



Intervention de S.E. Monsieur Marc Pecsteen de
Buytswerve, Ambassadeur, Représentant permanent

au Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies

Briefing UNOWAS

New York, le 9 juillet 2020

Mr. President,

First of all, allow me to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Chambas, for his intervention. Belgium attaches great importance to the work of UNOWAS in favour of prevention, reconciliation, mediation, sustainable peace and the promotion of the Rule of Law in West Africa and the Sahel.

I would also like to thank Ms. Ibrahim for highlighting an important issue for West Africa and the Sahel.

Mr. President,

The **security situation in the region remains unstable**. In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, the situation is deteriorating, despite many efforts and growing international mobilisation. In addition, parts of Nigeria also face constant terrorist attacks by Boko Haram as well as **conflicts between pastoralists and farmers** which are also worrying phenomena and deserve special attention. Moreover, numerous local conflicts, sometimes of an intra- or inter-community nature, rage in the region. This deterioration has a direct impact on the humanitarian situation, causing suffering among hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates dramatically this already bleak picture, affecting even more the most vulnerable, including women.

Large parts of Burkina Faso are now affected by violence. Recent actions have hopefully stopped further geographical spread. Belgium is concerned that terrorist attacks, which target the state but also civilians, infrastructure and places of worship, threaten not only Burkina Faso but the wider regional stability, with the risk of spreading to coastal countries as with the attack on the border with Côte d'Ivoire on 11 June. Additionally, community relations are very strained and will take time and actions to heal.

Across the region, **Belgium salutes the courage and sacrifices of the defence and security forces in their fight against terrorists.** However, to ultimately defeat terrorism, they know they have an obligation to set the example through their actions in the respect of **human rights**. It is not weakening the security forces than making them investigate allegations and if need be to go through a publicly announced criminal or disciplinary procedure. The opposite is true: while a perception of impunity already fuels terrorism, actively fighting impunity is the best way to regain the trust of the citizens, gather more intelligence and lay ground for reconciliation. Belgium is committed to continue to support its partners in the region with that aim.

In addition, in line with the Secretary-General and ECOWAS, Belgium believes that the response to the challenges that arise in West Africa cannot solely be achieved through security actions. A **holistic approach** is needed to deal with violent extremism, also emphasizing good governance, the fight against impunity, the strengthening of democratic institutions, addressing grievances of marginalised groups as well as sustainable and inclusive development.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to take tangible steps to halt the deterioration of the social fabric. Threats to pacific coexistence need to be resisted by fighting against any attempt to divide on the basis of religion or community belonging.

Mr. President,

Democratic institutions sometimes remain fragile in the region. The various upcoming elections later this year could test them even more. It is therefore paramount that voting occurs in a level playing field and that the **elections will be free, fair, transparent and pacific**. Belgium supports the efforts of UNOWAS to help in these elections and to consolidate democracy.

In particular, the tensions in Guinea have already cost human lives recently and it is important that renewed dialogue and compromise take place in order to achieve appeased elections. In Burkina Faso and Niger, the challenge will be to ensure that elections are held all across the country. Finally, in Côte d'Ivoire, where we expect that 2020 will confirm the return to peace and stability and call all political actors to raise to the occasion which also impacts regional stability. Moreover, the post-electoral tensions in Mali need to be addressed swiftly, in line with ECOWAS' recommendations, to avoid a further deterioration of the political situation in the country.

More broadly, we support the efforts of UNOWAS and the UN country teams for **national reconciliation, post-conflict reconstruction and security sector reform**. In various states, the political will to anchor good governance, democracy and human rights will be decisive in order to perpetuate the gains and engage on the path of sustainable development.

Mr. President,

UNOWAS also plays a leading role in studying the **impact of climate change on security**, within the framework of a "conflict prevention" approach. This is vital work, as Ms. Ibrahim has explained, and I encourage the Special Representative to continue this effort.

To conclude, I would also like to underline the essential role played by regional and subregional organisations. I commend their close coordination with UNOWAS and encourage them to maintain it in the future.

Thank you.