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Editorial

From preventive diplomacy to peaceful political transition in the Gambia

By Mohamed Ibn Chambas

West Africa has witnessed a series of peaceful presidential and legislative elections, held in accordance with the democratic standards and principles recognized by the African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations.

Definitively breaking with non-democratic practices dominated by the alternation of coups d'état and unlimited monopoly of power, Africa, and in particular West Africa, has moved serenely and resolutely towards political change based on the rules and principles of free elections that guarantee the choice of the people.

It is a political reality dictated by an awareness of Africans-citizens as leaders, that the objective of

development can only be achieved through a new political culture based on good governance and the respect of rights.

Undoubtedly, there is still some way to go. But no one can deny or underestimate the progress made in the upholding of electoral processes and political change that West Africa has just experienced.

From Nigeria to the Gambia via Benin and Ghana - to mention just a few examples - African leaders and citizens have demonstrated great political maturity and a strong sense of responsibility that must be welcomed and supported.

Apart from some minor incidents between supporters of the various candidates, the last ten elections in the West Africa region were

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UNOWAS promotes dialogue among stakeholders with a view to build consensus to unblock disagreements through multiple good offices missions and support to regional organizations such as ECOWAS, MRU and other regional partners.

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To read



The Lake Chad Basin is grappling with a complex humanitarian emergency affecting some 17 million people across north-eastern Nigeria, Cameroon's Far North, western Chad and south-east Niger. The combined impact of deepening insecurity, rapid population growth

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...Editorial

held peacefully and without any violence.

The example of the Gambia is in this sense significant. For a country that has been under autocratic rule for more than two decades, there has been little room for maneuver for peaceful political change.

Who would have thought that elections could be held freely? That the electoral commission could be independent and allow itself to announce results confirming the eviction of the power in place? And finally, who could have foreseen that the Gambians would peacefully vote and wait with a great sense of responsibility for the first results and the end of the political crisis brought about by Yahya Jammeh's reversal and his rejection of the announcement by the Independent Electoral Commission confirming the candidate of the opposition coalition, Adama Barrow, as the third elected president of the Gambia?

This political maturity and sense of responsibility represent the foundation of the regional preventive diplomacy that eased the departure of former President Jammeh and allowed a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

The joint ECOWAS-UA-UN mediation dispatched to Banjul in the aftermath of Jammeh's refusal to leave power testifies to the willingness of the countries in the region and of the regional organizations to ensure that the legal framework for peaceful political alternations is scrupulously respected. It also testifies to the determination of the regional organizations to appropriate problems and solutions in a preventive approach with the objective to safeguard peace and stability in the region.

The personal involvement of the presidents of Senegal, Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Mauritania and Guinea during the crisis illustrates the engagement of African leaders to do everything possible to prevent another conflict, and to maintain the region in a dynamic peaceful change.

The departure without violence of Yahya Jammeh and the inauguration of Adama Barrow is a success of the regional preventive diplomacy. It is also the fruit of the exemplary attitude of Gambians.

But this success of regional preventive diplomacy can only be complete and effective if The Gambia is committed to pursuing the process of political change by abiding by democratic principles.

The decision of the new President Adama Barrow to set up ►

They have said

► a joint transition team composed of members of the former administration and of the new one is a strong signal of the new authorities' commitment to the democratic process. The international community who was mobilized during the post-election crisis to assert the rule of law and the constitution must now provide the necessary support to consolidate the political change in The Gambia and to accompany the Gambians in their aspiration for development.

For this reason, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), in the wake of President Barrow's return to Banjul, has sent an expert in political transition to support the incoming and outgoing administrations, to have a serene transition, and ensure a peaceful change of power.

In the coming days, the joint transition team will report to President Adama Barrow. This will mark the end of the transition period and launch a new era of political alternation.

But the latter cannot constitute an end in itself as political, economic and social challenges are multiple and require a strong political engagement from the new authorities.

In a country where 60% of the population lives in poverty, where one third has to live do with less than \$ 1.25 a day, where there is a widening budget deficit that reaches 7% of GDP in 2016, the priority of new Gambian government will be undoubtedly to put in place economic recovery plans and launch structural reforms. The legislative elections scheduled for April 6 will be a real test for the ruling coalition.

Regional preventive diplomacy was crucial to safeguard the will of the Gambian people as expressed in the ballot box, and to strengthen peace in a region that needs it. Peaceful political transition is fundamental to consolidate the gains of political alternation through free elections.

The United Nations, and particularly UNOWAS - in coordination with regional organizations, will continue to support the Gambia in this important phase of its history.

Mohamed Ibn Chambas

Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel



Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President ECOWAS

"We applaud the people of the Gambia for their strong commitment and ardent desire to pursue democratic objectives as was demonstrated recently during the general and presidential elections"

[Learn more](#)



Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma: AU

The transition is significant in that it is the first peaceful transfer of power in the Islamic Republic of The Gambia since the country's independence in 1965.

[Learn more](#)



Jeffrey Feltman, USG for Political Affairs

The transition in the Gambia is "a very clear case of prevention," in which the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the UN were "all united behind the will of Gambian people."

[Learn more](#)

The Gambia, a peaceful change

In a landmark election on 1 December 2016, the Gambians queued patiently and peacefully to express their aspirations for change. Mr Adama Barrow was elected President of the Gambia.



