

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria.

STATEMENT BY THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOS) AND CIVIC ACTORS FORUM IN WEST AFRICA TO THE 65TH SESSION OF THE ECOWAS AUTHORITY OF HEADS OF STATES AND GOVERNMENT

The West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS), in collaboration with Tournons la Page (TLP), West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), and other pro-democracy actors across the region, extend our warmest regards to the Heads of States ahead of the 65th Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government to be held in Abuja, Nigeria, on July 7, 2024. This memorandum expresses our concerns about developments in our region and offers some recommendations for the consideration of Your Excellencies with a view to strengthening the democratic architecture, improve upon peace and security and advance the integration of the peoples of the Community.

As regional Civil Society Organizations (“CSOs”) dedicated to the prosperity and development of the region, we are deeply concerned about the political and security crises and the risk to the unity and cohesion of the Community. These developments, including unconstitutional and undemocratic changes of governments, have occurred, and persist despite the normative framework on peace and security and the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

We recall that the CSOs and non-state pro-democratic actors that gathered on December 8, 2023, in Abuja on the eve of the 64th Ordinary Session of the Authority of the Heads of State and Government urged ECOWAS to expedite the review of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and strengthen it to include a prescription against unlimited presidential terms or term limit elongations, having regard to the damaging impact of term elongation on peace and security in the sub-region.

We note with approval the instruction directed to the Commission at the 64th Ordinary Session of the Authority of the Heads of State and Government, to intensify consultations with Member States to finalize and present for adoption the draft Revised Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

We note similarly the resolution at the 64th Ordinary Session to convene an extraordinary summit on Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCGs), the call on The Gambia for the adoption of a new Constitution ahead of the 2026 general elections, the support to Guinea-Bissau in the consolidation of democracy, and efforts to consolidate peace and stability,

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including through the completion of the on-going review of the Constitution and Security Sector Reform, and initiatives in support of the deployment of the regional counter-terrorism force.

Certain recent developments, however, threaten the very foundations of the Community. They include:

- The coordinated announcement by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso on January 28, 2024 of their intention to withdraw from ECOWAS;
- The violation of transition agreements by junta leaders in Mali and Burkina Faso and the worsening security and human rights conditions in these countries;
- The escalating terrorist insurgency and violent extremism especially in the Sahel belt of the region coupled with human rights fallout and incoherent regional response
- The March 25 constitutional coup against the people of Togo following an illegitimate and unilateral change of constitution by the parliament;
- The lingering prospect of the President of Cote D'Ivoire retaining power for a fourth term following the removal of the term limit in the 2016 Constitution allowing him to run for a consecutive third term in office,
- Repression of CSOs, and crack down on dissident voices and persistent violation of the human rights and laws of the Republic in Guinea-Bissau.

In light of these, CSOs in the region held a consultation summit on the July 1, 2024, ahead of the ECOWAS Heads of State Summit to deliberate on a common citizens' position on these concerns and propose recommendations that seek to enhance ECOWAS' normative framework, as well as formulate citizens' agenda to form part of the discussions by the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS at the forthcoming 65th Ordinary Session in Abuja, Nigeria.

Demands

It is on the back of this that we make and reiterate the following demands to the 65th Heads of State and Government Summit:

- **Term Limit and Constitutional Reform in Togo**

We firmly believe that now, more than ever is the time for ECOWAS to fast-track the review of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol and promulgate a code on presidential term limits that is in harmony with all proposed revisions of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol. The degenerating socio-political climate across the ECOWAS requires immediate intervention to forestall further reversals of democracy in the region, with term elongation being a major driver.

With two-thirds of citizens in 34 African countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2022, in favour of limiting presidents to two terms, ECOWAS should recognize presidential term limits as by far the preferred option among citizens and respond accordingly to these aspirations.

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Moreover, lessons from the constitutional review in Togo that provides overriding powers to the president of the council of ministers with no term limit against the elected president should inform the review of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. It is our humble appeal to ECOWAS that the reform of presidential term limit to two terms should apply equally and strictly to Heads of States as Heads of Government across all member states. ECOWAS should take immediate steps through the reform to curtail the situation in Togo from becoming the new norm in the region.

We also call on ECOWAS to open discussions and dialogue with the government of Togo on the recent amendment to the constitution that received wide protest from pro-democracy actors and citizens, including the Togolese Conference of Bishops, academics, the CSOs, and the diaspora community. The fact that a referendum was not the prioritized option to adopt the amendment and that the decision was taken by a one-party controlled Parliament and its affiliates certainly affects the rights of the citizens to express their political choices.

- **Deteriorating Security and Humanitarian Conditions in the Sahel and the Planned Exit of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS.**

We continue to express our grave concern about the security in the Sahel compounded by the backsliding of the principles of human rights, the rule of law, democracy and good governance. We condemn the arrest and detention of civic actors and political opponents by the transitional governments in Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea and Niger and the continuous suppression of activists and defenders, particularly, in Burkina Faso under the “general mobilisation law”, which gives the president sweeping powers, including that of conscripting people and restraining civil liberties.

