



Bureau des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest et le Sahel

UNOWAS

United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

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PRESS RELEASE

In Partnership with IOM, UNFCCC and UNEP, UNOWAS Launches UN Regional Working Group on Climate Change, Environment, Security and Development in West Africa

Dakar, 11 June 2021- On Thursday 10 June, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), in partnership with the West and Central Africa Office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Regional Collaboration Centre of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), launched a UN Regional Working Group on climate change, environment, security and development in West Africa.

The launch of the Regional Working Group is part of UNOWAS's initiatives following the Security Council's request to undertake risk assessments in the sub region to examine the "adverse implications of climate change" and to assist governments and the UN system to address these challenges.

The objective of the UN Regional Working Group is to combine knowledge and expertise of its members to promote an integrated and harmonized approach to climate change-related risks in coordination with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), linking regional policy development with local and national action.

"Climate change is a top priority for the United Nations. Climate change negatively affects all aspect of our societies", said the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovanie Biha, in her opening remarks, adding that while UNOWAS' mandate is focused on conflict prevention "each one of you will have different entry points to address climate change based on your respective mandates. This is the essence of this Regional Working Group: UN complementarity and regional cooperation with ECOWAS."

Mr. Christopher Gascon, Regional Director, IOM's West and Central Africa Office highlighted that "the Working Group must allow us to document, support and design concrete solutions with the communities and the people of this region, including the migrants." "If it's extremely important to keep on producing cross-cutting knowledge on the interlinkages between conflict

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and climate change in the region, this is also important to mobilize the environmental dimension as an opportunity,” he added.

For his part, the UNFCC Lead Advisor on Stakeholder and Regional Support Mr. Luca Busa, emphasized his organization’s commitment to their “policy of inclusive multilateralism, ensuring all sectors of society have a voice in the UNFCCC process in order to boost their climate ambition and action in an overall unity of purpose.” “and this working group will certainly help achieve that goal,” he said.

In the same vein, Ms. Elizabeth Sellwood, Head of the Environmental Security Unit at UNEP, stressed that “Because climate security risks are multi-dimensional, it is critical that we break the silos in which we too often work; this working group will not only promote greater collaboration across sectors and communities of practice at the regional level but also support the development of integrated approaches that leverage the mandates, specific expertise and added value of all UN partners.”

Reiterating the centrality of a coordinated and efficient approach in addressing the impact of climate change in the sub region, the Deputy Special Representative stressed the importance of aligning this new Regional Working Group with the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) to maximize synergies with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel.

UN partners expressed their readiness to commit to the Working Group, emphasizing the need to build on already existing programmes and activities at national and regional levels, to capitalize on good practice, including from other regions.

Members agreed to further concretize the terms of reference of the Group and to dedicate forthcoming meetings to, among other topics: integrated UN support to ECOWAS’ policy development on climate change; complementarity of the Working Group with the Security, Governance and Resilience Pillars of UNISS; briefing by the UNFCCC on COP 26 and its implications for West Africa; briefing by the Climate Security Mechanism on its services and engagements.

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