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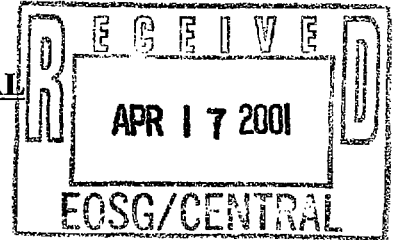
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NOTES FOR BRIEFING THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AND THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INTER- AGENCY MISSION TO WEST AFRICA

BY
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Inter-Agency Mission, which was dispatched by the Secretary-General, visited the West African sub-region from 7-26 March 2001 and was led by Assistant Secretary-General, Ibrahima Fall, Department of Political Affairs. The Mission participants included representatives of DPA, DPKO, UNHCR, OHCHR, DDA, WFP, DGO, UNDP, UNICEF, OCHA, and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The Secretariat of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was fully involved as a partner in the preparation and execution of the Mission in which the organization was represented by a director.

II. TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. The terms of reference of the mission were:

To provide recommendations concerning a coordinated and coherent United Nations response aimed at addressing the multifaceted problems confronting the sub-region, taking into account initiatives under way or being proposed by the various actors.

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE MISSION

3. The Mission visited Senegal (7-8 March), Nigeria (9-11 March), Togo (11-12 March), Liberia (12 - 13 March), Côte d'Ivoire (13-16 March), Ghana (16 -17 March), Sierra Leone (17-18 March), Guinea (19-20 March), Guinea-Bissau (21 March), the Gambia (21- 22 March) and Mali, (22 - 27 March). In each country visited the delegation held working sessions with the Heads of State and Cabinet Ministers. In several countries it met also with Prime Ministers. The mission met with the UN Country Teams, parliamentarians, representatives of political parties and civil society and international and national non-governmental organizations, the ECOWAS Executive Secretary, staff of the Mano River Union Secretariat, the President of the African Development Bank, the Secretary General of the Accord de Non-agression et Défense, the Chairman of the West African Union Economique Monetaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA) Commission and the Governor of the West African Central Bank.

4. The Mission held frank and open discussions with all its interlocutors, in line with its terms of reference. Within that context, views were exchanged on a range of issues, including in the

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areas of peace and security, governance, national reconciliation through political dialogue, human rights, humanitarian issues, sub-regional integration and enhancing cooperation with

ECOWAS and other sub-regional organizations. Additionally, the Mission discussed social and economic issues including the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty alleviation, the debt burden, debt reduction and/or cancellation. Amongst the cross-cutting issues discussed were the problems of illegal arms trafficking and proliferation and its connection to the sale of "conflict diamonds", the issue of land mines, child soldiers and street children, the issues of refugees and IDP, success and failures of DDR process in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

5. Country-specific issues discussed include the introduction of Sharia law in the north and the economic upheaval in the Niger Delta region, in southern Nigeria, the conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire and the problems confronting Guinea-Bissau. The situation in Sierra Leone and its impact on the other Mano River Union member countries, as well as, the border crisis between Guinea and Liberia were also discussed.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE MISSION

A. Peace and Security

6. The idea of a comprehensive and integrated approach to the priority needs and challenges being faced by the sub-region was extensively discussed and widely welcomed by the mission's interlocutors. It was generally agreed that the problems being faced in the sub-region including civil conflicts, political instability, humanitarian problems, arms trafficking, economic development and sub-regional integration could not be viewed and addressed in isolation one from the other but should be addressed using a sub-regional approach.

7. The gravity of the political and security situation in several West African countries and the potential for the rapid spread of insecurity and instability in the sub-region, unless urgent steps are taken by the United Nations and ECOWAS to address the root causes was emphasized. The importance of approaching conflict prevention management and resolution from a sub-regional rather than a national perspective was stressed.

8. Interlocutors underscored that the nature of modern-day conflicts in West Africa was such that the victims are predominantly civilians, in particular women and children. Child soldiers have and continue to be used by parties to conflicts and special attention needed to be paid to their rehabilitation. Aid worker had also been targeted by rebel forces. It was also observed that in the ongoing conflict among the Mano River Union countries, all sides have and continue to use mercenaries.

9. An issue frequently stressed to the Mission was the repercussion of ineffective demobilization and reintegration programmes following the disarmament of former combatants. Of particular concern is the large numbers of former combatants from the Liberian civil conflict, who have not received adequate reintegration assistance. They have remained unemployed and constitute a security threat within Liberia and in the entire sub-region.

10. The ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Peace-keeping, adopted in 1999, has resulted in the creation of several organs, including a Mediation and Security Council, a Council of Elders and a department in the Secretariat in Abuja charged with the responsibility of peace and security. The Mechanism also provides for the creation of an early warning centre and situation room at Secretariat, which would be linked to observation centres monitoring political, social and economic developments in the sub-region.

11. The Accord de Non-Aggression et de Defense (ANAD) which came into effect in 1977, has had limited success in promoting peaceful relations amongst countries in the sub-region. The implementation of the decision made in 1999 by the ECOWAS Heads of State for ANAD to be harmonized and integrated into ECOWAS is underway.

