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UNOWAS

United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

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PRESS RELEASE

MRU-UN HIGH LEVEL PLANNING MEETING TO ENHANCE PARTNERSHIP

Dakar, 14 January 2021 - The Mano River Union (MRU) Secretariat and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), organized a two-day high-level meeting in Dakar, Senegal, from 13 to 14 January 2021.

The objective of the meeting was to review their joint work plan (2020-2021), and assess its state of implementation in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic and its impacts on the Member States of the Mano River Union. It also provided exchanges with ECOWAS and the United Nations Resident Coordinator Offices on recent elections in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.

The high-level meeting was attended by Ambassador Medina A. Wesseh, Secretary-General of the MRU, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General (SRSG) for West Africa and the Sahel, a representative of ECOWAS, the Regional representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for West and Central Africa, the United Nations Resident Coordinators of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, the Senior Regional Coordinating Officer of DCO Office in Dakar, and the United Nations Peace and Development Advisors of MRU's Member States.

The meeting noted with satisfaction that, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the planned electoral calendar in the countries concerned has generally been respected. Participants nevertheless deplored the electoral violence recorded in some Member States of the MRU sub-region. The COVID-19 pandemic was also identified as a significant constraint to the implementation of the joint MRU-UNOWAS work plan.

Participants welcomed the joint approach involving ECOWAS, MRU, development partners and the United Nations, which helped to ease tensions in Member States of the MRU and. expressed concern about the social tensions inherent in the sub-region while called for continued dialogue and consultation to resolve sources of tension. In that regard, the Meeting noted with satisfaction that national reconciliation and social cohesion are among the key priorities of the Member States.

In view of the above, and after due consideration of issues discussed, the meeting resolved as follows:

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- To increase advocacy with Governments of Member States for the reopening of borders, whilst assisting them to break and stop the upsurge of COVID 19 in the sub region.
- To foster social cohesion at border communities by building the capacity of JBSCBUs through training and infrastructure development;
- To strengthen collaboration and experience sharing between Elections Management Bodies in MRU Member States with a view to establishing a strong sub regional network
- To create a platform for increased advocacy on human rights issues, issues related to women and youth empowerment and women's increased participation in governance; and the fostering of cross border trade.
- Evaluate the MRU cross border strategy and develop a training manual on border management.

The participants expressed satisfaction with the commonalities of proposals from Member states and the convergence of views on all the issues and concerns raised and were happy with the spirit of mutual understanding and cordiality that prevailed throughout their deliberations. They further emphasized the need for reopening of borders while committing to stepping up efforts to confront the upsurge of COVID 19 infections in the sub region.

The participants expressed their appreciation to the Government of Senegal, the MRU Secretariat, and UNOWAS for the well-organized meeting and efforts to making it successful.

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