

## SPEECH

### **THE 50th ORDINARY SUMMIT OF THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS)**

**Abuja, 17 December 2016**

**Speech by Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas,**

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United  
Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)**

*Your Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson- Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, and Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government;*

*Your Excellency Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and host of the Summit;*

*Excellencies, Heads of State and Government;*

*Honorable Ministers;*

*Your Excellency Mr. Marcel de Souza, President of the ECOWAS Commission, Commissioners and other statutory Appointees of ECOWAS;*

*Excellencies Ambassadors and Heads of Regional and International Organizations;*

*Distinguished Guests;*

*Ladies and Gentlemen.*

It is my honour to be here with you today, and a pleasure to transmit greetings of Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, who has always followed events in West Africa with keen interest. As he will soon be handing over to his successor he has asked me to thank you for the excellent collaboration he has had with you and for your support during his entire tenure of office. He wishes you success in your deliberations.

A lot has been achieved since your last summit in June. Notably, people of the region have demonstrated their maturity and determination to democratically and peacefully exercise their right to choose their leaders. Cabo Verde has conducted its presidential and local elections, which have again set standards for the region and beyond. On 1 December, voters waited patiently to drop their marbles in presidential elections in The Gambia, which took place against a backdrop of opposition members being held in prison and a communication shutdown. The UN shares the joy of many witnessing the peaceful conduct of the polls, and commends your collective action to ensure an orderly handover of power reflecting the will of the people and respect for the constitution of The Gambia.

That being said, we remain concerned by some of the worrisome developments that have occurred during the post-electoral period in The Gambia, in particular the seizure of the headquarters of the Independent Electoral Commission by the Gambian military. As always, the United Nations will continue to support your efforts for a peaceful, timely, and orderly transfer of power on January 19, 2017, in full respect of the will of the Gambian people as expressed in the presidential election.

Last week on 7 December, Ghana completed the 2016 electoral cycle, and again lived up to its well-deserved reputation as a democratic paragon in the region. We commend the statesmanship of President John Mahama for his statesmanship and graceful concession and congratulate the President-elect Nana Akuffo Addo on his victory.

The UN salutes efforts by countries across the region to modernize their constitutions, bringing them in line with the aspirations of their people, and to build the foundations for prosperous and democratic societies, which are cohesive and resilient.

*Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We commend the people of Guinea for conducting a process of dialogue owned by the overwhelming majority of national stakeholders, and encourage Guinea-Bissau to continue the process of dialogue, reconciliation and inclusiveness in order to end the prolonged paralysis of government.

On 13 October, 21 Nigerian parents rejoiced after reuniting with their daughters, who more than two years ago had been captured by Boko Haram in the town of Chibok. All in all, 23 girls have so far regained their freedom, and efforts are underway for the release of more of them. Several hundred terrorists have collectively surrendered to the authorities, and large tracts of territory previously held by the group have been liberated. The State is back, and many schools have reopened. This success was due to the concerted efforts of countries contributing troops and supporting the Multi National Joint Task Force. It was also due to the commitment of the people and Government of Nigeria, whose steadfastness and determination to defeat Boko Haram is strong.

However, recent attacks by Boko Haram have disrupted the return of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons to their homes. Hundreds of thousands of children are severely malnourished, and may face starvation, or will not be able to develop their full capacities as human beings. With new areas liberated, the full extent of the tragedy has become all the more visible. You would agree with me that this is intensely worrying and that we can and must do better. To face the challenge, the UN and the wider international community have scaled up the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the LCBC countries, and in particular, Borno State and Diffa Province.

To tackle the root causes of violent extremism it is imperative to go beyond humanitarian support. Programmes to kick start economic development should be put in place. Exclusion and marginalization should be addressed. Education, health and socio-economic infrastructure should be rebuilt. Trust in government needs to be reestablished. Impunity, injustice and inequality must be dealt with so as not to provide a fertile ground for extremist groups and other peddlers of discontent to take undue advantage of the innocent people.

Addressing the root causes of extremism also calls for intensifying the fight against poverty by the integration of sustainable development goals and climate change and environmentally conscious national strategies, decentralization and community-based approaches on how to meet the needs of the poor and the deprived.

It is in this regard that the UN remains resolute in working with the G5 Sahel countries for the implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy on the Sahel with its four pillars of governance, security, development and resilience. We condemn the recurrent terrorist attack against countries of the sub-region, the most recent of which was perpetrated yesterday in Burkina Faso. Our condolences to the families of the fallen troops and we wish those injured a very speedy recovery.

The UN also wholeheartedly applauds the adoption, in June this year, of the *ECOWAS Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform and Governance*, which is another area where ECOWAS is moving ahead. Recognizing the critical role of this sector in democratic consolidation, it will be important to fully take ownership of the policy at all levels, apply best practices from Member States, and moving forward with implementation.

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Recently, we gathered in neighbouring Lomé, for the African Union Summit *on maritime safety, security, and the blue economy*. On the high seas, illegal-fishing fleets, dumpsters of toxic waste, and pirates operate across borders and deprive the region of much-needed revenue. Your relentless efforts to put into full operation the *Regional Coordination Centre for Maritime Security in Western Africa is needed to ensure effective surveillance of all zones in the Gulf of Guinea*.

On land, trafficking rings, transnational criminal networks, and drug smugglers pose threats that jeopardize hard-won security gains, and risk to undermine state structures. The adoption by ECOWAS ministers in September, of the *Regional Action Plan on illicit Drug trafficking, organized Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa*, is a significant step forward, which calls for a redoubling of efforts as we are moving into the implementation phase. You can count on the collaboration of the UN in facing the security threats posed by transnational organized criminal networks.

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Looking back on 41 years of cooperation, please be assured that the United Nations is proud to continue working with you. Going forward, we must recognize the tremendous role played by women and youth, in urban and rural areas, in the economy, security, and tourism. Yesterday, here in Abuja, we celebrated the Women's Open Day and had the opportunity to interact with regional women leaders, and were impressed by their energy and commitment to contribute to the development of the region. We owe it not only to the women but to all the people of West Africa to harness the full potential of women in the sub-region by fully implementing the laudable affirmative action laws adopted by many ECOWAS countries.

Allow me to conclude by borrowing what Bill Richardson (a former Governor of New Mexico in the USA) once said: "We cannot accomplish all that we need to do without working together."

*Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,*


Je vous souhaite des réflexions fructueuses. Et puisque nous nous acheminons vers la fin de l'année, je souhaite aux excellences chefs d'état et de gouvernement et à tout le peuple d'Afrique de l'Ouest, un très joyeux Noël et une nouvelle année heureuse et prospère.

Je vous remercie.

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