

PRESS RELEASE

The UN in West Africa mobilizes for the Sahel

Dakar, 14 October 2011 - The United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) held the ninth periodic consultation with the Heads of the Regional Offices of the United Nations (UN) agencies in West Africa. The meeting was chaired by Said Djinnit, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa.

Participants reviewed the situation in West Africa. They expressed concerns over growing risks of instability in the sub-region.

The meeting discussed developments in the Sahel including the impact of the Libyan crisis on the sub-region. They agreed to develop a joint framework to harmonize and enhance UN efforts to address issues related to security, food security, illicit drug trafficking, transnational organized crime, youth employment and development in the sub-region in support to initiatives of Sahel countries. A working group will be established for this purpose.

With regard to food security in the Sahel and in West Africa, the regional organizations expressed concerns about the consequences of deficiency and/or irregularity of rains as well as continued high food prices. Final results of the ongoing crop evaluation will determine the level of severity of potential crises in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger as well as early actions in preparation of the upcoming 2012 lean season.

Heads of UN regional offices expressed support and readiness to collaborate with UNOWA for 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 join UNOWA and other UN peace missions in the sub-region in establishing a steering committee to develop a regional 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 UN's action in response to Benin's request for assistance to face increasing incidents of maritime piracy was also discussed, in the light of the considerable impact on the economy of the country and the sub-region.

UNOWA updated the participants on 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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