



## PRESS RELEASE

### **35th HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF HEADS OF UN PEACE MISSIONS IN WEST AFRICA**

**Dakar, 04 February 2020** - 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 35th High-level Meeting on 04 February 2020 in Dakar, Senegal.

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 Mali (MINUSMA), Mahamat Saleh Annadif, in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), Rosine Sori-Coulibaly, and for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Central Africa (UNOCA) François Louncény Fall, the United Nations Resident Coordinators for Côte d'Ivoire, Philippe Poinot and Liberia, Kingsley Amaning, and the Director for Western Africa Division of the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Operations, Abdel-Fatau Musah also attended.

Discussions focused on the political, socio-economic and security situation and trends in West Africa and the Sahel and their impact on neighboring regions including the Central African region. They expressed their condolences to the families of victims of attacks by violent extremists, 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 Special Representatives and Heads of Mission and Resident Coordinators commended efforts to sustain peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire and welcomed the recent launch by the Government of a new phase of political dialogue on the Electoral Code, ahead of the 2020 presidential election. They expressed concern about the growing crisis of confidence between key actors in the electoral process and encouraged a constructive engagement of all stakeholders in the dialogue, to ensure a broad consensus and inclusivity in the electoral process. The participants welcomed the efforts of the Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Electoral Needs Assessment Mission, deployed from 11 to 22 November 2019. The participants also welcomed regional and international initiatives to enhance the credibility of the electoral process and urged all political actors to promote peace and stability.

2. The Heads of Mission expressed concerns at the ongoing political tensions and violence as well as human rights violations 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. They encouraged all actors to take steps to promote social cohesion and avoid the use of incendiary language.

3. The Heads of Mission welcomed the holding of peaceful presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau completed on 29 December 2019; and commended the people of Guinea-Bissau for having actively exercised their civic duty, political actors for resorting to legal means in their dispute of the election results, and 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 persisting distrust and polarization between political actors. The Heads of Mission urged all political stakeholders to put national interests above personal and partisan considerations to build consensus on important national priorities to consolidate peace and stability. They encouraged partners, particularly the Group of Five (AU, CPLP, ECOWAS, EU and UN) to continue to coordinate their efforts 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 Mission took note of the briefing on the current political and economic situation in Liberia, particularly the January 6 protest, and welcomed dialogue by the government, pressure groups and opposition political parties that ensured that the protest was peaceful. They 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. The Heads of Mission also urged the National Elections Commission and the government to ensure the timely conduct of the Senatorial elections in October 2020, in conformity with the Constitution. They appealed to all political actors to refrain from using incendiary speech that undermines national reconciliation and social cohesion. They commended the UN Country Team's coordinated support to Liberia as well as the strong partnership between the UN, ECOWAS and international partners, particularly on conflict prevention and good offices. The Heads of Mission called on the international community to continue its support to Liberia to further enhance peace consolidation and sustainable development.

5. The Heads of Mission noted with satisfaction the holding of the Inclusive National Dialogue in Mali. The resulting resolutions and recommendations testify to the importance and relevance of the debates, which augur an improved political climate. The resumption of the work of the Monitoring Committee for the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali should be seized as an opportunity to accelerate the peace process. At the same time, the Heads of Mission expressed concerns over the deteriorating security situation and deplored the loss of life for both Malian and foreign forces, whose sacrifices they praised. They also encouraged the Government of Mali to continue taking the necessary measures, with the support of MINUSMA, to find lasting political solutions to the worrying situation in the Centre of the country.

6. The Heads of Mission welcomed the ongoing Political Dialogue in Senegal, expressed satisfaction about the important milestones achieved so far, and noted that a consensual agreement on a new electoral code ahead of the local elections will further consolidate Senegal's track record of democratic governance. They also welcomed the strong political commitment to fully implement all recommendations, as a move to build national cohesion in support of national development.

7. The Heads of Mission equally welcomed the holding of a political dialogue in Benin and encouraged all actors to promote inclusivity in political and electoral processes while highlighting the continued need for dialogue to address political grievances. They urged all actors to collectively work towards creating a peaceful atmosphere for the 2020 local elections.

8. The Heads of Mission welcomed progress being made in the preparations for the presidential election in Togo and encouraged all actors to commit to its peaceful conduct and address any disputes with the utmost respect for the rule of law.

9. The Heads of Mission encouraged the stakeholders in The Gambia to pursue key reforms towards post-transition stabilization with full respect for the rule of law, human rights and in the spirit of dialogue.

10. The Heads of Mission commended the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for its efforts to promote peace and stability in the region, particularly in promoting peaceful electoral processes. They recognized the leadership of ECOWAS in scaling up efforts to address the spread of violent extremism and terrorism and the implementation of decisions taken at the summits in Ouagadougou in September and Abuja in December 2019 in this regard.

11. The Heads of Mission welcomed increased collaboration between the Mano River Union (MRU) and the UN system in the MRU basin during 2019.

12. The Heads of Mission 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, transparent and credible elections in Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Burkina Faso, Togo and Ghana in 2020.

13. The Heads of Mission welcomed the scaling up of operations of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, in line with recent commitments made in Pau, France on 13 January 2020 by the Heads of State of France and the G5 Sahel countries. 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.

14. The Heads of Mission expressed deep concerns over the violence against the civilian population and security and defense forces, that has skyrocketed in the Sahel region in 2019. They deplored that, in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, terrorist armed groups have expanded their presence, leading to unprecedented numbers of internally displaced persons. They

applauded the collective resolve of the seven countries in the region within the Accra Initiative to enhance stronger cross-border partnership.

15. While commending the Multinational Joint Task Force, the G5 Sahel Force and Security and defense Forces of conflict-affected countries, the Heads of Mission 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; kidnapping for ransom, bandit and militia attacks and herder-farmer clashes across Nigeria; and the corresponding challenging humanitarian situation across the region. The Heads of Mission 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.

16. The Heads of Mission took note of the briefing provided by SRSG Fall on the situation in Central Africa and efforts by member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to promote peace, stability, good governance and socioeconomic development in the sub-region. They commended the ECCAS Heads of State and Government for the adoption of the ECCAS reform instruments on 18 December 2019 and reaffirmed the UN commitment to provide support for the implementation of the reform. They also welcomed UNOCA and UNOWAS determination to continue working closely with ECCAS and ECOWAS in support of the implementation of the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability, and the Fight Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Central and West Africa, and to operationalize the Interregional Coordination Centre for the Implementation of the Regional Strategy for Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa.

17. The Heads of Mission 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 and undermining of state authority and the formal economies of the region. The Heads of Mission reiterated the threat posed by the continued presence of perpetrators of transnational organized crime, arms, human and illicit drug traffickers, and the nexus between these activities and terrorist organizations and other violent groups in the region; further highlighting the urgency of the efforts by the United Nations and other international partners to support and help increase the capacity of national institutions to combat these enablers of terrorism and violent extremism.

18. 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 Mission 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. Furthermore, the Heads of Mission acknowledged the relevance and potential of a strengthened Civil Society in the region.

19. The Heads of Mission agreed to continue to reinforce their cooperation and exchange on best practices and lessons learnt on transitions within an integrated approach with the UN Country Teams in the spirit of the reform on repositioning the UN Development System.

20. The Heads of Mission agreed to continue to cooperate and to strengthen information-sharing between their missions on key issues affecting the region.

21. Participants expressed their gratitude to SRSB Mohamed Ibn Chambas for hosting the meeting and agreed that the venue of the next meeting will be in Bamako in November 2020.

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