

**The Expert Group Meeting on Drug Control in West Africa  
INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ACTION GROUP AGAINST MONEY LAUNDERING  
AND TERRORIST FINANCING IN WEST AFRICA – GIABA**

**Remarks by Director General, GIABA, at the opening  
ceremony of the Expert Group Meeting on Drug Control  
in West Africa, held at the CESAG in Dakar,  
Senegal, from 10 to 11 September 2007:**

Protocols

At its 32nd Ordinary Session which was held in Abuja, Nigeria, on 15 June 2007, the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government noted with concern the unprecedented increase in reported cases of drug trafficking in several Member States. In a bid to vigorously combat this scourge, GIABA has been mandated to consider the eradication of drug trafficking as part of its programme and immediately make arrangements for the development of an Action Plan for the Region. It is against this background that this Expert Group Meeting was convened to appraise the drug situation in the region, review existing mechanisms for prevention and control; determine further remedial actions required; and recommend through a comprehensive and integrated Plan of Action, immediate steps to be taken nationally and on a regional basis to stem the tide of the scourge.

2. It is therefore my honor and pleasure to welcome you to this meeting, especially those of you coming from outside Senegal. I wish to thank you all in your personal capacities and your respective governments and organizations for allowing you to participate in this meeting. I wish to thank in particular, the UNODC Regional Representative and the Interpol for their consistent support to this region in the fight against organized crime, especially drug trafficking. I also thank our distinguished facilitators – Messrs Jean-Louis Gaillard and Michele Amiot, for accepting to support and facilitate this meeting. I believe we shall benefit from your immense knowledge and experience in this area.

3. The fight against drug trafficking is a high priority for the ECOWAS. This imperative is in view of the harmful effects of this phenomenon, which you are all aware of. Suffices to say that organized crime, in particular drug trafficking, could undermine not only legitimate activities, but also the rule of law, thus weakening the very basis for political stability, democracy, good governance and overall socio-economic development. The overarching objective of ECOWAS is to prevent conflict, sustain peace and promote regional integration. The fight against organized crime is therefore an important element, indeed a strategic objective to foster and deepen this integration process.

Appraisal of Drug Situation in the Region:

4. According to reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), cocaine seizures in West Africa increased seven times between 2005 and 2006 from two tons to fourteen tons. West African countries also face severe problems with illicit trans-shipment of cocaine and heroin from Asia and Latin America. Heroin use is also on the rise in West Africa, raising other human concerns. The increased use of the drugs which can be injected with shared syringes will be a factor in the containment of HIV/AIDS. Country by country review shows this trend.

For example:

Guinea Bissau;

5. Guinea Bissau is at the threshold of gaining reputation as Africa's first Narco-State if the trend is not curtailed. It is a key entry, transit and deposit point for international illicit drug traffickers for cocaine from Latin America destined for Europe. A recent Police operation led to the discovery of 674 kilograms of cocaine and the arrest of South American traffickers. The continued exploitation by traffickers of Guinea Bissau's weak self-defense capabilities to ship their contraband via the Nation's Bijados Island has prompted a swift reaction from the Prime Minister, Martinho Ndafo, who has threatened to shoot down any aircraft that enter its air space without authorization.

Senegal;

6. Cocaine trafficking in Guinea Bissau is connected with that in Senegal. In late June 2007, the Police in Dakar seized more than 2 tons of cocaine. Part of the drugs was found in a Yacht drifting off the coast of Senegal, and the rest was found in a house at Mbour sea resort south of Dakar. Documents found in the possession of those arrested revealed that the traffickers had been to neighboring countries: Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau and the Gambia. In the first six months of 2007, the Police in Senegal seized a record of 44 kilograms of cocaine at Dakar airport and arrested about 30 drug carriers.