Supporters wave Gambian's national flags as they cheer during the inauguration ceremony for the start of Gambian President Adama Barrow's presidency at the Independence Stadium in Bakau, west of the capital Banjul, on February 18, 2017. AFP PHOTO / SEYLOU

A historical day

In a landmark election on 1 December and after more than two decades of an authoritarian regime, the Gambians have expressed their aspiration for change through an historical vote that put an end to Jammeh's tenure.

Yahya Jammeh's, who came to power in a coup in 1994, was at first associated with a modernization drive and expansion of infrastructure, but later became increasingly erratic and associated to forced disappearances, restrictions of freedom of expression, and repression of dissent. After a peaceful demonstration in April 2016 demanding changes to the electoral laws, two opposition executives died in police custody, which President Jammeh said was "normal".

In a historical day marking the announcement of the results of the Presidential election, Adama Barrow of the United Democratic Party was declared winner by the Independent Election Commission on 2 December 2016 as the presi-

dential candidate of a coalition of seven opposition parties who united for the first time in Gambia's history to confront long-time ruler President Yahya Jammeh.

However, what was applauded by the international community as a significant example of a peaceful change of power in Africa became, suddenly, a political crisis due to the refusal by Yahya Jammeh to step down, even though he had initially conceded defeat, but later changed his mind, seemingly intending to stay in power at all cost.

Regional preventive diplomacy

What happened after the declaration of the election results on 2 December may well be the material of future textbooks on preventive diplomacy. Jammeh's U-turn not to recognize the results was met with a strong condemnation by regional and international partners. At their regular summit in Abuja in mid-December 2016, ECOWAS heads of state unequivocally committed themselves to an orderly and peaceful transition,

and came out with a strong collective message.

Several ECOWAS mediation missions, with the involvement of Presidents Buhari of Nigeria, Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia and Chairperson of ECOWAS, Koroma of Sierra Leone and Dramani of Ghana, subsequently engaged President Jammeh and maintained dialogue with other Gambian stakeholders. While logistic, legal, financial, and other preparations for a possible military intervention were under way, carefully choreographed messages by the international community kept mounting pressure on the regime, triggering multiple defections of civil servants and Gambia's Ambassadors abroad.

The moment Adama Barrow was sworn in on 18 January as the third President of the Republic of the Gambia in the embassy of the Gambia in neighboring Dakar, Senegal, he was simultaneously acknowledged by major actors, while the European Union announced the imminent resumption of support to The Gambia, which had been suspended due to concerns



over human rights violations.

The same day, the ECOWAS military operation was suspended, to give way to last-minute mediation efforts led by the Presidents of Guinea and Mauritania, and supported by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, who had played a key coordinating role throughout the crisis.

On 21 January, following a joint ECOWAS – AU – UN Declaration, former President Jammeh addressed the nation on TV announcing that he had decided to “relinquish the mantle of leadership”, and soon after left Banjul with his entourage for Equatorial Guinea. Five days later on 26 January, Barrow returned to Banjul from Dakar, where dignitaries and officials welcomed him on the tarmac. His convoy to town was met with thousands of jubilating supporters, many of whom wearing the #GambiaHasDecided t-shirts which just a week before were banned by the outgoing regime.

The nonviolent transition is all the more remarkable as not a single fatality had been recorded. While insisting on their democratic rights, throughout the process, Gambians displayed their well-known commitment to peace. Its success also gives testament to the determination of international and regional partners, with the support

and coordination of the United Nations, all pulling in the same direction. Moreover, it underlines the importance of the role of regional preventive diplomacy, and how democracy has come of age in West Africa since the transition to multi-party systems in the early 90ies and subsequent conflicts over resources and participation. It shows the strength of West Africa’s collective institutions, enshrined in ECOWAS’ Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. As a matter of fact, the Gambian election comes at the end of cycle of ten successful elections in West Africa, where, despite flaws, congratulating the winner, as in Nigeria, Benin, Cabo Verde, and elsewhere, seems to be becoming the new norm.

UN support for a peaceful political transition

Through its regional office, UNOWAS, the UN has continuously demonstrated its determination to support The Gambia laying out a strategic vision and plan for moving the country forward.

The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, who met recently with the new President of The Gambia (date), Adama Barrow, in Banjul, commended Gambians for their commitment to achieve a peaceful transition and for transcending individual interests for the benefit

of the country. He also offered the UN support in the area of voters’ education to prepare the parliamentary elections scheduled for 6 April.

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) played also a significant role in facilitating the establishment of the Joint Transition Team through the support of its Senior Expert in management of transitions who was deployed to Banjul since mid-January to assist and guide the new and the former administration coordinate a peaceful transfer of power.

On 15 February, President Adama Barrow officially launched the Joint Transition Team which will be responsible of ensuring a smooth transfer of power as well as an inclusive transition that will consolidate peace between Gambian people.

During the launching ceremony of the Joint Transition Team, President Adama Barrow stressed his commitment to the principle of continuity of governance, the need to initiate institutional and constitutional reforms in order to build durable and independent institutions. He also pointed out that the transition was not intended as an inquisition, but rather a salutary operation aimed at collecting facts that will inform the policy-making.

For their part, former ministers including the former Vice-President who are members of the Joint Transition Team, assured the new government of their full cooperation and readiness to achieve the transition process.

The Joint Transition Team is expected to submit in the coming days its report to President Barrow which will mark the end of the transition period.

THE GAMBIA POLITICAL CHANGE IN 14 KEY DATES

1st December 2016

Presidential electoral period

01 December 2016

⇒ Presidential election day. Gambians went peacefully to the polls.

