



Security Council Briefing on UNOWAS, 25 July 2023

Malta Statement delivered by Ms Francesca Gatt

Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

Thank you, President.

I take this opportunity to welcome UNOWAS Special Representative Simão to his new role, and thank him for his briefing. I also thank the former Special Representative Mahamat Saleh Annadif for his work and Deputy Special Representative Biha, for ensuring continuity over the past months. I also thank ECOWAS Commission President Touray for his insightful briefing.

2023 is a crucial year for democracy in West Africa and the Sahel. Malta welcomes the recent elections in the region, a step in the right direction towards democracy and sustainable peace. We commend the good offices of UNOWAS, including its engagement with leaders.

The increased representation of women as local councillors and mayors in The Gambia, the highest ever proportion of women in Benin's National Assembly, increased women parliamentarians in Mauritania, and a quota for women's representation in Liberia, are welcome achievements.

However, we also note with concern the setbacks to women's representation and political participation in Nigeria, where the number of women in the National Assembly decreased by 19 per cent.



Furthermore, any attacks on human rights defenders, the civic and political space, continue to limit the right of opinion and expression and we strongly urge authorities in the region to step up efforts in this regard.

Malta calls for a holistic approach towards deterring any extension of violence in the region, by tackling the root causes of violent extremism and conflict. Education, human rights, sustainable development, justice, and the rule of law must run parallel to counter-terrorism operations.

We deplore violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in any counter-terrorism efforts, and strongly urge thorough investigations into alleged violations to ensure accountability.

In particular, we wish to underline our concern about the security situation in Mali. The withdrawal of MINUSMA carries potential risks for both Mali and its neighbours. We reiterate our call for the protection of civilians to be safeguarded in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Relevant stakeholders must centralise the needs of children and focus on the humanitarian response in light of the grave violations being committed against them. We look forward to discussing how UNOWAS could potentially bridge this gap, following this development. We also take note of the establishment of the ECOWAS Presidential Task Force to deepen reflections on this withdrawal and any forthcoming security challenges.



Malta commends ECOWAS, members of the ACCRA Initiative, and other regional organisations for their work in handling these challenges, and strongly encourages full cooperation from countries in the region.

We also commend UNOWAS for its collaboration with UN Women and other organisations in advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in the region.

President

Malta remains deeply concerned by the dire humanitarian situation across the region, particularly in the Sahel, with millions more this year than in the previous reporting period requiring humanitarian assistance, and with the majority expected to experience severe food insecurity with elevated food prices also impacted by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

As the region is heavily impacted by climate change, we continue to support UNOWAS in advocating for best practices on climate-change resilience and adaptation on the ground and in promoting an understanding of these practices amongst local communities.

On this note, we hope that this Council reaches an agreement on a PRST that truly reflects the situation on the ground.



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President

To conclude, we look forward to the recommendations of the Issoufou Panel while reaffirming our strong support to the SRSG, UNOWAS, and regional organisations. Peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel should remain at the heart of our efforts.

I thank you.