

**PRESS RELEASE**

*Twenty second high-level meeting of Heads of UN Peace Missions in West Africa*

**Dakar, 28 November, 2011** - Representatives of the United Nations (UN) peace missions in West Africa held their twenty-second high-level consultation in Dakar in order to facilitate the coordination of the action of the UN promoting the stability of 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. Albert Gérard Koenders, SRSG in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and Mr. Joseph Mutaboba, SRSG in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) also participated.

The Heads of Missions in West Africa underscored their determination to continue joining efforts and working closely in order to contribute to crisis prevention and resolution— in particular those related to electoral processes, combating insecurity, preserving democratic gains and enhance food security and development in West Africa.

The Heads of Missions in West Africa, raised serious concerns about the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel Band, the impact of the crisis in Libya in the sub-region and the development of links between AQMI and terrorists in East Africa. They welcomed the reinforced collaboration by countries concerned in fighting terrorism and promote development in the affected areas. They announced a United Nations multi-agency assessment mission early December in order to define a UN global strategy to increased vulnerability in the Sahel. The Heads of Missions also called on a quick response of the International Community to avoid a severe food crisis threatening to affect six million people in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mali and Mauritania.

Regarding the issue of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, the Heads of Missions welcomed the prompt deployment of the UN assessment Mission in accordance with Security Council resolution 2018 (2011). The findings of the of the Mission will be presented to the Security Council on xx December 2011 with a view to enhance anti-piracy strategy in the area in collaboration with the international community and regional organization in East and West Africa.

The Heads of Missions reviewed their collaboration on the implementation of the Secretary-General's decision to tackle cross-border threats between Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire and in the sub-region. They have decided to establish a steering committee to develop a sub-regional security strategy to combat – within a coherent framework - cross-border threats such as mercenaries, cross border movements of weapons and armed groups, illicit trafficking as well as their impact on forced population movements.

The Heads of Missions reiterated their determination to join efforts in combatting drug trafficking and organized crime in West Africa through the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) launched to support the implementation of ECOWAS action plan on illicit drug trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse (2008-2011). They welcomed progress in the establishment of the transnational crime units (TCU's) in the four pilot countries namely Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia as well as the inclusion of Guinea into the program.

The Heads of Mission discussed the peace process in Cote d'Ivoire where legislative elections are slated for 11 December 2011. The holding of open, free, fair and transparent legislative elections, to be certified by the SRSR for Cote d'Ivoire, should complete the institutional architecture, thus complementing the 2010 presidential elections. UNOCI is multiplying its contacts with all political parties to call for an inclusive electoral process and is providing technical and logistical support for the organization of the elections. The Mission is also working in close cooperation with the Ivorian security forces and with the support of UNMIL within the inter-mission cooperation framework, to ensure that elections take place in a peaceful environment. The UN also remains engaged in accompanying the Ivorian authorities in implementing the other aspects of the peace process, including in the areas of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform, human rights, rule of law, national reconciliation, and economic and social development.

With regards to Liberia, SRSR Ellen Margrethe Løj, briefed the meeting on the general elections held in that country on 11 October, noting that international and national observer missions had declared the process to have been free, fair and transparent. The Heads of Mission, however, noted concern that the main opposition party, Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), called for a boycott of the 8 November presidential run-off and that violence between the CDC and the police on the eve of the run-off would have intimidated some Liberians from voting. The Heads of Mission welcomed President Johnson Sirleaf's establishment of a Special Independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate the violence of 7 November at the CDC Headquarters and emphasized the importance that the Commission independently and thoroughly investigate the incident to successfully lay the groundwork for much needed political dialogue and reconciliation.

On Guinea-Bissau, the Heads of Peace Missions in West Africa welcomed the continued improvement of the political stability and socio-economic context in recent months, and commended in that regard the efforts deployed by national stakeholders, with the continuing support of international partners and the United Nations. They urged for sustained engagement and political will from Government to pursue major reforms, and advocated for substantive and immediate support by international partners, including for launching the crucial Pension Fund for the retirement of defense and security forces elements. Further, while noting the ongoing efforts of all partners, including the ECOWAS, CPLP and EU, in support of SSR priorities in the country, the Heads of Peace Missions urged for the swift finalization of the tripartite MOU involving ECOWAS, CPLP and the Government of Guinea-Bissau for implementing the roadmap for SSR adopted earlier this year. The UN-sponsored National Conference on peace, development and reconciliation planned for January 2012 was identified as a key milestone for sustaining democracy and enabling a positive political environment for implementing major reforms and holding peaceful legislative elections at the end of 2012. With regard to the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime, they called for more financial and technical support from UN and partners

for capacitating the Transnational Crime Unit and implementing the 2011/2014 operational plan prepared by the Government for tackling drug trafficking and organized crime.

The Heads of Missions finalized the preparations for the holding of the Regional Conference on “Impunity, Justice, and Human Rights” in West Africa, which is scheduled to take place from 2 to 5 December 2011 in Bamako. The conference will be organized by the United Nations in cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) and other partners. The objective of the conference is to promote justice and human rights in support to ECOWAS efforts to combat impunity as a threat to peace and stability in the sub-region.

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