1

02 December 2016

⇒ The Independent Electoral Commission announced preliminary results and declared Adama Barrow President-elect.
⇒ In a TV statement Jammeh accepted the results.

2

06 December 2016

The Electoral Commission issued a statement revising the results (With a margin fewer than 20,000 votes initially announced). But said that Barrow has still won the election.

3

6th December 2016

9th December 2016

Crisis period which started with the rejection of the outcome of the election by Jammeh Mediation efforts were led by regional organizations and the UN

09 December 2016

⇒ President Yahya Jammeh reversed his initial position and rejected revised results by IEC, and called for a new election.
⇒ The UN SC called on Jammeh to step down and to transfer power to Barrow.

4

13 December 2016

A high-level joint ECO-WAS-AU-UN delegation was dispatched to Banjul to convince President Jammeh to transfer power to Adama Barrow.

5

18 December 2016

During its 50th ordinary session, ECOWAS Member States designated Presidents Buhari of Nigeria and Mahama of Ghana as Mediators in the Gambia political crisis.

6

17 January 2017

⇒ Jammeh declared a state of emergency.
⇒ The National Assembly voted a resolution extending Jammeh's mandate.

7

18 January 2017

End of Jammeh's mandate as per the Gambian constitution.

8

19 January 2017

⇒ Adama Barrow sworn in as the new President in the Embassy of The Gambia in Dakar.
⇒ The UN SC adopted the resolution 2337 endorsing the recognition by AU of Adama Barrow as the President of The Gambia
⇒ ECOWAS "Standby" force entered in The Gambia.

9

20 January 2017

In a mediation of the last chance, Presidents of Guinea and Mauritania supported by SRSG Ibn Chambas engaged another round of talks with Jammeh

10

20th January 2017

21st January 2017

Peaceful end of the crisis - Success of the preventive diplomacy which allows Gambia entering into a new era

21 January 2017

⇒ Following hours of talks, Jammeh accepted to step down and confirmed his departure in a TV statement.
⇒ An ECOWAS-AU-UN declaration was issued.
⇒ Jammeh left Banjul

11

26 January 2017

President Barrow returned to Banjul from Dakar.

12

18 February 2017

President Adama Barrow retook his oath of office during the independence celebration, a month after he was sworn in as President in Dakar.

14

15 February 2017

With the support of UNOWAS a Joint Transition Team was established by President Adama Barrow to ensure a peaceful transfer of power

13

18th February 2017

Nana Ato Dadzie: *“Our mission in The Gambia is to identify the bottlenecks to smooth transition”*

All over Africa there is a great attention and investment in the electoral process but unfortunately little attention is focused on the transition process, says Mr. Nana Ato Dadzie, expert in political transition, who is currently in Banjul as part of the UNOWAS support to ensure a peaceful political transition in The Gambia.



Nana Ato Dadzie: UN Senior consultant on political transition

1) Concretely what is the role of an expert in political transition?

An expert in political transition assist and facilitate a country in delivering a peaceful and orderly transfer of political power from one democratically elected President/Government to another democratically elected President/government.

All over Africa there is a great attention and investment in the electoral process but unfortunately little attention is focused on the transition process.

Records of post - electoral violence in Africa, tend to indicate that majority revolve around transition issues arising from absence, novelty, paucity of administrative/ institutional /legal framework for managing transition. See Ivory Coast etc

The expert's work is to assist identify, classify, and make recommendations to the appropriate authorities, to remedy the weaknesses so established to ensure that the present and future transitions

are better managed , orderly and peaceful to avert breakdown of the process which invariably leads to threats of or violence .

All over Africa there is a great attention and investment in the electoral process but unfortunately little attention is focused on the transition process.

2) Tell us about your role as expert in transition in The Gambia.

The Gambia reflects a typical case of failure of a transition process.

Having unconditionally accepted defeat at the 01 December 2016 Presidential polls on 02 December 2016, the next constitutional step for ex-President Jammeh was the transfer of power to the winner, Mr Adama Barrow.

What went wrong? What administrative/institutional /legal framework existed to ensure compliance with this constitutional

mandate?

Records indicate both incoming and exiting presidents set up parallel transition teams to facilitate transfer of power. Why did this process fail? What created opportunity for the ex-President to belatedly recant his voluntary concession of defeat. Our mission in The Gambia among others, is to identify the bottlenecks to smooth transition in The Gambia transition 2016 and among other things:

a) to assist to salvage the botched transitional process and put it back on track.

b) to assist the people of The Gambia lay a more solid foundation for peaceful and orderly management of future transitions .

3) What are the challenges you faced with interacting with the new and former administrators?

A basket full. Transitions are generally bridges which normally come into been between election and assumption of office by the new President. In Gambia, we came in when the tenure of the previous President had run out. After the new President had assumed office.

The former President had in fact, moved into exile and was out of the Jurisdiction.

Unavailable to properly hand over.

His government had indeed, collapsed through resignations, dismissals and abandonment even before he left the jurisdiction.

Many Former Ministers had also left the country. In any case, many of the Ministers believed they had no obligation nor felt constrained, compelled or obliged to submit to any belated formal handing over process.

The fragile security situation, days after the assumption of office and return of the new President in The Gambia presented its own challenges to the old Ministers and appointees.

Numerous behind the scenes consultations and assurances with the assistance of UN /UNDP office in The Gambia ultimately greatly facilitated the readiness of the former appointees to submit to this process of accountability; to deepen peace and stability and to restore the country to rapid normalcy.