12. The role of civil society in conflict prevention and management was widely discussed. It was emphasized that representatives of civil society, often frustrated by their perceived lack of power, are increasingly looking to the United Nations, the international community, and regional and sub-regional organizations for assistance and partnerships to strengthen their ability to undertake conflict prevention and resolution measures in their own countries and the sub-region.

B. Peacekeeping

13. It was stressed to the Mission that the political will exists among ECOWAS Member States to help contribute to peacekeeping operations both through ECOMOG and within United Nations peacekeeping operations. Particularly for operations within the sub-region, West African troops were considered to be at an advantage. They are effective, being familiar with the culture, terrain, climate and a number of other factors. However, lack of equipment, logistical and technical capacities available to national contingents were major factors inhibiting the deployment of ECOMOG operations and countries contributing troops to UN peacekeeping operations. Additionally, certain conditions established by the UN precluded their effective participation in such operations; for example, a great deal of dissatisfaction was expressed with the present arrangement under the "wet lease" system. Countries lack the resources to prefinance the equipping of their contingents and reimbursement by the UN was said to take too long to effect. Preference was expressed for a "dry lease" arrangement.

C. Humanitarian issues

14. As a result of sub-regional conflicts, there are over half a million refugees, and well over 670,000 IDPs. Of approximately 15 million people in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, over 1.1 million are either internally displaced or refugees. The seventeen-year old conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal continues to threaten the stability of both Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, and has itself produced over 41,000 IDPs. Landmines in both the Casamance region and Guinea-Bissau will prove a long-term hazard for civilians.

15. The attention of the Mission was repeatedly drawn to the stark disparities between the relatively meager assistance provided to humanitarian emergencies in Africa, compared with the largesse generated for equally grave emergencies outside Africa. A sense of cynicism also

prevails about the good will of the international community to help solve critical structural problems and ensure that the gap between emergency relief and development is breached.

16. The Mission noted, in this regard, that most assistance to Liberian refugees had been discontinued in Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana despite the fact that many of the refugees have been compelled by circumstances to remain in their host countries.

D. Economic Development and Regional Cooperation

17. The economies of the countries of West Africa have remained generally very fragile and are failing to consistently improve. Recent reductions in the prices of export commodities and high debt service obligations and political instability are factors contributing to their economic decline. It was particularly stressed that without considerable assistance on the debt issue from the international community, including from the HIPC programme, progress towards democratization would be undermined and democratic systems in place would likely fail.

18. However, ECOWAS countries have shown resilience in the face of the socio-economic and political difficulties. Individually, through country-based mechanisms, and collectively through sub-regional mechanisms under the auspices of ECOWAS and UEMOA, efforts are being made to redress the situation. Many interlocutors view UEMOA, CILSS and other sub-regional entities as specialized centers within the umbrella of ECOWAS. They were seen as complementary poles of expertise to provide specific services to ECOWAS.

V. TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE UNITED NATIONS APPROACH TO DURABLE AND SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS IN WEST AFRICA

19. The need for greater sub-regional integration in the political, security, economic and social spheres and for national governments in West Africa and international partners in general, and the UN in particular, to contribute towards the resources needed to accelerate this process were issues that were particularly stressed to the mission by Heads of State and a range of other interlocutors.

20. In the Mission's view, the time has come for the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, to develop an integrated sub-regional approach to priority needs and challenges in West Africa. A unified approach should be developed through the development of harmonized, common framework linking strategies, programmes, activities and mechanisms aimed at promoting peace, security, development and sub-regional integration. Existing protocols of collaboration and Memoranda of Understanding between several agencies, as well as existing sub-regional programmes and activities in West Africa, are a positive steps in that direction.

A. Peace And Security

a) Global approach and ECOWAS capacity building

21. Even though the political context in conflict and post-conflict countries is complex and specific to individual situations, it is very important that countries are not treated in isolation since sub-regional factors may also weigh heavily in the balance. Unless sub-regional perspectives are properly addressed, critical national problems related to reconciliation, economic integration, migration, refugees, displaced people, ethnic conflict, and the proliferation of arms and unemployment will remain unresolved. The capacity of sub-regional institutions to play a leading role in promoting peace and development needs to be reinforced.

22. The UN should play an active role in this process. It was widely felt that integration through the continuing activities of ECOWAS was necessary for restoring and maintaining peace and security and for creating the environment conducive to sustainable development and economic growth. The mission was seen as providing a new opportunity for such a powerful and concerted call to be made to the international community to make assistance for integration a priority. In this regard, it was the view of many that only the United Nations, acting in an impartial and objective manner, could effectively mobilize the international community to work with the countries of the sub-region to promote integration.

b) Women and the search for solutions to armed conflict

23. Women's groups are very much organized and are seeking assistance to bring about peace and security in their countries and in the sub-region. Women's groups in the various countries have established links and are organizing meetings in an effort to develop a common action plan to bring pressure to bear on the political and military leaders to choose peace rather than continued conflict. This trend should be encouraged and supported on a sustained basis by the UN and international community.

c) Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)

24. The mission finds that failure in DDR is one of the major root causes of the exacerbation, resurgence and expansion of conflicts in the region. Complaints are rife throughout the region that disarmament, when carried out, was not supported by any effective and comprehensive reintegration programmes.

