

Building social cohesion, good governance and open, inclusive societies in West Africa and the Sahel.

Thank you Madame President. I would like to thank Special Representative Annadif, Executive-Director Ghada Waly and Ms Yougbare for their briefings and for their work.

Madame President, let me start on politics and by welcoming the peaceful election in The Gambia in December. This was an example of West African democracy in action. However, the United Kingdom remains concerned by ongoing transition challenges including in Mali and Guinea. We encourage UNOWAS to continue its good offices role to support the upcoming local elections in Senegal, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia, and the preparations for the Nigerian elections in 2023.

Madame President, we will have the opportunity to discuss Mali in more detail tomorrow, but the United Kingdom shares the concern set out by ECOWAS this weekend and by Ghana today on behalf of the A3 and by other colleagues, at the proposal of the Malian transitional authorities to postpone elections by up to five years. We will continue working with ECOWAS, with UNOWAS, with the Council and the international community to hold the transitional authorities to their commitments.

Madame President, more broadly on security, the United Kingdom remains concerned by the deteriorating situation across the Sahel. The prevalence of conflict and violent attacks, in the tri-border region between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger is having a tangible impact on security across the West Africa region; most recently the deadly attack in Northern Benin. This conflict is driving a high level of humanitarian need and severe food insecurity, compounded by the continued impacts of Covid-19. And as others in this Council have said, climate change is also a driver of insecurity in this region. Madame President, with these interconnected challenges facing this region, we welcome the continued implementation of the UN integrated strategy for the Sahel and UNOWAS's close engagement with the region and with regional bodies.

On the Lake Chad basin, ongoing conflict involving extremist groups in North East Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad Basin also remains deeply concerning. The United Kingdom remains committed to working alongside regional and international actors, to support better cross-border efforts to respond to the conflict and tackle the ongoing terrorist threat.

Madame President, in closing, it is clear that a holistic and integrated approach is needed to address the interconnected challenges in the region. In this regard, the United Kingdom supports wider UN integration and coherence,

including greater alignment between the work of UNOWAS and UN Country Teams. National security efforts need to be joined up with the efforts of wider development partners, UN agencies and the Peacebuilding Commission to help tackle the root causes and drivers of conflict, and to help build social cohesion, good governance and open, inclusive societies.

Thank you, Madame President.