

PRESS RELEASE

SRSG'S VISIT TO SIERRA LEONE

Dakar, 26 February 2014 - As part of his mandate as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and Chairman of the West Africa Coast Initiative High-level Policy Committee (WACI POLCOM), Mr. Said Djinnit ended yesterday a two day visit to Sierra Leone.

The objective of the visit was to discuss with the authorities of the country the threat to peace and stability posed by transnational organized crime including drug trafficking and to acknowledge Sierra Leone's success in establishing a fully operational Transnational Crime Unit (TCU). This mission was also part of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA)'s support to ongoing efforts by ECOWAS to enhance the implementation of its plan of action against Drugs and Crime.

During his visit, SRSG Djinnit along with the ERSG Jens Toyberg-Frandzen, Head of UNIPSIL, met with the President of Sierra Leone, Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Internal Affairs as well as with the National Security Coordinator heading the Office for National Security. He also held a working meeting with the Secretary-General of the Mano River Union (MRU), Dr. Saran Daraba Kaba.

The SRSG discussed various issues related to the regional security situation and the role of Sierra Leone and the MRU in stabilizing the region. In this regard, he commended the authorities of Sierra Leone for their leading role in the sub-region in implementing a fully operational Transnational Crime Unit, as part of WACI programme with the joint support of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the UN Department of Political Affairs/UNOWA and INTERPOL.

In view of the UNIPSIL's upcoming withdrawal, the SRSG and national authorities also discussed the feasibility of internalising the TCU in the national security architecture, with the continuous support of the international partners. Sierra Leone would become the first country to do so.

"I am very impressed by the professionalism reflected today at all levels of the TCU. The TCU in Sierra Leone is not only a model for other West African countries in fighting collaboratively organised crime, it is also inspiring for senior executives like me, since our motivation lies on your active involvement", said the SRSG Djinnit following his visit to the TCU Headquarters in Freetown during which demonstrations of law enforcement operations as well as a TCU Management Board meeting were held.

After Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire, this visit, third of its kind, is a follow up to the outcome of the WACI (West Africa Coast Initiative) High-Level Policy Committee (POLCOM) meeting held in Abidjan on 29 October 2013.

Background

A 2009 UNODC report "Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: a Threat Assessment" shows that in some cases, the value of illicit flows through the region surpasses the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of the West African States, which are among the world's poorest countries. For example, the value of 45 million counterfeit antimalarial tablets (\$438 million) is greater than the GDP of Guinea-Bissau. Revenue from cigarette smuggling (around \$775 million) is greater than the gross national product (GNP) of The Gambia. Illicit income generated from illegal oil bunkering or cocaine trafficking (approximately \$1 billion each) rivals the GNP of Cape Verde or Sierra Leone.

The West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) was jointly launched in 2009 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA)/UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and INTERPOL. WACI is a response to the need to adopt a multi-stakeholders approach to support the ECOWAS regional action plan to address the growing problem of illicit trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse in West Africa. The cornerstone of WACI is the establishment of transnational crimes units (TCUs), which are national specialized multi-agencies to combat transnational crime. Capitalizing on the presence of UN missions, WACI has been initiated in four pilot countries also considered as priority affected countries by ECOWAS i.e. Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI), Guinea Bissau (UNIOGBIS), Liberia (UNMIL) and Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL). It was expanded to Guinea, thus encompassing all member states of the Mano River Union (MRU) and Guinea-Bissau.

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