



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR WEST AFRICA

UNOWA

BUREAU DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

OFFICIAL STATEMENT

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS

Vienna, 13-14 March 2014

Statement of Mr. Said Djinnit

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa

I am happy for this opportunity to address the High-Level segment of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and to share with you the West Africa perspective on peace and security. While a good number of countries in the sub-region, including those in post conflict reconstruction and development phase are making noteworthy progress towards sustainable peace, there are considerable challenges that need to be addressed. Youth unemployment, rapid urbanization, food insecurity and widespread poverty remain daunting challenges. The chronic weaknesses in governance and in the security sector, amplified by a combination of security threats including transnational organized crime, especially illicit drug trafficking continue to negatively impact on communities and development efforts.

Within West Africa, we have identified three areas of instability that are now subject to three different initiatives with deep involvement of the international community, aimed at helping the countries and regional organizations to address the root causes of the problems:

1. In the North, the Sahel region is bedeviled by a combination of human security challenges including food insecurity, chronic droughts, unemployment, terrorism, drug and human trafficking and crisis of governance with their attendant humanitarian consequences. The UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel as well as a number of such other strategies and initiatives being promoted by the international community are meant to fundamentally address these challenges.
2. The Mano River Region, where insecurity related to cross border criminal activities including arms and drug trafficking, as well as ethno-political tensions continue to disrupt efforts to consolidate peace. The affected countries have demonstrated leadership and commitment by developing and adopting a comprehensive cross-border security strategy for the Mano River Basin with the support of the UN and ECOWAS. The countries of the region are now engaged in the implementation process of their strategy and expect the active support of the international community.
3. The Gulf of Guinea has been experiencing a rise in piracy and crimes at sea. In order to address these challenges, Heads of State and Government of concerned countries in Central and West Africa adopted a code of conduct and a regional mechanism for "the repression of Piracy, armed robbery against ships, and illicit maritime activity in West and Central Africa" in a Summit held in Yaoundé in June 2013. The UN, through its various entities is closely working with ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GGC in efforts to put in place the mechanism and the subsequent implementation of the strategy.

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It is pertinent to note that while the nature of the problems are generally distinct, none of these three areas can be taken in isolation, and that the trafficking of illicit drugs has for long been a crosscutting challenge, from the Sahel region to the Gulf of Guinea. Most worrisome is the established fact about the growing rate of drug consumption, production and export in countries of the region, especially methamphetamine, in addition to being a transit zone.

I share the notion that the prevention of, and fight against drug trafficking and abuse is an essential pillar to any conflict prevention and peace building strategy in West Africa, which remains vulnerable to political instability and tension. Given the international dimension of the scourge, the countries of West Africa should not be left alone to bear the full burden of the struggle against criminal organizations that are sometimes better equipped (financially and logistically) than the institutions mandated to fight them. I am here referring to the principle of shared responsibility.

It is worth noting that measures against this scourge constitute an important aspect of the various security strategies recently adopted, including the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, the regional strategy against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and the Cross-Border Security Strategy of the Mano River Union. However, implementation remains a daunting challenge, given the enormity of the tasks and the resource requirement. Beyond technical and financial assistance to African states which should be strengthened in any case, there is also a need to consolidate the political impetus both at national and international level. Indeed, without a reinforced cooperation at the political level between all continents involved, e.g. American, Asian, European and African, we will not achieve the desired objective of reducing the scourge to minimum level.

Over the past years, the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UNODC have joined their efforts towards mobilizing the regional leadership and international community on the need for decisive collective response to this growing threat to peace and stability in West Africa. The adoption by ECOWAS of its Regional Action Plan in December 2008 constituted an important momentum in bringing together the region and the international community in a joint venture against organized crime. There is need for more support towards its full implementation. Through collective efforts, the Regional Action Plan was extended by the ECOWAS Heads-of-State until 2015, and is undergoing a revision process for its renewal. I wish here to commend the leadership of ECOWAS institutions for such impulse.

As part of the efforts to assist in the implementation of the ECOWAS Action Plan, DPKO, UNODC, DPA/UNOWA and INTERPOL launched the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI), building on the existing UN capacities in the sub-region. The subsequent creation of, and success achieved by Transnational Crime Units (TCUs) in three out of the five host countries in West Africa, is an accomplishment that needs to be consolidated and improved upon.

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UNOWA will continue to work in close collaboration with ECOWAS, UNODC and other partners, to foster the required political will within the sub-region to fight drug-trafficking and prevent drug abuse in West Africa and in the Sahel, including through exploring ways and means of enhancing coordination among all stakeholders involved.

For now, I urge the international community to effectively support the efforts that the West African States have initiated through their collective roadmap, as outlined in the ECOWAS Praia Action Plan, so that the energies and resources of the sub-region could be channeled towards consolidating peace and democracy as well as pursuing sustainable development.

I thank you for your attention.

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