The late announcement of Ministerial and other new appointments, coupled with the fact that except for 2 of the new Ministers and appointees, the rest were rank novices in public administration platform, heightened our challenge.

Once appointed new administrators however showed immense interest in quickly learning the ropes.

A weakened, inefficient and over politicized civil service, eliminated our last ballast and resource that could have assisted in our engagement with the old and new ministers and administrators.

4) The Joint Transition Team has been established, what is so far your assessment of the work accomplished?

That we could ultimately muster 17 out of 19 former Ministers and other ex-appointees and the former Vice President back to the conference room after their disen-

agement and the prevailing security atmosphere was significant.

The Joint Transition Team inauguration by H. E President Barrow himself, his inspiring leadership message and a group picture of HE the President with both former President Jammeh's Ministers and the current Ministers of State went viral.

The leadership advocacy role played by the 2 Co-chairpersons (the former Vice-President and the then current Vice-President of The Gambia, Madam Fatoumata Tambajang) provided a huge platform for dialogue and healing among the national leaders at the plenary meeting.

The leadership advocacy role played by the 2 Co-chairpersons provided a huge platform for dialogue and healing among the national leaders at the plenary meeting.

This process ultimately broke down fears and suspicions and gave assurances of safety and security to the ex-officials and indeed, all Gambians.

The Joint Transition Team operations has created greater awareness in the national leaders of the possibility of political alternation and transitions and the need for adequate preparation of a legal framework and institutional /administrative structures to better manage transitions in the future.

Slow Collation of data ; instability in staff placement in the civil service ; unavailability of some key administrative staff at post ; absence of records and mechanism for tracking records remains a challenge for the completion

of the work of the joint transition team ,

President Barrow 's administration should now have sufficient space to operate and deliver its avowed catalogue of democratic reforms.

5) How do you envisage the post-transition period evolving ?

The inauguration of the Joint Transition Team and the publicity it provided created substantial public excitement reverberating with call for national unity, peace and reconciliation and avoidance of undue acrimony between opposing political parties to ensure normalcy in the State.

The rapid return to near normalcy is among other factors must have contributed to the scaling down of the Ecomig Troops from 7000 strong soldiers to 500.

President Barrow 's administration should now have sufficient space to operate and deliver its avowed catalogue of democratic reforms.

In the medium term, the expert advocates a National Conference to mobilize national consensus on the setting up of an institutional / administrative/legal framework involving the creation of an Office of Administrator -General, to better manage future transitions and make them more orderly and peaceful.

The Conference is to ensure the creation of a national awareness and consciousness of the need for this critical stability bridge between election and the assumption of office of a New President/government.

As Gambia crisis passes, displaced return from Senegal

Several thousand people have returned to the Gambia since ex-president Yahya Jammeh ceded power.



People started to return to The Gambia as soon as they heard the news that Yahya Jammeh had left the country UNHCR / Helene Caux

ZINGUINCHOR, SENEGAL (UNHCR) – John* could not hide the relief on his face as he waited with his wife and children for a bus at Senegal's Selety border crossing to take them back to their home in the Gambia after two weeks of awful uncertainty last January. "It is over, we are going back home," he grinned, one of more than an estimated 40,000** people who have returned to their native Gambia since the political crisis there ended on 19 January when former president Yahya Jammeh ceded power and went into exile. Movements of returns to the Gambia have been taking place on a regular basis since Yahya Jammeh left the country on 20 January.

John explained that he decided to leave his home in the town of Kunkujang-Mariam, in the Serrekunda

region as Jammeh refused to accept the results of the December 1 presidential election, which was won by opposition leader Adama Barrow. This sparked a regional crisis and prompted more than 76,300 people to seek shelter in Senegal according to Senegalese authorities.

"We just did not know how things would turn out. Thank God, the blood bath has been avoided,"

"We just did not know how things would turn out. Thank God, the blood bath has been avoided," 42-year-old John said, echoing the thoughts of many who had feared the situation in the Gambia could tip into violence. Like many he praised host families for their warm welcome in Senegal. "Peo-

ple have opened their homes for us, we stayed with a family we did not even know. They have been very, very nice."

Helping displaced people

Authorities in the Gambia have been sending buses to border points to help the displaced return home. John and his wife and children prepared to take one to West Field Junction, in the Serrekunda region. From there, they planned to hire a car or take a taxi. People started to return to The Gambia as soon as they heard the news that Yahya Jammeh had left the country on Saturday 20 January. On that day, 530 people crossed back through the Selety border crossing in Senegal's Ziguinchor region. On Sunday 21, the number grew to over 3,700, with as many again on Monday 22, some

heading home in private cars, on motorcycles, or hoping to board a bus. Others have been going back to the Gambia through informal crossings on the northern and southern borders.

“I used to cook one kilo of rice a day for my own family,”

Some returning by boat to Banjul, the Gambian capital, were arriving on crowded ferries which are reportedly old and unsafe. During the crisis, people fled or hid in their homes, turning Banjul into a ghost town. A UNHCR team in Banjul said that some normalcy had quickly begun to return, as some schools and shops re-opened.

During the political impasse, thousands of displaced people from the Gambia were hosted by families in Senegal. Many, like Mariama* – who was hosting up to 15 people in her home, including a cousin

and her baby – have struggled to feed them. “I used to cook one kilo of rice a day for my own family,” said Mariama. “Now, with the new people I am hosting in my home, I cook three to four kilos a day. I had to dig into our food resources to feed everyone. It is okay – we need to help them – but now, in order to have extra money to buy rice, I prepare and sell breakfasts to people in my neighbourhood.”

