

31st HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF HEADS OF UN MISSIONS IN WEST AFRICA

COMMUNIQUE

Monrovia, 1 December 2017

1. At the invitation of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel 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 31st High-level Meeting on 1 December 2017 in Monrovia, Liberia.
2. In attendance were the Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General and Heads of UN missions in Liberia (UNMIL), Mr. Farid Zarif; in Mali (MINUSMA), Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif; and in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas. The United Nations Resident Coordinator for Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Babacar Cissé, also attended.
3. The objective of the meeting was to provide insights and exchange views on peace and security dynamics in the areas of operation of the respective missions and in the West African region as a whole, and to strengthen coordination in order to address common challenges in such areas as elections, transnational organized crime, violent extremism and terrorism, security sector and constitutional reform processes, as well as democratic transitions.
4. The Heads of missions lauded the peaceful nature of the 10 October elections in Liberia. They noted that compliance with the rule of law and due process is essential for strengthening Liberia's nascent democracy. The Heads of missions expressed hope that the electoral process would be concluded expeditiously, stressing that legal challenges should be legitimate and in good faith. They emphasised that the will of the Liberian people must be respected. The Heads of missions also noted the importance of complying with the constitutionally-mandated date for the inauguration of the new government in January 2018. In this connection, they underscored the need for all parties and stakeholders to exercise restraint, uphold the rule of law, and conduct all activities with civility and in a non-violent manner, including in their public discourse.
5. The Heads of missions further underlined that peaceful, free, fair and transparent elections are a prerequisite for peace consolidation and sustainable development in Liberia. They made it clear that the destiny of Liberia remains the responsibility of all Liberians, while emphasizing that the international community needs to continue assisting Liberia's development beyond the conclusion of the electoral process and UNMIL's withdrawal.
6. The Heads of missions expressed the hope that upcoming elections in West Africa will consolidate democratic progress and bring about an increase in women's participation in politics.

7. Following the recent instances of violence and loss of lives in Togo, participants also reviewed the ongoing consultations. In this matter, the Heads of missions commended the leadership by President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana and called on all national stakeholders in Togo to engage constructively in dialogue in order to come to a resolution reflecting the democratic aspirations of the people of Togo.
8. The meeting commended the successful completion of the peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire. Participants noted with concern the recurring mutinies, jail breaks and other security issues witnessed in Côte d'Ivoire. It emphasized that security sector reform as well as the loi de programmation militaire should be implemented effectively and without further delays. The meeting advocated for progress towards social cohesion and national reconciliation. In the lead-up to the 2020 elections, it also welcomed the good offices of the United Nations as and when required.
9. The Heads of missions expressed concerns about the protracted political and institutional crisis in Guinea-Bissau as well as the lack of progress on the decisions of the 51st Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government of 4 June 2017, and urged the parties to reach an understanding on the implementation of the Conakry Agreement and foster the holding of peaceful and credible legislative and presidential elections in 2018 and 2019, respectively.
10. Participants pointed to the recent security incidents in Mali and in neighbouring countries, including in northern Burkina Faso and western Niger, highlighting the need for enhanced regional security collaboration to address security threats, including measures to prevent and counter violent extremism as well as to fight illicit drug trafficking.
11. The meeting welcomed progress made over the past twelve months, in particular the 20 September document signed by the signatory groups, in which they recommitted to the immediate cessation of hostilities and the finalization of the peace-process timeline. Participants expressed concern about the slow pace of implementation of the Peace Agreement, and encouraged the signatory parties of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali to act decisively, pursue constructive dialogue and demonstrate their commitment to the peace process with concrete actions fulfilling their obligations to the Malian people. The meeting also noted the postponement of the elections previously scheduled for mid-December, and called on the Government and all key stakeholders to privilege dialogue to make the elections, now planned for April 2018, more inclusive, peaceful, free and fair.
12. Participants expressed serious concern over the continued fragility of the security situation in West Africa in general and in the Lake Chad Basin countries in particular and the Sahel, often with distressing humanitarian consequences. The Heads of missions strongly condemned recent attacks against civilians, national armed forces and peacekeepers, and welcomed regional initiatives aiming to jointly address regional security threats and transnational organized crime, especially trafficking in small arms and light weapons.
13. The Heads of missions recognized that threats posed by the continued presence of perpetrators of transnational organized crime, drug traffickers and terrorist organizations in the region require increased and coordinated efforts by the United Nations and other international partners to assist national authorities in developing effective counter measures. Those efforts should also be geared towards tackling drug trafficking as a source of funding for terrorism in the sub-region and beyond.
14. 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. The Heads of missions encouraged national, regional and international partners to pursue and support such initiatives, while being mindful of the need for coordination and cooperation.

15. Participants agreed to continue to cooperate and to strengthen information-sharing between their missions on key issues affecting the region.
16. Participants expressed their gratitude to SRSG Farid Zarif for the warm welcome and excellent organization of the meeting.