

COMMUNIQUE

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

Dakar, 2 May, 2012 - The Heads of the United Nations (UN) Peace Missions in West Africa held their twenty-third high-level consultation in Dakar to review the progress in the coordination of the action of the UN in promoting 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). Mr. Albert Gérard Koenders, SRSG for Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and Mr. Joseph Mutaboba, SRSG for Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) as well as Louis Aucoin, Deputy SRSG for Liberia (UNMIL) and Nega Berhanemeskel, Acting Head of Mission for Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) also participated. The Heads of Mission congratulated Ms. Karin Landgren on her recent appointment as SRSG for Liberia.

The Heads of Missions in West Africa, exchanged views on a number of challenges affecting the stability of the sub-region, and ongoing initiatives to address them, with particular focus on the situation in the Sahel Region, the piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime, including through the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI). They stressed the need for regional and international organizations to strengthen their collaboration and coordinate their initiatives to address these threats to peace and security in the sub-region, in particular in Mali and Guinea-Bissau. They further reiterated their commitment to support the new leadership of ECOWAS, as well as the leadership of the Mano River Union (MRU), in their efforts to address the main challenges to stability in the sub-region.

The Heads of Missions expressed concerns about the recent developments in Mali. They stressed the need for all stakeholders in Mali to stay the course of the 6 April Framework Agreement. In this regard, they renewed their support of the United Nations to the institutions of the transition and to the effort of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mediation under the leadership of President Compaoré of Burkina Faso in consultation with neighboring countries, the African Union (AU) and the UN for the full return to constitutional order and the search of a lasting settlement of the security and humanitarian situation in the North of the country.

With regard to the situation in Guinea Bissau, the Heads of Missions took note of the efforts towards restoration of constitutional order in the country, including the ongoing mediation efforts undertaken by ECOWAS, in partnership with the African Union (AU) and Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), and taking into account the framework of the UN Security Council Presidential statement of 21 April 2012. Emphasis was put on the need to find a prompt and adequate solution in order to restore normality and address the urgent socio-economic needs of the population of Guinea-Bissau. The importance of seriously addressing the issue of drug trafficking and fast tracking demobilization aspects of security sector reform (SSR), including urgent funding needs, was also highlighted.

The Heads of Missions reviewed their collaboration on the implementation of a sub-regional security strategy to combat – within a coherent framework - cross-border threats such as movement of weapons and armed groups as well as illicit trafficking and their impact on local population. They took note of the progress made on the roadmap adopted by UNOWA, UNMIL and UNOCI on 7 March 2012 in Abidjan to implement a cross-border stabilization and recovery strategy between Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire and in the Mano River sub-region. They highlighted the challenges linked to the porous borders and the approximately 68,000 refugees in Liberia, and the impact on the local communities. In that context, they welcomed the strengthened collaboration between the UN and Mano River Union (MRU) and expressed the readiness of the UN to build on the existing MRU peace and security architecture through, among others the support of confidence building activities at the borders. The Heads of Mission further observed that the monthly Mano River Union security and confidence building meetings organized at the borders of MRU countries demonstrate emerging ownership by the Governments.

The Heads of Missions noted the progress made in efforts to consolidate stability in Côte d'Ivoire and the improvement in the overall conditions in the country, including the economic, social and security situation. They welcomed the commencement of the dialogue between the political forces in Côte d'Ivoire. They noted the recent positive steps to move ahead with the Demobilization process (DDR) and Security Sector reform (SSR), urging the Ivorian Government to proceed with these actions and to pursue its efforts to fight impunity, improve security and strengthen political dialogue and equitable justice.

Regarding Sierra Leone, the Heads of Missions welcomed the steady progress the country continues to make in the consolidation of peace and implementing a comprehensive agenda for development. They noted the importance of Presidential, parliamentary and local elections scheduled for 17 November 2012 for the country's continued progress. To that end, they called on all parties to continue to engage in constructive dialogue and assume their responsibilities to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections. The Heads of Missions expressed support for the efforts of UNIPSIL in supporting national efforts at promoting dialogue and ensuring democratic and violence-free polls.

On the Sahel Region, the Heads of Missions welcomed the AU-UN collaboration for the finalization and implementation of a comprehensive plan of action for the Sahel region, incorporating major issues at stake, particularly terrorism, transnational organized crime, illicit proliferation of arms, food insecurity, youth unemployment, climate change, governance challenges and chronic under-development with a view to better assist the concerned countries in the Sahel implementing their home-grown strategies. The Heads of Missions echoed in that regard the urgent appeal made by UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel Region, Mr. David Gressly for sufficient funding to urgently address the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel, in particular food insecurity.

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