Fourty tons of rice arrived in Ziguinchor region in the third week of January and distribution started in several villages hosting displaced people.

To meet the needs of both displaced people and their hosts, the Senegalese government has been quick to act. The authorities delivered and distributed several tons

of food to the displaced and host families – including rice, oil and sugar. Fourty tons of rice arrived in Ziguinchor region in the third week of January and distribution started in several villages hosting displaced people. In addition to food aid, the government is also providing mattresses, matts, sheets, blankets, and soap to those in need.

An estimated 3,500 people also sought safety in Guinea Bissau during the crisis, with 2440 who have since returned by themselves to the Gambia.

** Names changed for protection reasons*

*** Figure from Senegalese authorities as off early February. This figure refers to people who have returned homes in The Gambia through buses orgnaized by Gambinaa nd Senegalese authorities.*

By UNHCR Dakar



Eighteen-year-old Maimouna is returning home in the Gambia after being hosted several weeks by family members in a village by the border in Senegal UNHCR / Helene Caux

#FreePress for a #NewGambia: UNESCO and EU bring tools of the trade to media in The Gambia

With a 691,583 euro grant from the European Union, UNESCO is building media capacity in the Gambia through providing equipment and developing journalism education and an enabling environment for freedom of expression and access to information in the Gambia.



“For peace to be lasting and development to be sustainable, human rights must be respected. Everyone must be free to seek, receive and impart knowledge and information on all platforms, online and offline. Quality journalism enables citizens to make informed decisions about their society and their contribution to development. But in order to do so, tools – both intellectual and material - are necessary” underlined Gwang-Chol Chang, Director a.i. of the UNESCO Regional Office for West Africa (Sahel) in Dakar speaking on February 22nd at the Gambia National Commission for UNESCO, where a ceremony was held to deliver media equipment to beneficiary newspapers, the Gambia Press Union, and the University of the Gambia.

In the Gambia, as in many countries around the world, media

professionals often lack the necessary resources and capacities to exercise their activities. Difficulty accessing information and lack of equipment and training are among the daily challenges faced by media professionals. This project is addressing some of these issues, namely professional development and training and the economic viability of media houses.

“A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of democracy”

The overall objective of this project, which will continue through June 2017, is to contribute to better democratic governance through improving freedom of the press and the quality of information available to the Gambian population.

“A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of democracy” Ambassador Attila Lajos of the EU Delegation to the Gambia underlined. Fatou Kinneh-Jobe, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure, underlined that the Gambia must take advantage of President Adama Barrow’s statement that the media, both public and private, must enjoy freedom to disseminate divergent views and dissenting opinions.

“As the New Gambia consolidates the new democracy, the onus is on you, the journalists, to ensure that the news you provide is credible and that it promotes peace, cohesion and development. I cannot overstate your responsibilities as peace and development agents. Let your pen and voice be your weapons of victory” emphasized Ade Mamonyane Lekoetje, United



Nations Resident Coordinator in the Gambia, during the ceremony.

The delivery of equipment comes days after President Adama Barrow's inauguration in Banjul on February 18th. This project promotes excellence in journalism in recognition that journalism education is an important part of developing a free and independent media. The project also reinforces gender equality in the media and the development of training curricula and materials. It also contributes to reinforce freedom of expression and access to information.

Primary beneficiaries of this project include media houses, newspapers, community radios, the Gambia Press Union, and the University of the Gambia. Through June 2017, capacity building initiatives will occur, as well as training of Gambian security forces on the safety of journalists and freedom of expression to support the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Jour-

nalists and the Issue of Impunity. Furthermore a formal platform for dialogue between media and the Government will be established in order to support the revision of existing regulatory frameworks concerning freedom of expression and access to information in order to align them with international human rights standards.

“To further buttress the importance of Press Freedom, the New Gambia has stressed its unwavering desire to respect the fundamental principles of press freedom and respect to journalists who strive to uphold the ethics of their profession.”

With longstanding experience in promoting excellence and training in journalism, UNESCO has

been identified for the implementation of this project as the UN agency with the mandate to support the fields of communication, media, and journalism. “To further buttress the importance of Press Freedom, the New Gambia has stressed its unwavering desire to respect the fundamental principles of press freedom and respect to journalists who strive to uphold the ethics of their profession. UNESCO will maintain a strong partnership worldwide to uphold this ideal for a better and informed world” the UN Resident Coordinator in the Gambia confirmed. The project directly contributes to the achievement of 2030 Development Agenda's goal (SDG 16) to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

By UNESCO Dakar

OHCHR to increase its support to The Gambia as new era begins

With the departure of Mr. Jammeh and the inauguration of President Adama Barrow, a new era has begun where human rights principles will be respected.



People wearing t-shirts reading «We are all Gambians» demonstrate in Dakar against alleged human rights violations in Gambia (AFP Photo/Seyllou)

In his speech, on 18 February 2017 during The Gambia's 52nd Independence Day celebration in Banjul, Mr Adama Barrow, the new President of The Gambia, declared that during his tenure the promotion and protection of human rights would be at the core of his policy and reforms. "A Human Rights Commission would be established without delay", said the freshly elected President.

It is an historical gain that The Gambians will be experiencing after two decades of suffering.