25. Liberia's alleged failure to fully emerge from internal conflict, following democratic elections in 1997, coupled with the government's support for the RUF and involvement in the "arms for diamonds" trade, has resulted in the suspension of many governance and assistance programmes which could have assisted Liberia to make the transition from a war-torn society to one in which stability and good governance prevailed.

d) Support to governance

26. Poor governance is one of the main causes of conflict in the region. It is important that civil society groups and local communities be empowered to be effective participants in the governance of their country. Dialogue with dissident groups and opposition parties have to be encouraged in a genuine approach to national reconciliation. It was stressed that democratization ran the risk of failing as people expect 'dividends', from the adoption of democratic principles. This concern was particularly highlighted in Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria.

B. Respect For Human Rights

27. The Mission noted that there were many violations of basic human rights in various areas of the sub-region. These violations ranged from the broader rights of a people to peace, security and development to singular abuses against the rights of individuals. Child soldiers also remain involved in armed conflict and are still being actively recruited. Despite growing awareness, the violence against women, especially in armed conflict, continues.

C. Regional Integration

28. The question of sub-regional integration permeated all the discussions of the mission. The issues brought to the attention of the mission were along two broad lines: re-alignment of sub-regional institutions working on integration, harmonization of donor interventions to respond comprehensively to sub-regional issues as well as initiatives set in motion by ECOWAS.

29. The interlocutors, while admitting the central role of ECOWAS in sub-regional integration, also took due cognizance of the complementary roles of UEMOA, BCEAO, CILSS, ANAD, the Mano River Union and other such groupings. They argued to the mission that ECOWAS should be strengthened to emerge as the major sub-regional organization. The mission is of the view that the comparative weight and resources available to the United Nations system and the United Nation's ability to provide a complementary framework, if used in close collaboration with ECOWAS and other organizations and actors within the region, would greatly enhance the total capacity and effectiveness in addressing the priority needs and challenges.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a) Institutional arrangements

30. The idea of a United Nations integrated approach to the solution of the complex problems of the sub-region, in the context of a partnership with ECOWAS, was well received and the mission has raised a lot of expectations in the sub-region regarding the prospects of a proactive UN involvement in the solution of the sub-region's complex problems.

31. The Mission's report should be seen as the first step in United Nations/ECOWAS efforts at providing a coherent response and at addressing the complex and multifaceted problems confronting West Africa, taking into account ownership of several initiatives emanating from or proposed by actors in the sub-region.

3. To enhance UN capacity and collaboration in the sub-region, and to complement existing initiatives, a UN Office for West Africa is urgently required to ensure harmonization of UN programs with ECOWAS and other organizations in the sub-region as well as to encourage all international, bilateral and multilateral partners to pool their assistance and development policies and activities in West Africa within the framework of a sub-regional, integrated approach.

33. The Secretary-General's Inter-Agency Task Force on West Africa should be transformed into an Integrated Management Task Force on West Africa which would pay specific attention to the implementation of the key recommendations of this and other related reports and work in close collaboration with the proposed Special representative for West Africa and back stop the activities of his or her office.

34. The strengthening of the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Peacekeeping is urgently required. ECOWAS is trying to establish the administrative framework and other components provided for in this mechanism. Urgent assistance is required by ECOWAS to make this a reality.

b) Issues requiring immediate action:

35. In view of the volatile political and security situation prevailing in the entire sub-region, it is urgent that the following steps are taken:

- The UN, in cooperation with ECOWAS, should urgently develop a focussed and comprehensive sub-regional plan of action aimed at addressing the root causes of instability in West Africa and at ending, in particular, the current cross-border conflict among the Mano River Union states.
- To prevent the recurrence of conflict in Guinea-Bissau, where the political situation remains volatile despite its recent transition to a post-conflict situation and to democracy, urgent financial and capacity-building assistance, which would necessitate the intervention of the Bretton Woods and other financial institutions, should be provided. The reconvening of the International Conference on Guinea-Bissau is urgent.
- An International Conference for the mobilization of donor support for Guinea should be convened as soon as possible to enable it cope with the current humanitarian crisis, which also threatens its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as, its political stability.

- It is recommended that financial assistance from bilateral donors, the Bretton Woods and other financial and international development institutions should be granted to assist Cote D'Ivoire revive its weakened economy and thus avert a return to internal strife. This should be implemented alongside pressure on the Government of Cote d'Ivoire, to implement a credible plan for national reconciliation.
- The United Nations should play a more active role in ameliorating the relationship between Cote d'Ivoire and its neighbors.

36. Regional stability cannot be attained without a concerted effort to reintegrate the thousands of ex-combatants who now constitute a mercenary pool in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is therefore recommended that development funding should be directed towards the reintegration of ex-combatants.

37. The United Nations should support and follow up on the efforts of regional leaders, to impress upon the leaders in particular of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote D'Ivoire to honour their commitments to reconciliation with the opposition for the restoration of stability.
