of climate action in the region.

Fatou grew up in the capital city of Banjul, a protruding island exposed to the harsh conditions of the Atlantic Ocean. Daughter to a farmer, she regularly witnessed the devastating impact that climate change had on her father's main source of income, and the many forms in which it can manifest. Land degradation, drought, floods, and other weather-related events continue to dictate and threaten her families and communities' livelihoods even today. She reflects, "During the rainy season, my city is often flooded, leaving many families, especially women and children without shelter or basic

necessities". It is this experience that motivated Fatou to become an advocate for climate action in her community and beyond.

Determined to improve the lives of her fellow Gambians, Fatou founded Clean Earth Gambia in January 2017. Her non-governmental organization works with young people to protect the environment through initiatives such as capacity building workshops, tree planting measures and area-cleaning exercises. It is with great pride that Fatou details the many achievements of her organization so far. "Since 2020,

in partnership with Banjul City Council, we have planted over 10,000 coconut and baobab trees along the Banjul coast, which will help to prevent rapid sea-level rise".

Not only is Fatou a strong advocate for young climate defenders, but she also recognizes the disproportionate impact of climate change on women. It was therefore important to her, that Clean Earth Gambia works closely with rural women farmers, building their capacities to adapt to the impacts of climate change while also advocating for the protection of their farmland. "Our efforts and my leadership result-

ed in the farmlands of these women farmers being saved" triumphs Fatou. To achieve such results, Clean Earth Gambia has partnered with local and civil society organizations in The Gambia, the Government of the Gambia, and UN agencies among organizations to implement these programmes.

Fatou's aspirations as one of the Secretary General's Youth Climate Advisors, pivots on representation. "It's not just about the appointment itself, but about what I can accomplish in this role to represent the voices of youth... and advocate for the best interests of the most vulnerable and underrepre-

sented communities in climate adaptation" she explains. When asked what her message to the youth and government leaders of the region would be, Fatou stressed "Young People are powerful agents of change...however we need to recognize that the struggle for climate justice cannot be won by individuals alone, but requires collective effort from governments, young people and all stakeholders".

In a region that bears the brunt of climate change, West Africa and the Sahel needs Fatou and her fellow young climate defenders more than ever.



TO READ



In early March, UNODC launched a series of research reports that provide in-depth analysis of the main criminal markets in the Sahel, including trafficking in medical products, fuel trafficking, firearms trafficking and the smuggling of migrants, as part of the Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment – Sahel ([TOCTA-Sahel](#)) research project.

The reports paint a comprehensive picture of the enablers of organized crime and its impact on the region. They do this by highlighting the diversity and multiplicity of criminal flows and actors in the region and by emphasizing the role of corruption in the legal supply chain as a catalyst and/or facilitator of trafficking. They revisit certain assertions, most notably on the nexus between terrorism and organized crime and the type of actors involved in the exploitation and abuse of migrants in transit in the Sahel, and assess how organized crime undermines stability in the region.

The TOCTA-Sahel is aimed not only at fostering greater international cooperation in order to disrupt criminal networks but also, with its special focus on the role of armed groups and stability, at assisting Member States in anticipating and addressing challenges that may arise in the near future.