Under the former regime of President Yahya Jammeh, systematic and countless violations have occurred which have exacerbated an already hostile and repressive political environment: Enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and restrictions on freedom of expression, assem-

bly and association. Heavy-handed attempts by the government to side-line opposition voices, such as arbitrary arrests and detention of civil society representatives and journalists.

A historical gain

Despite the government multiple restrictions and lack of cooperation under Jammeh's administration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in West Africa (OHCHR – WARO) has demonstrated a strong engagement to support the Gambians through a determined and regular promotion and protection of the human rights in The Gambia.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has consistently and in various occasions condemned human rights violations that were taking place

in the country, including in the aftermath of the mass arrests during the peaceful protests on 14, 16 April and 9 May 2016 and the detention of dozens of political opponents, supporters and bystanders, including the conviction of 30 opposition members. He also called on Jammeh to respect the result of the elections, the democratic process and the rule of law.

But today the situation has changed and the new President's commitment is a huge step toward the consolidation of human rights which OHCHR will support.

"The OHCHR will enhance its support and cooperation with the new authorities to ensure that Human rights are institutionally anchored in their concerns," said Andrea Ori, the Representative of the Dakar based Regional office of OHCHR.

Challenges and supports

In this vein, OHCHR has undertaken several key missions and activities to the Gambia to ensure that a timely and effective support is provided to the new authorities. A technical expertise in the drafting process of a bill to establish the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in line with international standards has been provided in addition to the regular support to the office of the Resident Coordinator which was put in place since the presidential election.

In response to the announcement by the President Barrow to launch a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to investigate the alleged human rights violations and abuses committed during former President Jammeh's regime, OHCHR will be able to assist in developing standards and operational rule of law tools and the design that is needed for the implemen-

tation of transitional justice mechanisms.

In the meantime, OHCHR has also called upon the new government to ensure future promotion and protection of human rights and has pleaded for the release of all political prisoners. "OHCHR is pleased to note that Mr. Barrow has stated that his Government will undertake key constitutional and legal reforms to enforce constitutional provisions that are entrenched to protect the fundamental rights of citizens", said Andrea Ori.

To mark its actions towards a new era respectful of human rights, the Government has ordered the release of all persons detained without trial. However, despite the fact that many political prisoners and detainees have been released, many cases remain unaccounted for, especially cases of disappearances. Gambians, who were illegally arrested and detain-

ned, tortured, sacked, deprived of their properties or lost members of their family are calling for justice and reparation.

Many other human rights domains will require OHCHR expertise and assistance: public administration, security sector and the judiciary are suffering of lack of human and financial resources and professional capacity. The support of the international community, particularly to promote and strengthen human rights, is paramount. The change of regime is an opportunity for the UN in general and OHCHR in particular to increase its assistance to help the new government initiate new reforms of the institutional framework and strengthen the capacities of state actors, non-state actors and oversight bodies to ensure that accountability and rule of law prevail in The Gambia.

By OHCHR Dakar



A marching band in Farafenni, a market town in The Gambia, just south of the border with Senegal. Photo: UNFPA The Gambia

Salieu Taal, a lawyer who turned activist and the initiator of GambiaHasDecided (GHD) during the political impasse in the Gambia precipitated by Jammeh's decision to reject December 1st elections, says that the Gambians should not shy away from asserting their rights as citizens and holding their representatives accountable for decisions they make on their behalf.



1- When and how the GHD was born?

GHD is a civil society initiative started in the Gambia by a group of young Gambian professionals based in the Gambia after outgoing President Jammeh decided to annul the December 1st elections. I invited a group of friends and acquaintances to my house to discuss ways to channeling our anger and frustration after Jammeh's decision to cancel and annul the December 1st elections. We met and brainstormed over pizza and local Nigerian food (suya) and agreed to launch a campaign around the hashtag [#GambiaHasDecided](#) with the singular purpose of mobilizing public against Jammeh's illegal decision and asserting our democratic rights as citizens. Our membership included young women professionals,

entrepreneurs, social activists, music promoters, media and IT professionals. Collectively we came up with a strategy that would use the internet to make the GambiaHasDecided viral and reinforce the message locally by producing t-shirts and erecting bill boards around strategic areas within the country with the message [#GambiaHasDecided](#). We initially funded the entire budget for our campaign and subsequently raised funds through our networks and gofundme account.

Now that Gambia has decided, GHD seeks to ensure that the decision of the Gambians is respected by the in-coming Government. Gambians fought for Democracy

2-Now that "The Gambia has decided", do you intent to play a specific role in the future?

Now that Gambia has decided, GHD seeks to ensure that the decision of the Gambians is respected by the in-coming Government. Gambians fought for Democracy, good governance and respect for the rule of law amongst other things. GHD is now evolving into a civil society organization that will play a role in ensuring that an inclusive democratic space is developed by all the stakeholders and ensure that structures, institutions are designed that will prevent abuse of power, intolerance and dictatorship. GHD has embraced the youths who have become our major stakeholders and working to ensure youths participate in nation building and begin to take up leadership positions in Government and the legislature. In summary, GHD focus areas are upholding democracy, promoting good governance, upholding the rule of law and civic education.

3-As a civil society actor, what is the message you want to deliver to the Gambians now that The Gambia is entering a new era?

As civil society actor, we just want to reiterate to the Gambian population that they have decided for a change and the change from tyranny to participatory and inclusive democracy. As a population, we must not shy away from asserting our rights as citizens and holding our representatives * Government and legislators) accountable for decisions they make on our behalf.

