

34th HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF HEADS OF UN PEACE MISSIONS IN WEST AFRICA

COMMUNIQUE

Bissau, 10 May 2019 - At the invitation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General 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 34th High-level Meeting on 10 May 2019 in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau.

The objective was to strengthen coordination in order to enhance synergies to address common challenges facing the West African and Sahel regions.

In attendance were the Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), José Viegas Filho and for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas; the United Nations Resident Coordinators for Côte d'Ivoire, Babacar Cissé, and Liberia, Yacoub El Hillo. The Director of Political Affairs for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) Bruno Mpondo-Epo also attended.

Discussions focused on recent security incidents in the region. They expressed their condolences to the families of victims, both civilian and military, including in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, as well as in the Lake Chad Basin while strongly condemning attacks against civilians and peacekeepers. They underlined the need for a multidimensional and regional approach to address the root causes of insecurity and called for enhanced cooperation amongst all relevant actors and concerned governments.

1. The Heads and other representatives of Missions commended efforts to sustain peacebuilding gains in Côte d'Ivoire and welcomed discussions on the reform of the Independent Electoral Commission, ahead of the 2020 presidential elections. They noted the ongoing re-composition of the political class and encouraged all parties to ensure that democratic expression takes place in a healthy political atmosphere. In that regard, they welcomed national and regional initiatives to help de-escalate tensions and urged all political actors to promote peace and stability in order to achieve the aspirations of the Ivorian people. They also stressed on the need for an early engagement of the UN in supporting the Ivorian people in the upcoming presidential elections.
2. The Heads of Missions expressed concerns at the ongoing political tensions and violence in Guinea and called on all actors to exercise restraint and engage in constructive dialogue to resolve their differences ahead of upcoming legislative and presidential elections with utmost respect for democratic principles and the rule of law.
3. The Heads of Missions welcomed the outcome of peaceful, credible and transparent parliamentary elections in Guinea-Bissau on 10 March; and commended national stakeholders and the international partners for the support and collaboration provided. However, they expressed concern that post-electoral stabilization efforts are facing serious challenges owing to the re-emergence of partisan divisions surrounding the elections of the members of the Bureau of the People's National Assembly (ANP). The Heads of Missions urged all political parties represented in the ANP to work together in a constructive manner to enable the legislative body to focus on the major post-electoral priorities. Moreover, they noted that the timely appointment of a new Prime Minister by the President of the Republic was crucial. They also urged national authorities and the National Electoral Commission (CNE) to complete the electoral cycle by organizing the presidential elections before the end of 2019, in compliance with the Constitution and the Electoral Law. The Heads of Missions encouraged partners, particularly the Group of Five (AU, CPLP, ECOWAS, EU and UN) to continue to coordinate their activities and to support and engage the Bissau-Guinean political actors in order to foster genuine dialogue, peace and development in the country.
4. The Heads of Missions took note of the briefing on the current situation in Liberia, particularly plans to protest on 7 June and the ongoing dialogue by the government, pressure groups and opposition political parties to ensure that the protests are peaceful. The meeting enjoined the people and government of

Liberia to sustain efforts to address various political, economic and governance challenges facing Liberia and reiterated the importance of the maintenance of peace and security. They commended the UN Country Team's coordinated support to Liberia as well as the strong partnership between the UN, the AU and ECOWAS, particularly on conflict prevention and good offices. The Heads of Missions called on the international community to continue its support to Liberia to further enhance peace consolidation and sustainable development.