Nigeria;

7. The editorial column of ThisDay Newspaper in its August 27, 2007 edition, reports that the Nation was once again witnessing a spate of arrests of hard drug exporters. Recently, two drug suspects were arrested at the Lagos International Airport, (on board Virgin Atlantic) in possession of cocaine to London. Subsequent arrests made included some movie stars who were prosecuted for the offence of drug trafficking. This situation, according to this report, calls for urgent action to tackle the evil trade frontally in order to forestall its further negative consequences.

The Gambia;

8. Banjul International Airport is an exit point for drug traffickers. In August 2007, seven men and a woman were arrested, having swallowed a large quantity of cocaine as they tried to board a flight at Banjul International Airport.

Niger Republic;

9. UN Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported the arrest, earlier in the month of August, of 12 men with 3 truckloads of drugs and guns. Traffickers usually target the ancient trading regions and remote desert routes to move drugs and illicit goods across borders to Europe. Cocaine is trans-shipped to Europe through this region mostly by air, thus exposing the vulnerability of land-locked countries. Available information revealed much more airport seizures than maritime seizures, and these are often reported in the news media, though this is less comparable to maritime seizures in terms of volume. Anecdotal evidence suggests that cocaine trafficking in the region could also mean that traffickers may use land-locked countries like Niger and Burkina Faso to traffic cocaine to Europe.

Burkina Faso;

10. The amount of drugs intercepted over the past three months is astounding according to Mr. Christophe Compaoré, Coordinator of the Committee against Illicit Drug Trafficking in Burkina Faso. He warns of an emerging drug transit route in the West and South West of his country. About 49 kilograms of cocaine worth 5 billion CFA (US \$10 million) were intercepted by the Burkina Faso authorities on the border with Mali earlier in the month of August 2007.

Mali;

11. Gao, a city in the remote north of Mali, has become a well-known grouping point for traffickers and migrants hoping to take the overland trans Saharan route to migrate illegally into Europe. According to Mr. Antonio Mazitelli, UNODC Regional Representative for West and Central Africa, "there is an increased use of Sahelian countries like Mali and Niger for cocaine trafficking". Traffickers bring drugs to coastal towns, including Guinea Conakry, Dakar and Lomé, then travel to inland capitals like Bamako and Ouagadougou, and continue their trip towards Europe in order to divert the attention of law enforcement agencies at the arrival points.

Cap Verde;

12. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Fact book reports that Cape Verde is used as a trans-shipment port for illicit drugs moving from Latin America and Africa destined for Western Europe. There have been reported cases of arrests at Praia International Airport with large quantities of hard drugs seized.

Ghana;

13. Ghana is a drug transit country. Trafficking routes are old and established; drugs are moved across the borders with Togo and Cote d'Ivoire by air, sea and land ports. Cocaine and heroin arrive from South America and East and South West Asia. There is evidence suggesting that consumption of these drugs is increasing within Ghana. Heroin is still the principal drug transiting through Ghana, and Europe is the primary destination. Cannabis is grown throughout the rural areas of the country, often hidden within fields of legal staples.

Liberia;

14. Colonel Tay, the Head of the Drug Enforcement Agency of Liberia, had expressed fear that Liberia may not succeed in the fight against drug trafficking because the country's Drug Enforcement Agencies are weak. He said the increased use of illicit drugs on the Liberian market stems from the lack of drug laws. The lack of logistics and other equipment is hampering the smooth functioning of the Agency. Most drug dealers and users in Liberia are youths, which means that the future generation is vulnerable.

Cote D'Ivoire;

15. Cannabis is widely grown in this country though for local consumption. Cote d'Ivoire is a transit point for narcotics from Asia and Latin America destined for European and North American markets. Consumption of hard drugs is increasing, and the Felix Houphouet Boigny Airport continues to be a transit point for flows of cocaine and heroin to destinations in Europe and beyond.

Guinea Conakry;

16. Guinea is also a transit route. Traffickers bring drugs to this coastal town and then travel to inland capitals like Bamako and Ougadougou and continue their trip towards Europe.