The G5 Sahel and UNOWAS review their roadmap

The two-year cooperation between the G5 Sahel (Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Niger) and the United Nations is a testimony to the willingness of both organizations to work together in addressing the challenges that hamper the development of the five Sahelian countries.



Cooperation between entities

In his speech at the opening of the meeting, the Permanent Secretary of the G5-Sahel, Najim El Hadj Mohamed, highlighted the quality of cooperation between the two entities, which he believes must be further strengthened through the realization of flagship projects and the development of a calendar of activities for the period 2017-2020, as well as a common G5/UN project matrix.

Meanwhile, Ms. Hiroute Guebre Sellassie, Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, recalled the commitment of UNOWAS to work closely with the G5-Sahel, primarily through the establishment of the UNOWAS Liaison Cell in Nouakchott, which plays a leading role in consolidating cooperation between the two entities.

The two-day meeting also allowed the two teams to discuss potential projects and funding needed for their launch, as well as the importance of a better partnership coordination with the various UN agencies.

Through their joint efforts, the G5-Sahel and the United Nations have been able to launch important projects such as the establishment of the «Security Cooperation Platform» and the Anti-Radicalization Unit, as well as the Sahel Women's Platform, which are examples of concrete achievements that demonstrate a privileged partnership and respond to the priorities contained in the Roadmap.

The two-year cooperation between the G5 Sahel (Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Niger) and the United Nations is a testimony to the willingness of both organizations to work together in addressing the challenges that hamper the development of the five Sahelian countries. It is with this mindset that, on 6 and 7 March in Nouakchott (Mauritania), a meeting was held between the G5 Sahel and the United Nations Office for West Africa and Sahel (UNOWAS) to assess the implementation of the roadmap and to develop a work plan that addresses the priorities and needs of the G5 Sahel countries.

Response to the multiple challenges

More than two years ago, the two entities were able to develop a road map aimed at harmonizing the priority projects of the G5-Sahel Priority Investment Program (PIP) and the Integrated Strategy

of the United Nations For the Sahel (UNISS), to provide an effective and coherent response to the multiple challenges related to governance, development and security, as well as resilience. It was therefore necessary for both partners to take stock of the state of progress of the projects and to revise the roadmap in the light of the latest developments in the region. Thanks to the roadmap, tangible progress was made to ensure ownership of projects and initiatives by beneficiaries by working closely with the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel. The integration of gender in the work of the G5 Sahel has seen improvements after the deployment of an Expert to the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel in Nouakchott. The meeting highlighted the need to update flagship projects jointly developed with the G5 Sahel to better take into account the evolution of the situation in the Sahelian space.

Forum of Special Envoys and Partners for the Sahel: UNOWAS reiterates its support to the Sahel

On 14 and 15 March, Mohamed Ibn Chambas participated the 4th informal meeting of the Special Envoys and the Partners for the Sahel, hosted by the Government of Luxembourg and co-chaired by the EU Special Representative for the Sahel, Angel Losada.



Special Envoys and partners for the Sahel during their meeting on 14 March 2017 in Luxembourg

Continued support

To renew their commitment and express their continued support to the Sahel region, representatives from various European Foreign Affairs Ministries, the G5 Permanent Secretary, the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, as well as several representatives of think tanks participated in 4th informal meeting of the Special Envoys and the Partners for the Sahel. The discussions focused on current economic, peace and security trends and developments in the Sahel and on the need for close coordination between national, regional and external actors, and on specific challenges posed to external cooperation.

The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-

General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, emphasized the continuous mobilization of the United Nations (UN) for the Sahel, as illustrated during the recent debates at the Peace Building Commission, and the coordination meeting between the G5 Secretariat and UN regional agencies held in Nouakchott on 6 and 7 March (see page 16). He put forward the UN's efforts in conflict prevention and its support to regional initiatives, notably through its collaboration with the G5 Sahel and through consultation mechanisms such as the upcoming Ministerial Coordination Platform for Sahel Strategies planned on 29-30 May.

commitment towards the Sahel

Participants agreed on the need for new approaches in light of

current security developments, in particular local conflicts, violent extremism and transnational crime. They also pledged their continuous commitment towards the Sahel and emphasized the complementarity of efforts, in particular with regard to military initiatives in the region. The Malian peace process and the establishment of the G5 Sahel regional force were also discussed.

The forum of Special Envoys was established under the former Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES) to ensure coherence and coordination between the major actors. The next meeting of the Special Envoys will be hosted by Sweden, in Stockholm, in September 2017.

CNMC continues its work to complete border demarcation

As part of the implementation of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC), the two delegations met in Yaoundé, in Cameroon, to discuss the work progress of the demarcation and to take stock of the security situation, especially after the January attack which cost the lives of 5 agents of the CNMC technical team.

An extraordinary meeting of heads of delegations of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC) took place on 8 March 2017 in Yaoundé under the Presidency of Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, and with the participation of Mr. Amadou Ali, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Cameroon, and Mr. Abubakar Malami, Minister of Justice of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

This extraordinary meeting comes after a deadly attack perpetrated on 31 January on a CNMC technical team carrying out its regular border demarcation mission. 5 people were killed including an independent UN contractor, three Nigerian nationals and one Cameroonian.

