

PRESS RELEASE

Twentieth high-level meeting of Heads of UN Peace Missions in West Africa

Harmonizing the action of the United Nations to secure peace in West Africa

Dakar, February 28, 2011 - Representatives of the United Nations (UN) peace missions in West Africa held their twentieth high-level consultation in Dakar in order to coordinate the action of the UN promote peace and stability in the sub-region.

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) for West Africa (UNOWA). Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj, SRSG in Liberia (UNMIL); Mr. Y. J. Choi, SRSG in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and Mr. Joseph Mutaboba, SRSG in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) also participated.

The heads of Missions exchanged views on the recent political developments in the sub-region. They underscored their determination to continue joining efforts and working closely in order to contribute to crisis resolution— in particular those related to electoral processes, to preserve democratic gains and enhance development in West Africa.

The Heads of Missions expressed deep concerns at the deterioration of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire and its serious consequences for the sub-region. In this regard, they deplored the escalation of violence in Abidjan and throughout the country. The Heads of Missions were briefed on the latest developments in the post-electoral crisis and the efforts of the international community to solve the political deadlock. They stressed the three current priorities of UNOCI (i) to contribute to the protection of civilians taking into account that the primary responsibility lies with the Ivorian authorities, (ii) to ensure the safety of the Golf Hotel where President Alassane Ouattara stays (iii) to keep in safety the records of the second round of the Presidential Election. The Heads of Missions expressed solidarity with the people of Côte d'Ivoire and UNOCI colleagues due to the difficult environment in the country.

Acknowledging the political and security situation in Liberia, the Heads of Missions expressed serious concerns regarding the impact of the Ivorian crisis on the country and the entire sub-region. They especially referred to the rising number of refugees estimated at 68,000 people. They welcomed the completion of the voters' registration exercise in preparation to legislative and Presidential elections.

With regard to Guinea-Bissau, the Heads of Missions welcomed recent progress on political and security issues. To support the stabilization of democratic institutions, Heads of Missions urged the authorities of Guinea-Bissau and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to expedite the adoption of the roadmap developed in collaboration with the

Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) in support of of security sector reform. They encouraged the Government of Guinea-Bissau to seize the opportunity of the upcoming consultations with the European Union to renew their relations with this important partner in the pursuit of reforms.

The Heads of Missions reiterated the commitment of the UN to further support electoral processes in the sub-region with the objective to strengthen democracy. They agreed to intensify their collaboration on electoral best practices in order to prevent electoral violence and contribute to the peaceful conduct of the numerous elections planned in the region.

The Heads of Mission welcomed the holding of the Presidential election in Guinea, which put an end to the political and constitutional crisis in the country. They emphasized that the international community should remain mobilized to assist Guinea in consolidating its democratic gains, promoting national reconciliation, restoring the rule of law and enhancing socio-economic development. They called for the security sector reform that has been undertaken in the country to be supported.

With regard to Niger, they showed appreciation to the transition authorities for complying with the electoral calendar so far and for holding the first round of Presidential elections. They expressed wishes of success for the second round of the Presidential ballot, which is scheduled to take place on 12 March 2011.

The Heads of Missions expressed concerns about the raise of insecurity and organized crime in the subregion. Regarding the fight against drug trafficking, they welcomed the launch in December 2010, of the Regional Programme for West Africa by the the Office of the United Nations against Drugs and Crime (UNODC). They noted progress in the implementation of the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) in support of the ECOWAS Action Plan. Heads of Missions have reiterated their support to ECOWAS in fighting this threat to the stability of the subregion. They also called for the international community and countries in question to increase collaboration within the framework of a strong and coordinated regional partnership to combat organized crime.

The Heads of Missions expressed concerns about human rights violations taking place in total impunity. They reiterated their commitment to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1325 and subsequent resolutions. They also welcomed progress made in the implementation of the regional action plan following the Dakar Declaration on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in September 2010.

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