

PRESS RELEASE

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

Dakar, May 28, 2011 - Representatives of the United Nations (UN) peace missions in West Africa held their twenty-first 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. Y. J. Choi, SRSG in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI); Mr. Joseph Mutaboba, SRSG in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) and Michael von Schulenburg, Executive Representative for the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) also participated.

The Heads of Missions in West Africa welcomed positive development in the sub-region since their last meeting in February 2011. They welcomed the holding of elections in Benin, Cap Verde, Niger and Nigeria which shows democratic progress in the sub-region. They however deplored tensions and violence in some countries. They therefore reiterated their support to the states and regional organization for the holding of free, fair and peaceful elections, in line with the Declaration of the Praia Regional conference (18-20 May) on electoral best practices in West Africa, which was organized by UNOWA and partners.

The Heads of Missions welcomed the ending of the electoral crisis and positive developments of the political situation in Côte d'Ivoire notably marked by the inauguration of President Alassane Ouattara in the presence of, a number of dignitaries, including the UN Secretary General. They noted the significant challenges that the new Government is facing with regards to insecurity, humanitarian assistance, human rights, national reconciliation and the holding of legislative elections. In this regard, the Heads of Missions reiterated the readiness of the UN to support the Ivorian people towards lasting peace as a prerequisite for harmonious economic development.

With regard to Liberia, the Heads of Mission expressed concerns for the continuing refugee crisis along the border with Côte d'Ivoire, where UNHCR reports that over 180,000 refugees have crossed into Liberia since the beginning of the Ivorian crisis. Also, reports continue of movements of suspected Ivorian fighters over the border and the return of a number of suspected Liberian mercenaries. In response to this situation, UNMIL has conducted re-deployment of its military force to ensure increased monitoring of the 700 km-long border between the two countries, and continues to support national security agencies to monitor and operate along the border. In preparations for the upcoming referendum and general elections later in the year, Heads of Mission welcomed the setting of the Inter-Party Consultative Committee which allows inter-party communication and collaboration between the twenty five political parties have now been accredited, and continue to make alliances.

The Heads of Missions highlighted substantive achievements in Sierra Leone in terms of peace building, restoration of national authority, development of democratic institutions and socio-economic progress. They expressed hope that those will be consolidated through the 2012 elections. They also noted plans of transferring from peace building mission to UN development system, underlining that Sierra Leone would be the first country to do so in the sub-region.

On the situation in Guinea-Bissau, the Heads of Missions welcomed the recent endorsement by the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS of the roadmap for supporting security sector reform (SSR) and stabilization in Guinea-Bissau, and the concrete steps taken by Guinea-Bissau authorities in this regard. They also commended the deployment of the Angolan SSR mission (MISSANG) which will contribute, alongside the CPLP, ECOWAS, the EU and the UN, among others, to assist Guinea-Bissau in the reform and restructuring of its security architecture. The Heads of Missions encouraged the authorities of Guinea Bissau to pursue their efforts for good governance. They called on international community to support the implementation of the SSR and stabilization roadmap including the pension fund for demobilized and retired military and security personnel. Finally, the Heads of Missions urged national authorities to continue step up their efforts to address the scourge of drug trafficking and organized crime.

The Heads of Missions in West Africa, raised concerns about the security situation in the Sahel Band and welcomed recent initiatives by countries concerned to reinforce their collaboration in fighting terrorism and promote development in the affected areas.

The Heads of Missions expressed 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 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 development in West Africa.

On the occasion of the international peacekeepers day, the Heads of Missions paid a tribute to UN personnel including West African military contingents and citizens devoting their lives to the promotion of regional stability and peace on earth.

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