5. The Heads of Missions took note of the recent change of Prime minister and formation of a new Malian government. They took note of the signing of a political agreement between the Prime Minister and political parties and stressed the importance of accelerating the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement to firmly anchor Mali on the path of stability and lasting peace. They also called on political parties and civil society organizations to continue playing a key role in the implementation of institutional reforms that are at the core of the agreement.
6. On Nigeria, the Heads of Mission welcomed the holding of generally peaceful presidential and federal legislative elections on 23 February as well as governorship and state assembly elections on 9 March. They congratulated President Muhammadu Buhari, winner of the presidential election and encouraged Nigerians to continue working towards national cohesion and unity and the consolidation of democracy in the country as well as the region. They commended UNOWAS for its good offices and support to Nigeria during the elections. The Heads of Mission deplored the attacks and the current rise in the violent activities of the Boko Haram insurgency, intercommunity violence as well as the killings in the Middle Belt and the North West. They urged the authorities to hold perpetrators of these crimes accountable.
7. The Heads of Mission congratulated the President of Senegal on his re-election, commended the Senegalese people for keeping the long tradition of peaceful elections, and called for building of broader national political consensus to consolidate Senegal's role as one of the beacons for democracy in the region.
8. The Heads of Missions also expressed concerns at the large number of unresolved petitions filed in court by Sierra Leonean parliamentarians on constitutional and electoral matters, highlighting the volatility of the political environment and threatening national cohesion. They called on political parties to refrain from using violent and hateful speeches and to promote dialogue to resolve political differences and strengthen national cohesion.
9. The Heads of Missions commended the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for its efforts to promote peace and stability in the region, particularly in addressing the situations in Togo and Benin. They appealed to Togolese stakeholders to put the interest of their nation above all sectional and partisan interests, to exercise restraint and seek peaceful means to address grievances. While noting that local elections have been slated for 30 June 2019, the Heads of Missions underscored the need for inclusivity and transparency during this process as well as during presidential elections planned for next year.
10. Participants commended the steady progress registered in the UN transition processes in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, while calling for a continued focus on remaining challenges, further reinforcement of UN Country Teams and greater international support towards addressing remaining gaps, including cross-border security issues.
11. The Heads of Missions also agreed that UNOWAS should convene a meeting of Resident Coordinators in the Mano River Union countries and the Mano River Union Secretariat with a view to developing programmes to mitigate the various challenges in the Mano River Union area.
12. The Heads of Missions indicated that, although the conduct of elections in the region continues to improve, pre and post electoral periods continue to be characterized by tensions. In this regard, they called on authorities and national stakeholders to work together to ensure a level playing field and help create an environment that is conducive to the holding of peaceful, inclusive and credible elections in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Mauritania in 2019.

13. The Heads of Missions noted with concern the violence witnessed on election day in north and central Benin as well as in the post-electoral period. They called on the Beninese stakeholders to exercise restraint and encourage a consensual and peaceful solution in order to preserve peace and stability in the country.
14. The Heads of Missions welcomed the resumption of the operations of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, as recently welcomed by the Ministerial meeting on the Force held in New York on 28 March. They emphasized that a multidimensional approach, notably through the establishment of its police component, and respect for human rights are essential to the success of the Joint Force.
15. The Heads of Missions remain deeply concerned about the situation in the centre of Mali. In this regard, they advocate for a better alignment with the Sahel Support Plan which is aimed at promoting coherence, synergies and coordination in the context of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. This collaborative approach would increase multiplier effects to strengthening, *inter alia*, governance, resilience and security. They further noted the importance of ensuring that populations and communities are at the center of the efforts of Governments as well as regional and international partners. The Heads of Missions stressed the importance of a continuous resource mobilization for both security operations as well as development and humanitarian programmes in the framework of the UN Support Plan for the Sahel.
16. The Heads of Missions expressed deep concerns over the violence that has skyrocketed in the Sahel region between November 2018 and March 2019, with reports of a 31 per cent increase in incidents relative to the same period the previous year. They deplored that, in Burkina Faso alone, the United Nations registered 153 incidents in the first three months of 2019 as part of a trend of increasing violence in the northern and eastern parts of the country due to a convergence of factors, including the inadequate capacity of the defence and security forces to operate effectively throughout the country, the growing mistrust of the local population towards defence and security forces, and the porosity of the borders
17. While commending the Multinational Joint Task Force, the G5 Sahel Force and Security and Defence Forces of conflict-affected countries, the Heads of Missions expressed grave concerns over a cycle of ethnic violence and revenge targeting of civilians by both state and non-state actors in Burkina Faso and Mali; the continuing deterioration in the security situation in the Lake Chad Basin countries; bandit and militia attacks and herder-farmer clashes across Nigeria; and the corresponding challenging humanitarian situation across the region. The Heads of Missions stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges posed by terrorist organizations other violent non-state actors by focusing on security, respect for human rights and the rule of law, governance and development, while encouraging authorities to continue to domesticate the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and resilience of Boko Haram-affected areas of the lake Chad Basin.
18. The Heads of Missions recognized efforts by national, regional and international partners in the fight against transnational organized crime and trafficking in the region, acknowledging that the scourge of these practices continues to aggravate insecurity and threaten the stability of the region through funding of terrorist organizations and other violent groups. The Heads of Missions reiterated the threats posed by the continued presence of perpetrators of transnational organized crime, drug traffickers, terrorist organizations and other violent groups in the region and the urgency of the efforts by the United Nations and other international partners in support of national authorities.
19. 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. Heads of Missions urge governments and relevant stakeholders to continue improving the legislative and institutional framework for the respect of fundamental human rights which are key to democratic consolidation. The meeting also recognized efforts to promote gender equality in the region but called for significant progress especially, with regards to women's participation in political and peacebuilding processes at all levels.

20. The Heads of Missions exchanged on best practices and lessons learnt on transitions.
21. The Heads of Missions agreed to continue to cooperate and to strengthen information-sharing between their missions on key issues affecting the region.
22. Participants expressed their gratitude to SRSG Jose Viegas Filho for hosting the meeting and agreed that the venue of the next meeting will be announced following consultations.