To complete the Demarcation

Since its inception on 15 November 2002, this is the first time the CNMC is victim of an attack of this magnitude. It was necessary for the parties to meet to renew their commitment to continue and complete the demarcation of the



Meeting of the Head of Delegation CNMC, 8 March 2017 in Yaoundé

border despite the tragic attack.

The heads of delegations also addressed the issue of security and the additional steps needed to protect CMCN officers on mission. In this regard, a meeting on the issue of security will be held in early April in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Heads of Delegations also expressed their satisfaction to the President of the CNMC for all the fundraising efforts that have mobilized 3 million Euros. They also pledged to contribute to the Trust

Fund, which will need to gather other contributions.

The CNMC was set up under the Joint Communiqué adopted at the Geneva Summit of 15 November 2002 between His Excellency Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon and His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, then President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the presence of His Excellency Kofi Annan, then Secretary General of the United Nations. The objective of the CNMC is to facilitate the implementation of the 10 October 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision on the Cameroon-Nigeria border dispute.

Following the deadly attack that caused the death of the five members of the Joint Technical Team of the CNMC, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) expressed its solidarity and sympathy to the families of the victims

at a ceremony held at UNOWAS headquarters in Dakar on Friday, 03 February 2017, during which a minute of silence was observed in memory of the victims cowardly killed by an unidentified armed group on 31 January 2017.

Lessons learned on conflict prevention in West Africa

On 26 and 27 January, UNOWAS and UNDP facilitated a regional consultation in Dakar to help prepare the World Bank-UN Study on “Making Development for Peace: The Role of Development in Preventing Violent Conflict”. During the meeting, participants discussed the importance of institutional collaboration in addressing political and security situations in the West African environment, which is one of the key aspects of UNOWAS’ mandate. The consultations brought together representatives from think tanks, civil society and UN agencies from the region to identify

key lessons and make recommendations in regards to conflict prevention. The participants discussed concrete cases of peace-building in post-conflict situations; regional experiences in the management of power transitions and crisis resolution; and addressing cross-border security challenges through regional mechanisms and institutions. The recommendations to the UN will feed into a full report, expected to be completed later this year, will focus on how structural factors, institutions and agency shape long-term prospects for durable peace.

«Palaver tree» on The Gambia

As part of its regular “palaver tree” sessions, a framework for discussions on governance and human rights issues established in 2012, UNOWAS convened on 28 February, an encounter with civil society organizations, think tanks, multilateral organizations and other actors to discuss the new political change in the Gambia following the inauguration of President Barrow.

After more than two decades, the people of The Gambia finds itself suddenly relieved of a dictatorial environment, but without rule of law nor a democratic framework in place.

The encounter was an opportunity to

exchange on a range of issues and challenges that the new authorities will have to tackle to initiate a coherent democratic reform process that covers political, human rights, governance, Rule of law as well as economic, social sectors, among others.

According to the participants, the new authorities should embark in constitutional reforms to ensure that a democratic framework is in place to guarantee the Rule of law for all Gambians. In this regard, they emphasized that the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, promised by President Barrow should play a constructive role in consolidating democratic gains and peace in The Gambia.

UNOWAS and ECOWAS discussed migratory trends in West Africa

On 25 January, UNOWAS and ECOWAS met in Praia, Cabo Verde, to discuss policy developments and current engagements with regard to migratory trends and perspectives in West Africa as well as tensions between pastoralists and other groups. Discussions focused on ways for UNOWAS to support ECOWAS in finding sustainable solutions to these challenges from a conflict prevention perspective. The meeting was co-chaired by UNOWAS DSRSG Hiroute Guebre Sellassie and by the ECOWAS Commissioner for Trade, Customs, Free Movement and Tou-

risism, Laouali Chaibou, with the participation of the IOM Regional Office. Both institutions agreed to strengthen their collaboration on the matter. ECOWAS and UNOWAS, as both institutions collaborate on issues such as preventive diplomacy, good offices missions and mediations, capacity-building for the prevention of post-election violence and to ensure peaceful democratic transitions, as well as for addressing the prevalence of cross-border crimes and promoting cross-border cooperation.

UNOWAS participates in the third G5 Sahel Ordinary Summit of Heads of State

From 5 to 6 February, UNOWAS Deputy SRSRSG Guebre Sellassie participated in the Third G5 Sahel Ordinary Summit of Heads of State in Bamako. During the meeting, she praised the G5 Sahel Heads of State and Government's efforts to promote regional cooperation, while pledging continued the United Nations' support to such endeavors. She also urged partners to tackle regional issues impacting on Mali and the Sahel and advocated for enhanced cooperation among partners on issues such as insecurity, migration, radicalization, good governance and human rights. She also recalled that progress made in the Malian peace process can help ensure security and peace not only in the country, but in the wider Sahel.

The Summit aimed at discussing the security situation in Mali and its impact on the Sahel region. It noted that the security situation in the Sahel was affected by the delinquency of the State in Libya and an increase in terrorist

attacks in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The Heads of State also expressed preoccupation about radicalization and violent extremism, proliferation of weapons, drug and human trafficking and their links with transnational organized crime, in spite of Malian peace agreement.

Finally, they put forward the creation of a G5 Sahel regional force to combat terrorism, organized crime, human and drug trafficking in the Sahel region, with a particular focus on Northern Mali. The force is expected to be molded into a brigade of five battalions contributed by the G5 countries, with a central command, a logistics battalion and an air force unit, to pursue joint cross-border operations as a means of combating threats in the region. The United Nations is reviewing the request to determine how the organization can contribute to operationalize this regional initiative.