



Coalition for Dialogue on Africa
Seminar on:
TRANSNATIONAL TRAFFICKING AND
POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN AFRICA
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Welcome Remarks

by

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Professor Abdoulaye Bathily, Chair,
Mr. Alexander Schmidt, Regional Representative, UNODC
Regional Office for West and Central Africa,
Members of the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa, UNODC,
ECOWAS and other Partner Institutions present,
Respected Analysts, Researchers and Experts,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The President of the ECOWAS Commission, H.E. Dr. Mohamed
Ibn Chambas called yesterday to express his regrets for not

being able to attend this timely and critical seminar, and has requested me to convey ECOWAS's message of welcome to the co-organizers and participants. Dr. Chambas is currently on mission in the region for reasons not unrelated to the theme of this seminar: "Transnational Trafficking and Political Instability in Africa". The political instability and terrible governance that currently characterize countries such as the two Guineas are fuelled by factors that include drug trafficking and illicit trade in natural resources.

As you may be aware, one of the reasons ECOWAS is rapidly scaling up its peace and security architecture to match the original economic integration agenda is that bad governance in the context of the shadow economy in which local and international criminal gangs call the shots, has for years rendered the goals of economic development and integration an increasingly elusive target.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The threats facing governance in the West Africa region flow from diverse sources and it is often a thankless job trying to enumerate them. Broadly speaking, they emanate from, among other sources, bad leadership, the mismanagement of the region's natural resource endowments and the vulnerabilities associated with the region's geographical location, demographic configuration and environmental factors. The transformation of

these risks into active insecurity are conditioned by the interplay between internal governance processes, power relations flowing from geo-strategic interests, the global shadow and criminal economy and the incapacity of the regional security system to respond to the challenges.

The territory of West Africa is hemmed in by the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahel-Sahara Belt, a landmass and waterway that provide the ideal infrastructure for trafficking and crime and has become veritable havens for transnational criminal gangs.

The easy access of the West African coast, coupled with weak indigenous maritime security, means that the Gulf has become the popular transit zone for the Latin American narco-cartels and their local accomplices seeking less protected routes into Europe and the U.S. for their deadly merchandise. Other criminal activities facilitated by this situation also include poaching, bunkering and dumping of toxic waste and cheap/dangerous goods, including pesticides and fake medicines from China and the rest of Asia.

To the north of the ECOWAS space, the Sahel-Sahara Divide constitutes another major source of regional insecurity. As you know, in the conflict between the insurgent Tuareg group, *Mouvement Nigérien pour la Justice (MNJ)* and the Niger Government, just like the agitation by the Niger Delta militants,

over perceived marginalization, genuine grievances have mixed with banditry, kidnapping, terrorism and trafficking in humans, drugs and cigarettes to transform the northern parts of Niger, Mali and Mauritania, and also the Niger Delta, into perhaps the most insecure zones in West Africa today. The porous borders and the proximity of the Sahel-Sahara divide to the Maghreb and the Middle East render the region vulnerable to terrorist incursions, arms trafficking and destabilization, as well as to human trafficking and refugee flows from the conflict zones in Sudan and Chad to the east.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When aircraft land in broad daylight in Bissau or Nzerekore and uniformed security personnel form a human corridor for the drugs-laden aircraft to be offloaded,

When seized drugs go missing in secure places with the help of the police in Accra or Bissau,

When the youth and women are being groomed to be narco-consumers and mules in the illicit business,

When drug money funds political parties and electoral campaigns in countries across the region,

Then we are approaching the starting point of the criminalization of the state and the supremacy of the shadow economy in the political economy of nations.

ECOWAS, with its partners, not least the UNODC, is putting mechanisms in place to combat the scourge of transnational crime and I am sure these measures will be discussed in the course of this seminar. Suffice it to say that to be successful in our drive against cross-border crime, we must combine intelligence measures with sustained advocacy. But above all, we must ensure good political governance that promotes responsible economic and social governance.

In arriving at any consensus on the way forward in securing the region's external frontiers, and fighting terrorism and organized crime, there is the need to strike the right balance between short-term security needs and sustainable approaches to peace and security. Any attempt to erect a sustainable regional peace and security architecture would require the right mix between building and/or strengthening the indigenous criminal justice system and the rule of law on the one hand and, on the other hand, developing a broader human security agenda with a focus on infrastructure and development that is designed to improve the livelihoods of the populations and offer choices to the army of the unemployed youth with a view to dissuading them from enlisting in the services of terrorists and criminal networks.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

- Developing strategies to strengthen existing conflict prevention mechanisms to encourage good governance, adherence to rule of law, accountability, tolerance of alternative opinions, non-neglect of minorities and fairness in the distribution of amenities and emulation of best practices.
- Evolving practical measures to ensure good natural resource governance, youth empowerment, and combating trans-national/cross-border crime, including terrorism and trafficking in narcotics, humans and small arms through better intelligence sharing and criminal justice system.
- Training and equipping the security agencies to effectively and positively intervene in conflict situations and humanitarian emergencies, particularly by further developing the civilian component of the ESF, building up the region's logistical capabilities and strengthening synergy between ECOWAS and AU on the one hand, and ECOWAS and other partners on the other.
- Further strengthening the capacity of the region to engage in effective post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building, thereby reducing the risks of relapse into conflict.

I wish all of you a wonderful stay in this beautiful city of Abuja,
and fruitful deliberations over the next two days.

Thank you very much for the attention.