Regional Forum on Media, **Peace** and Security in West Africa

Abidjan, 14-15 June 2012

UNOWA
Bureau des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest

ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

RÉPUBLIQUE DE COTE D'IVOIRE

Regional Forum on "Media, Peace and Security in West Africa"

ABIDJAN DECLARATION

The participants of the Regional Forum on "Media, Peace and Security in West Africa", meeting in Abidjan from 14 to 15 June 2012,

Commending the organization of the Forum by the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), in partnership with the Government of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire and the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS);

Noting the participation, at the highest level, of representatives of international, regional and sub-regional organizations, including representatives of UN peacekeeping, political missions and agencies, government officials from ECOWAS member states, representatives of the defense and security forces, representatives of institutions in charge of the regulation and self-regulation of the media, representatives of civil society organizations and media professionals;

Refering to the « *Déclaration sur la démocratie, les droits et les libertés dans l'espace francophone* » adopted in Bamako in 2000, the « *Déclaration sur la prévention des conflits et la sécurité humaine dans l'espace francophone* » adopted in 2006 in Saint-Boniface, to the Declaration on Elections and Stability in West Africa adopted in Praia in 2011 and the Declaration on Impunity, Justice and Human Rights adopted in 2011 in Bamako;

Welcoming the continued efforts by the African Union and ECOWAS, supported by UNOWA and the OIF, to prevent conflict, promote peace and stability in West Africa; fight against the forceful seizing of power and interruption of constitutional order;

Welcoming the holding of this meeting that brings together for the first time representatives of states, regional and international organizations, experts on peace and security and media professionals in the sub-region around a highly critical issue;

Aware of the particularly worrying situation prevailing in the sub-region, including in Mali and Guinea Bissau, two ECOWAS member states going through acute crises that mobilizes the entire international community;

Convinced that sustainable peace and security can only be upheld in the sub-region if the root causes of conflict, political and social instability, impunity related to violation of human rights are eradicated, and that the media, for that purpose, have a critical role to play;

Recalling that the media, through their actions and work can contribute to the prevention and resolution of conflicts;

Noting that during the Forum, the participants expressed a common concern regarding the dangers that may jeopardize democratization efforts, namely terrorism, illegal trafficking and organized crime, breach to constitutional order by the defense and security forces and the lack of collaboration between actors dealing with issues of peace and security on the one hand and the media on the other;

Declare that a free, independent and professional media are the bedrock of democracy and the guarantors of the rule of law and human rights; that they are inseparable from the protection and promotion of a culture of peace, and that it is imperative to work towards strengthening them both at the national, regional, and international levels,

And approve the following recommendations:

I. The Role of the Media as Stakeholders in the Promotion of Peace and Stability in West Africa

1. Encourage the implementation and ownership of "ECOWAS standards for the press to promote peace and security in West Africa";

2. Raise awareness of citizens of ECOWAS member states on the importance of the role of the media in preventing and resolving conflicts as well as in building a culture of peace;

4. Encourage state and non-state actors to recognize the crucial role of the media in any strategy aimed at preventing and resolving conflicts, consolidating peace and promoting democracy;

5. Ensure that the media positively contribute to post-conflict situations, including through objective and regular coverage of national reconciliation processes;

6. Sensitize journalists on their key role with respect to peace and security issues and call on them to fulfill their functions in a professional fashion , in respect of the deontology of journalism ethics; to this end, ensure that they be provided by adequate and sustainable resources in order to allow them to work in freely, transparently and independently;

II. Measures to Build the Capacity of West African Media to Meet the New Demands for a Culture of Peace:

1. Facilitate journalists' access to information on security and defense related matters, including on security sector reform;

2. Encourage, in the newsroom, the specialization of journalists in covering conflicts and crises;

3. Organize journalists and already existing networks focused on issues of peace and security in West Africa into a Regional Network with links to *"Netpeace"* created under the aegis of the African Union (AU);

4. Strengthen the media's capacity through the development of research strategies on peace at local, national and sub-regional levels;

5. Integrate, in basic and continuing education programs of professionals of West African media, modules related to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, consolidation of peace and promotion of democracy, especially by developing the analytical capabilities on root causes of conflicts and journalistic methods of specialized treatment of issues related to war and conflict management, mutual communication tools;

6. Draft codes of good practices on the positive role played by the media in preventing and resolving conflicts;

7. Improve statutory requirements and working conditions of journalists deployed in areas prone to conflict, political instability and organized crime, including by taking measures for their protection;

8. Fully guarantee freedom of movement of journalists in conflict zones or risk areas;

9. Adopt internal rules for editors to protect local correspondents deployed in conflict zones or risk areas, or covering issues likely to affect stability, against financial vulnerability so they are not tempted to give in to various forms of manipulation or corruption;

10. Adopt codes of conduct and ethics for journalists in countries where these instruments do not exist and add the peace and security component to the said codes;

11. Encourage professional and ethical use of information gathered through social networks and new media (internet);

12. Support and contribute to the structuring of networks of African journalism experts on peace and security matters;

13. Ensure that concrete and sustainable efforts be undertaken to include women journalists in all aspects related to the implementation of the present declaration;

14. Adopt a clear and precise definition of the concepts of "hate speech, violence incitation to violence and revolt" and ultimately mainstream them with the journalists and the broader public;

15. Sensitize journalists on their social responsibility one of the aim of which is to preserve citizens from the consequences of incitation to violence and hate;

III. The Role of Regional and International Organizations:

1. Adapt support programs for the West African journalists and media to the new political and security context of the sub-region developed within regional and international organizations;

2. Invite ECOWAS member states to integrate at all levels, the media in their overall policy on conflict prevention and peace promotion;

3. Establish at the ECOWAS level an annual prize to press organizations and journalists for their distinct contribution to the promotion of peace and security;

4. Create, between regional and international organizations, a permanent mechanism for consultation and monitoring on issues of peace and security in their exchanges with the media;

5. Hold regular consultations between regional and international organizations, media representatives and experts on peace and security;

6. Regularly invite West African journalists working in conflict or in post conflict areas on which peacekeeping missions are deployed for inter-faces and focus-group discussions;

7. Promote exchanges between peacekeeping missions and the media;

8. Organize regular training seminars for journalists on issues of peace and security;

IV. The Role of States and Defense and Security Forces:

1. Ensure, in all circumstances, that the government and other non-state actors, including political parties, guarantee security and protection for West African journalists and news organizations working in conflict zones and during election periods;

2. Create a relationship of trust between the media and the defense and security forces by promoting opportunities for dialogue and exchange in order to blur prejudices and assumptions and by establishing a mechanism for disseminating information considered "sensitive" so that they are treated professionally by the media;

3. Prepare the armies in the management and dissemination of information in times of crisis, for the media and the general public, including through the establishment of flexible and operational crisis units comprising special teams dedicated to communication;

4. Establish or build the capacity of information Directorates of defense and security forces, and upgrade them to current international standards for disseminating information by the armed and security forces;

5. Promote access, in conjunction with regional and international organizations, of national media, to areas of conflict, and report, in compliance with journalism's professional and ethical standards;

V. Cooperation for the implementation and monitoring of the Declaration of Abidjan

1. Given the regional and international threats to peace and stability and human rights violations, the participants call for a significant strengthening of regional and international cooperation on all areas covered by the recommendations made above.

2. The Participants also encourage governments, representatives of regulatory and self-regulatory media bodies, media professionals, regional organizations, international organizations and civil society organizations, to join their efforts to implement the recommendations of this Declaration by developing an action plan for the next five years.

Adopted in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, June 15, 2012