

SPEECH

Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Head of UNOWAS

“We have to unite our efforts to reduce the impact of drug-related crimes”

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) jointly launch, on 19 September 2016 in New York, efforts to support West Africa against drugs and crime. In opening the special event, Mr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Secretary General's Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), emphasized that “The fight against illicit trafficking and drug-related crimes contributes to improving the overall conditions for peace and security in the region. This is the core of the mandate of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel”. Kindly find below the statement of Mr. Ibn Chambas.

“Statement by SRSO Chambas at the UNODC-ECOWAS Launch in New York

Ms. /Mr. Chairman,

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to commend the ECOWAS Commission, ECOWAS member States and Mauritania, and UNODC, for their constructive collaboration that led to the development of two complementary programmes. This is a clear indication that there continues to be a close coordination and collaboration between the UN and the ECOWAS in the definition of strategic objectives, as well as programming, to assist member states in the fight against illicit trafficking and organized crime.

Throughout the development of the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan 2016-2020, member States have renewed their commitment to combat illicit drug trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse. I congratulate them for their determination: this, indeed, is the most auspicious signal they could provide to their population - in particular the youth - who too often fall victims to drugs or to criminal activities related to them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The fight against illicit trafficking and drug-related crimes contributes to improving the overall conditions for peace and security in the region. This is the core of the mandate of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, which I lead.

We are all too aware that illicit drug trafficking and related organized crime is an evolving threat – its corruptive power is devastating. It claims lives, and destroys the fabric of society, on the African continent and beyond, among the most productive parts of our communities. We cannot emphasize too much the necessity to unite our efforts to reduce the impact of drug-related crimes.

Drug trafficking is a global issue for which no region has yet the perfect solution. As a blatant reminder of what is at stake, in January this year, Bolivian authorities seized more than eight tons of cocaine destined for Cote d’Ivoire. In March not less than 500 kg of cocaine were seized off the coast of Cabo Verde. In the port of Dakar over USD 380,000 in counterfeit medicines were seized this year. More cooperation, information exchange and combining regional and international expertise could be pioneering a solution for West Africa, which could be replicate elsewhere.

Given the transnational dimension of drug related crimes, the linkages with terrorism, maritime crimes and corruption, the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan 2016-2020 and the UNODC Regional Programme provide for a common approach which will facilitate concerted activities on the ground. I appeal to Member States, in this regard, to commit sufficient resources for the implementation of those plans: strengthening cooperation among law enforcement agencies is a requirement.

Let me commend the international partners, including the European Union, for the support they have provided to these initiatives. I encourage other donor countries and relevant stakeholders to join, and support the roll-out of the ECOWAS Action Plan.

I thank UNODC for the technical support and leadership they have provided on the issue, and for having put together the event that brings us together today. I assure you of my personal commitment to support the efforts of ECOWAS and the member States to achieve the objectives set out in the Action Plan”.

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