

DECLARATION ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA

Abuja, 8th August 2012

The ensemble of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in West Africa under the auspices of the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSO F) has observed with keen interest and concern the present political situation in the region. Militarism and coup d'état are back on the agenda and in many countries, political instability, insurrections and democratic regression is on the agenda. On the 6th and 7th of August for example armed militants attacked military formations in Abidjan staging pitched battles.

MALI

Over the last few months, Mali has been shaken by incessant crisis, which culminated in the 21st March **2012 coup d'état** when mutinying soldiers overthrew the government of President Amadou Toumani Touré derailing thereby the constitutional order and creating the conditions for the full occupation of the north of the country by a rebel army of demobilized fighters from Libya and Islamic groups. The occupying forces in Northern Mali have been engaged in the massive violation of the human rights of citizens including rape, violence against women and inhuman and degrading treatment against people considered to have sinned against Islam. ECOWAS has made efforts since the crisis began to get the country to return to constitutional order through the establishment of a national unity government. The Acting President has returned to the country but unfortunately, the situation in Mali is not improving and chaos looms on the horizon as the military refuse to fully cede power. There is a high rate of population displacement into neighbouring countries, the implementation of SHARIA law as well as worsening humanitarian and security crisis in area. The Malian crisis could easily spill into the neighbouring countries of Senegal, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso. We join ECOWAS to welcome the return of H.E Dionkounda Traore as the interim President of Mali and we urge all stakeholders to continue to struggle for the establishment of a Government of National Unity in spite of the obstructions being created by the military.

GHANA

On July 24, 2012, Ghana slipped into shock and grief when the news about the death of the then President, H.E. Professor J. E. A. Mills was announced. He fell unwell while at work in his office, collapsed in his residence, and was rushed to hospital where he was pronounced dead thirty minutes later. In a smooth transition, the Chief Justice of Ghana swore in the Vice President as the President of Ghana within six hours in conformity with the Constitution. In line with the Ghanaian custom which requires that in times like this all should join in collective mourning and reflection on the life and times of the departed leader, leaders and presidential candidates of the various political parties suspended their elections campaigns and the media also suspended all political debates to show respect for the departed president and the bereaved family. With less than six months to the Presidential

elections, we join the Ghanaian people in mourning and urge them to remain steadfast in consolidating their democracy. The explanation for the smooth succession is embedded in the interplay of transparency, media vigilance, political maturity, general civic awareness of the procedure of succession, general observation of the Ghanaian custom of mourning a departed leader respectfully and peacefully and, above all, the willingness of all parties to comply with the provisions of the Constitution on Presidential succession.

NIGERIA

Nigeria is very important to the region as well as to the entire continent and we are deeply concerned about the state of insecurity in the country provoked by a growing insurgency and sectarian violence. The Boko Haram and Jos crises in particular are visiting ordinary Nigerians with an unending spate of bombings and killings of innocent citizens. Since Boko Haram began its campaign of bombings and carnage in 2009, hundreds of defenceless citizens, particularly in the northern part of the country, have been killed, maimed and displaced. The conflict, attacks and reprisal attacks of the Jos crisis reached a crescendo on Sunday the 13th of July 2012 when a serving senator of the National Assembly, Gyang Dantong, and Mr Gyang Fulani, Majority Leader in the Plateau State House of Assembly, lost their lives in a stampede after gunmen attacked them at Maseh village during a burial ceremony in Plateau State. The two lawmakers had gone to the village to join others for the mass burial of several dozens of villagers that were killed in earlier attacks by gunmen.

We have noted with disdain that there is no discernible coherence in the response of the Nigerian government to these atrocities and the collapse of public safety within the territory of the country. We observe with disdain that this could suggest a gradual decent into anarchy of the country and Nigerians seems to have lost faith in the ability of government to protect them from premeditated killings. We note with concern the inability of the Nigerian state to protect the lives of its citizens.

GUINEA BISSAU

Development, democracy and political stability gains in Guinea-Bissau have suffered a major setback following the military takeover of 12th April 2012 just a few weeks before the presidential run-off election that was scheduled for April 22nd 2012 when the military staged a coup that overthrew the constitutional government. A climate of fear and uncertainty has pervaded the country up till now, with repressive measures being employed by the military. Road-blocks have been set up throughout the capital, with cars routinely stopped and searched. Political actors and officials have reportedly been targeted and arrested and many citizens have reportedly travelled to the countryside or to neighbouring Gambia and nearby Senegal to survive the instability. The recent political situation in Guinea Bissau has disrupted life in the capital with schools closed; market sellers report vastly reduced trade and major banks closed down resulting in economic hardship for the populations. The political situation in Guinea Bissau has been unstable for the past several years and this most recent event has broad repercussions for the entire region. We observe that it has become the practice that each time elections are held in the Guinea Bissau and the winner is not endorsed by the leadership of the military; the likelihood is that the

latter will sooner or later stage a coup. In addition, there is growing evidence that elements in the military in Guinea Bissau are engaged in narco-trafficking. We are alarmed that since the military strike there has been an increase in drug trafficking and the country is becoming a hub for gangs smuggling cocaine from Latin America to Europe. We applaud current efforts of the international community (including ECOWAS, African Union and the UN) to restore the rule of law and constitutional order in Guinea Bissau.

The West Africa Civil Society Forum, aware of the danger facing states in the region within a context of generalized political and economic crisis:

- Request the ECOWAS Commission
 - To remain focused on taking charge of the situation in Mali and Guinea Bissau to take any action deemed useful for a rapid return to normalcy and constitutional order.
 - To take action to support a humanitarian crisis in Mali
 - To step up efforts to facilitate political solution in Mali and Guinea Bissau by facilitating a government of national unity into the States.
 - To facilitate the re-structuring of the military forces in Guinea Bissau.
- Call upon the international community including the United Nations:
 - To support the ECOWAS in the operation of restoring the integrity of the territory in Mali and Guinea Bissau
 - We call on the UN Secretary General to "actively engage" in efforts to harmonize efforts by the different regional groups to get a grip on putting pressure on the junta.
 - To step up efforts to convene a high level meeting that will produce an "integrated strategy and a roadmap with short and long term actions for the full restoration of constitutional order" in Mali and Guinea Bissau.
- Urge
 - The Heads of State of ECOWAS and the international community to find the best ways to restore the territorial integrity of Mali and Guinea Bissau
 - The government of Nigeria to formulate and articulate a rational, effective and progressive approach to the national crisis as well as decisive action within the law to tackle the growing menace to the peace and security in the country.
 - H.E Dionkounda Traore, the interim President of the transition in Mali to remain committed to overseeing the establishment of a Government of National Unity in Mali.

- The Presidents of Guinea Bissau and Mali to take a cue from the smooth transition in Ghana following the death of President Atta Mills.
- The Heads of States in West Africa as well as the entire populations in the region to emulate the culture of peaceful political transition as demonstrated in Ghana following the demise of a sitting President.
- The international community, including the European Union and the United Nations, to join the ECOWAS and the African Union to find a regional response to the security threat caused by the occupation of part of the northern border of the ECOWAS region and the emergence of terrorist groups such as the Boko Haram and AQIM.

WACSOF and all regional and national platforms of CSOs working within it are, in turn, mobilized to support ECOWAS in its efforts to make regional integration a reality. The West Africa's Civil Society Organizations are prepared to support the ECOWAS Commission in its mission of preventing and resolving conflicts in West Africa.

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The West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF)