

32nd HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF HEADS OF UN MISSIONS IN WEST AFRICA

COMMUNIQUE

Bamako, 5 March 2018

1. At the invitation of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the Heads of the United Nations Missions in West Africa held their 32nd High-level Meeting on 5 March 2018 in Bamako, Mali.
2. In attendance were the Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General and Heads of UN missions in Mali (MINUSMA) Mahamat Saleh Annadif; in Liberia (UNMIL), Farid Zarif; in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), Modibo Toure; and in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Central Africa (UNOCA) François Loucény Fall and the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Côte d'Ivoire, Babacar Cissé, also attended.
3. The Heads of Mission were received in audience by the Head of State, His Excellency President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali.
4. The objective of the meeting was to provide insights and exchange views on peace and security dynamics in the areas of operation of the respective missions and in the West African region as a whole, and to strengthen coordination in order to address common challenges.
5. The Heads of Mission pointed to the recent security incidents in the region, and expressed their condolences to the families of victims, both civilian and military, including along the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger borders. They highlighted the need for a multidimensional regional approach to address security and development issues, such as enhanced regional security cooperation to identify and confront security threats; including measures to prevent and counter violent extremism as well as to fight transnational organized crime. The Heads of Mission condemned the 2 March terrorist attack in Ouagadougou and express their condolences to the people and Government of Burkina Faso. The Heads of Mission also highlighted the importance of regional-level coordination on socio-economic development to improve the lives of the region's most vulnerable populations while addressing the root causes of insecurity in all its forms.
6. The Heads of Mission welcomed the renewed commitment of the Malian parties to the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, including their 16 January endorsement of a roadmap with the timeline for the implementation of key provisions of the Agreement. They urged the signatory parties to continue to pursue constructive dialogue, demonstrate commitment to the peace process, and fulfill their obligations to the Malian people with concrete actions according to the new timeline. The meeting also noted the preparations underway for the 29 July presidential election, and called on the Government and all key stakeholders to privilege dialogue to make the elections inclusive, peaceful, free and fair.
7. The Heads of Mission lauded the peaceful nature of the 26 December 2017 run-off elections in Liberia and highly commended SRSF Farid Zarif for his key role and excellent leadership. They also appreciated the positive role played by former President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria in his capacity as a member of the United Nations Secretary-General High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation and by SRSF Mohamed Ibn Chambas of UNOWAS, in complementing the good offices of SRSF Farid Zarif of UNMIL, to help ensure an early and peaceful outcome of the electoral process. The Heads of Mission congratulated H.E. President George Weah and the people of Liberia for their effective elections and timely transition consistent with the Liberia Constitution. They noted that UNMIL would close at the end of March, and they looked forward to closely collaborating with the United Nations Resident Coordinator thereafter.
8. Participants stressed that the destiny of Liberia remained the responsibility of all Liberians and appealed the international community to step up its assistance to the country to further promote peace consolidation and sustainable stability following UNMIL's withdrawal.
9. The Heads of Mission denounced the recent election-related violence in Guinea, and expressed the hope that upcoming elections in West Africa, including in Sierra Leone on 7 March, will deepen democratic and participatory governance and maintain the successful trend in the region. They also deplored that women's participation in politics remains low, and urged to enhance efforts to reverse the trend in line with commitments and regional frameworks to this effect.
10. The Heads of Mission welcomed the launching of the Inter Togolese dialogue on 19 February, commended the leadership of President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana, and called on all Togolese stakeholders to engage constructively to come to a resolution reflecting the democratic aspirations of the people of the country.

11. The Heads of Mission commended the progress on the transition process in Côte d'Ivoire. Participants, however, called attention to the challenge presented by the upcoming Senate election scheduled for 24 March and the fact that it is being organized prior to the local and regional elections. They noted that in the lead-up to the 2020 elections, there is a need for increased political dialogue that could ease tensions both within the ruling coalition and with the opposition. Participants also emphasized the importance of continued progress on Security Sector Reform, including the implementation of the Military Planning Law, as well as social cohesion and national reconciliation. The meeting noted that continued UN good offices will remain essential to accompanying Côte d'Ivoire at this critical juncture.
12. The Heads of Mission expressed concern over the protracted political and institutional crisis in Guinea-Bissau, and welcomed the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to resolve the current crisis, and the 4 February decision to impose sanctions on those obstructing implementation of the Conakry Agreement. The Heads of Mission stressed the need to share with the Security Council the importance of consolidating the gains made by the UN in Guinea-Bissau. The Heads of Mission recognized the contributions of the ECOWAS security mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB) in promoting stability, and commended the decision of the ECOWAS Authority to extend its mandate until 31 March 2018. They called on the authorities in Guinea-Bissau to respect the right of peaceful assembly and ensure that conditions are in place to hold peaceful, inclusive, and credible legislative and presidential elections in 2018 and 2019, respectively, in accordance with relevant provisions in the national constitution and electoral laws.
13. The Heads of Mission expressed serious concern over the continued fragility of the security situation in West Africa in general and in the Lake Chad Basin countries in particular and the Sahel, often with distressing humanitarian consequences. They strongly condemned recent attacks against civilians, national armed forces and peacekeepers, and welcomed regional initiatives aiming to jointly address regional security threats and transnational organized crime, especially trafficking in small arms and light weapons. In particular, the Heads of Mission expressed concern about the abduction of more than 100 school girls in Dapchi, Nigeria, and called for their immediate release.
14. The Heads of Mission recognized that threats posed by the continued presence of perpetrators of transnational organized crime, drug traffickers and terrorist organizations in the region require increased and coordinated efforts by the United Nations and other international partners to assist national authorities in developing effective counter measures.
15. The meeting welcomed regional initiatives aimed at addressing persistent challenges to governance, security, humanitarian needs, and human rights, including sexual and gender-based violence, in West Africa and the Sahel.
16. The Heads of Mission noted the progress made towards the establishment of the G5 Sahel Force, while emphasizing that sustainability and respect of human rights are essential to the success of military operations. They further noted the importance of ensuring that populations and communities are at the centre of the efforts of government as well as regional and international partners. In this regard, they welcomed the recalibration of the United Nations Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) to improve the response to the structural causes of insecurity through the development-humanitarian-peace axis.
17. The Heads of Mission welcomed the participation of SRSG François Loucény Fall of UNOCA to the meeting and took note of his briefing on the situation in Central Africa and efforts made by regional States and organizations, including the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), to overcome the continued or emerging peace, security, governance and socioeconomic challenges facing Central Africa. They acknowledged that some of those issues have trans-regional and global ramifications and, in this connection, welcomed the decision by ECOWAS and ECCAS, to organize a joint Summit in the near future.
18. The Heads of Mission reiterated the support of the United Nations to regional efforts to fight insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. In that respect, they welcomed the operationalization of the Inter-Regional Coordination Centre (ICC) headquartered in Yaoundé. They encouraged UNOCA and UNOWAS to mobilize the international community to reinforce the capacity of the ICC, including by supporting the successful organization of the conference of donors for the ICC scheduled to be held in June.
19. The Heads of Mission agreed to continue to cooperate and to strengthen information-sharing between their missions on key issues affecting the region.
20. Participants expressed their gratitude to SRSG Mahamat Saleh Annadif for the warm welcome and excellent organization of the meeting.

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