

OHCHR WARO, UNOWAS, ECOWAS and the Network of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa organize a regional consultation for National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa and the Sahel

Communiqué

(Dakar 14 April 2018) The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights - West Africa Regional Office (OHCHR-WARO), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in collaboration with the Network of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa, organized a regional consultation for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) from West Africa and the Sahel from 12-14 April in Dakar.

During three days of deliberations, representatives of NHRIs from 14 countries¹ shared experiences, lessons learnt, discussed on some pertinent issues relating to the human rights situation in West Africa and the Sahel and proposed concrete recommendations.

The representatives addressed issues including: compliance of National Human Rights Institutions with the Paris Principles; reinforcing linkages between the work of NHRIs, United Nations treaty body mechanisms and the Universal Periodic Review process; mainstreaming human rights towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals; strengthening the role of NHRIs in promoting gender equality; enhancing the role of NHRIs in conflict prevention through the development and use of early warning indicators; leveraging the role of NHRIs in political reforms and electoral processes; integrating human

¹ Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

rights in initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism and enhancing the respect of human rights within the context of migration.

At the end of the consultations, the representatives of NHRIs resolved to collectively contribute towards reinforcing the culture of human rights in their respective countries and in West Africa and the Sahel.

They underscored the critical role of NHRIs in the region and agreed on a concerted approach in assisting each other comply with the Paris Principles with support from the UN and ECOWAS.

They recognized the need to continue accompanying and promoting constructive engagement with their respective member states in order to strengthen and implement their mandates.

Noting the added value of the United Nations Treaty Bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, as well as regional human rights mechanisms to the work of NHRIs, participants pledged to continue strengthening the operational and strategic ties with these mechanisms and to avail support to their respective states to implement their recommendations.

Further highlighting the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, participants identified a human rights based approach as a prerequisite to achieving the sustainable development goals as translated in national, regional and continental development frameworks.

In addition, the participants committed to pursuing initiatives aimed at enhancing gender mainstreaming and improving the respect of human rights within the context of migration in West Africa and the Sahel.

With respect to the promotion of peace and security in West Africa, recognition was given to the usefulness of the ECOWAS Early Warning Mechanism (ECOWARN) coordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) through the National Early Warning System (NEWS) and its growing contribution to conflict prevention in West Africa. The participants also agreed to integrate human rights into the existing early warning systems by systematically using the human rights indicators developed by ECOWAS at the regional level with the possibility of further developing specific indicators that are suitable to their respective national contexts. The participants acknowledged the significant contribution of NHRIs to political and electoral processes while requesting for support from the UN and ECOWAS to enhance their capacities in this regard.

The participants identified violent extremism as one of the main threats to the respect of human rights in West Africa and the Sahel and called for the respect of human rights in addressing this threat.

OHCHR-WARO, UNOWAS, ECOWAS and the Network of National Human Rights Institutions agreed to continue supporting such consultations which facilitate the work of NHRIs.