We urge the Heads of State to seek the intervention of global and regional bodies including the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) and the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) to intervene in the situation in the Sahel to avoid further deterioration of the rights of citizens by their government. We further urge ECOWAS to prioritize the human rights conditions in the Sahel.

Additionally, we commend efforts by ECOWAS to deploy a mediator to engage the government of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger for their return to the regional bloc. We further applaud the leadership demonstrated by the President of Senegal in complementing ongoing regional mediation and intervention efforts to restore these countries to ECOWAS. We will continue to appeal to the Junta to reconsider their decision in the interest of their citizens whose political and economic history, and geographical identity and integration are strongly tied to the sub-region.

- **ECOWAS Standby Force**

We note the instruction to the Commission to urgently resume efforts to activate the ECOWAS Standby Force for counter-terrorism operations in zones infested by terrorist armed groups. We recognize the effort to position the ECOWAS Standby Force as a regional counter terrorism force and to reconfigure response to the security situation in the Sahel and coastal

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West Africa. To this extent, ECOWAS should enhance its role in coordinating international and transnational response to security and terrorism which is gaining grounds in the Sahel and extending incrementally to coastal West Africa.

Conclusion

We stand in solidarity to applaud efforts by the Commission to operationalize the ECOSOC-WA which would improve community citizens' engagement and interface with ECOWAS as enshrined in the ECOWAS revised treaty and the realization of the ECOWAS of citizens' agenda.

As ECOWAS begins the countdown to the celebration of the 50th anniversary in 2025, we entreat the regional body to leverage the resources and opportunities in the region to embark on institutional reforms to strengthen its legitimacy, enhance support from the community citizens and build resilience in reversing the anti-democratic trends and resurgence in the region including rethinking response to UCGs in West Africa. In light of the growing wave of instability increasingly taking over the region, the ECOWAS Commission should as a matter of urgency go beyond the initial progress made in building consensus on the review of the 2021 ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, to the eventual realization of the revised Protocol.

We reiterate our commitment as partners to support ECOWAS in the prevention or resolution of conflict; and to strengthen its capacities to meet the new threats to democracy and peace arising in West Africa. As civil society and pro-democracy actors addressing regional challenges to democracy, peace, and security, as well as good governance, we are ready and willing to collaborate with the ECOWAS Commission, our governments and the community citizens to expedite action on these all-important issues, which pose a major threat to the stability in the sub-region.

Thank you.

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Signatories (Members of WADEMOS, Civic Groups and Pro-democracy Actors in the Sub-region):

1. West Africa Civil Society Initiative (WACSI)
2. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)
3. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
4. Tournons La Page
5. The Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO-Senegal)
6. AfricTivistes (Senegal)
7. AfrikaJom Center (Senegal)
8. WATHI Think tank (Senegal)
9. Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana)
10. Africa Center for International Law and Accountability (Ghana)
11. Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GenCED-Ghana)
12. CDD-West Africa (Nigeria)
13. Transition Monitoring Group (Nigeria)
14. Women in Politics Forum (Nigeria)
15. Yiaga Africa (Nigeria)
16. Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)
17. The Centre for the Democratic Governance (Burkina Faso)
18. Le Balai Citoyen (Burkina Faso)
19. Centre d'Information et de Documentation Citoyennes
20. AFLED (Mali)
21. Réseau ONG d'Appui au Processus Electoral au Mali - Réseau APEM (Mali)
22. Education for a culture of Peace and Citizenship, Human Rights Defense (Mali)
23. Youth Association for Active Citizenship and Democracy (AJCAD) (Mali)
24. Coalition for Citizen Observation of Elections (Mali)
25. Statview International (Guinea)
26. ABLOGUE
27. Citoyen pour la Paix et la Justice (Guinea)
28. Femmes Actions et Developpement (Niger)
29. Alternative Espace Citoyen (Niger)
30. Coalition des Organisations Nigériennes des Droits de l'Enfant (Niger)
31. Network of Women Leader for Development (Benin)
32. Social Watch (Benin)
33. Forum Cabo-Verdiano da Sociedade Civil (Cabo Verde)
34. Instituto Pedro Pires (Cabo Verde)
35. Institute for Research and Democratic Development (Liberia)
36. Center for Democratic Governance (Liberia)
37. Clinique d'Expertise Juridique et social (Togo)
38. National Civil Society Consultation (Togo)
39. National Election Watch (Sierra Leone)
40. Campaign for Good Governance (Sierra Leone)
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44. Ofure Centre for Peace and Development
45. Center for Transparency Advocacy Nigeria
46. Gee Foundation for Social justice and development, Nigeria
47. The Meluibe Empowerment Foundation, Nigeria
48. Socio Economic Research and development Centre (SEDEC) / Transition Monitoring Group (TMG)
49. Connecting Peace Initiative, Rivers Port Harcourt, Nigeria
50. 21st Century Community Empowerment for Youth and Women Initiative, Nigeria
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