



Briefing on UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), 10 January 2023

Malta Statement delivered by Ms Francesca Gatt
Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

President

I begin by thanking Ms Biha for her report and comprehensive briefing, and His Excellency, Dr Omar Alieu Touray, President of the ECOWAS Commission, for their valuable insights.

Malta welcomes the peaceful democratic efforts in the region, which offer hope to other countries pursuing their own political and democratic paths. The legislative elections in Senegal in July 2022, in Benin last Sunday, and the continued efforts towards national reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire, are such examples. In looking ahead, we call for similar democratic approaches for inclusive and peaceful elections in the run-up to the 2023 electoral cycle within the region.

We are encouraged by the relatively calm environment in which preparations for the February and March general elections in Nigeria are taking place.



President

Despite this progress, we remain concerned about successive coups d'état which are hindering progress towards democratic consolidation and call on authorities to respect democratic processes.

Malta fully supports joint efforts by UNOWAS and ECOWAS to this end, such as the joint UNOWAS – ECOWAS high-level mission to Burkina Faso following the coup in September. We also commend ECOWAS for immediately condemning the attempted coup in the Gambia last December, and for standing firmly by the democratic results.

On the security front, Malta regrets to note the increasing threat of terrorism and violence by armed groups, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali as well as the presence of mercenary groups. We strongly condemn the terrorist attacks, which are resulting in civilian casualties and exacerbating the already dire situation for local communities.

The continued fighting between armed groups and the spread of terrorist activity is jeopardising the long-term stability in the region. We urge for local, regional and international efforts to reverse this increasing trend of violence and address the underlying conditions leading to the spread of terrorist activity.



President

Climate change is also exacerbating instability in a region already contending with heavy displacement, food and water insecurity. Malta is strongly committed towards solutions that bridge the climate-security nexus and acknowledges the work of UNOWAS in integrating these interlinkages through risk analysis and roadmaps, including the Dakar Call to Action.

As things stand, more than 24.4 million people in the Sahel needed life-saving assistance during 2022. This situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Apart from this, women and girls in the region continue to face high risks of sexual and gender-based violence, abductions, displacement, and trafficking. As a founding member of the Group of Friends of Women of the Sahel, Malta is committed towards actions to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women, including in leadership roles, in political processes in the region.

These include increasing the protection of women's human rights defenders and facilitating exchanges among women leaders and women's civil society organisations within and outside of the Sahel. These are important priorities. We commend UNOWAS' for promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda and ECOWAS for establishing the Women, Peace and Security Steering Group.



We echo DRSG's remarks on the importance of protecting children's right to education, in line with UNSCR 2601. The links between education, peace and security are clear, we need to safeguard the right to education

President

Despite these challenges, we are pleased to see that solutions are continuously being forged, through UNOWAS and regional partners, including the African Union, the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS. Supporting authorities in improving local governance, addressing social grievances, ensuring education, and promoting gender equality within the scope of all peacebuilding efforts must remain an integral part of our approach.

Malta underlines the importance of continuing to enhance and strengthen resilience through various UNOWAS projects. Additionally, we reiterate our support for any UN, regional, and local efforts striving for the advancement of sustainable development in the region.

To this end, Malta welcomes the greater cooperation in combating terrorism and transnational organised crime under the Accra Initiative. We also fully support the timely set-up of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, and we look forward to its findings later this year.

President



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Malta underlines the central role of UNOWAS in holistically addressing the challenges in the region, and we strongly support its renewal. Despite the many challenges, the commitment demonstrated by UNOWAS to consistently upholding the values of its good offices is greatly valued.

I thank you.