Benin Republic:

17. The local media reports recent seizures of 450kgs of cocaine. Cannabis is widely grown and consumed in Benin. United Nations Inter-Regional Crime and Justice Institute reports that smuggling and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labor in industries, such as drug production, are continuous and ongoing in Benin Republic. A major concern is the prevalence of corruption among law enforcement officials, thus making the fight even more challenging. Recently, the Head of Benin's drug law enforcement agency, Police Commissioner Roger Talon, was put behind bars on alleged cocaine-related charges.

Sierra Leone;

18. According to a survey conducted by the UNODC and the National Drugs Control Agency (UNDC), 76.5% of the population both men and women have admitted taking drugs like cocaine and cannabis, while the largest consumption is heroin, amphetamines, inhalants and morphine. Reasons for drug use in the country have to do with poverty, illiteracy, the war, lack of care and supervision, inadequate drug campaigns, the absence of a strong commitment by the Government to deal with the drug problem, and lack of effective counseling groups and drug treatment centers.

Togo;

19. Togo is a transit hub for heroin and cocaine traffickers. Human trafficking for labor on drug farms is on the increase. Whilst traffickers exploit the porous borders, both land and sea, to ferret their illicit goods, law enforcement agents in this country are unable to give the criminals a serious chase because of lack of equipment, including four-wheel drive vehicles, necessary for effective combat against traffickers.

#### REASONS FOR THE UPSURGE IN TRAFFICKING:

20. Many factors contribute to the increase in drug trafficking, but the following readily come to mind: Geography is only part of the appeal for traffickers. Guinea Bissau is a fairly straight 4000 miles shot across the Atlantic from the coca fields of South America. The relaxation of strict controls of land, air, and sea borders along with the enhancement of commerce and international trade links with Asia, Latin America, Western Europe and North America has made it an attractive drug transit Region. Increased repressive law enforcement actions in some jurisdictions compel criminals to exploit weak links in other parts of the world, and this is why drug traffickers have ab initio identified the West African Region as a potential transit point for drug trafficking from Latin America to Europe especially. The level of poverty, unemployment and the low level of performance in the economy in some countries, in tandem with civil strife and conflicts, as well as corruption are additional challenges. Impunity and the relatively low risk many traffickers face, make the region a "haven" for drug traffickers; such is the case for Guinea Bissau, where entry to Portugal is Visa free. Corruption is another mitigating factor. Ignorance of the people is another factor.

In Guinea Bissau, large consignments of abandoned cocaine on the shores of the country were used by local farmers as fertilizer. Far back in the 90's, then Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime prevention in Vienna, Austria, Mr. Pino Arlacchi, had recognized that "organized criminal groups were increasingly using Africa as a clearing house for drugs in transit to all parts of the world, and that it is being facilitated through international mail and courier services".

#### The ECOWAS Response to the Problem of Drug Trafficking

21. Since 1997, the ECOWAS had realized the deleterious effects and debilitating impact of this scourge on the stability and economic development of the Region, especially on its integration programme, and has developed a Regional Plan of Action, which aims at providing the necessary framework for national efforts and actions against the drug problem. The Plan consists of harmonization of legislation, human resource development, epidemiological surveys on drug abuse, as well as preventive measures. The ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government at its 21st Summit on 30-31 October 1998, in Abuja, Nigeria, issued a declaration titled: "Community Flame Ceremony – the Fight against Drugs". Other Decisions of the Authority on drug control include the resolution A/RES.2/8/97 relating to Prevention and Control of Drug Abuse in West Africa; Recommendation C/98 on the establishment of a Regional Fund for Financing Drug Control activities in West Africa; Decision A/DEC.8/10/98 on the establishment of a Regional Fund for Financing of Drug Control activities; and Decision A/DEC.9/12/99 establishing the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA).

## The West African Joint Operations (WAJO)

22. Before 2001, drug law enforcement departments in West Africa have not had appreciable collaboration with one another. Drug traffickers took advantage of the communication gap between them to establish cells across the sub-region and move along the West African corridor with relative impunity. Indeed, where intelligence is to be shared with neighboring countries, one Agency found it difficult to release the information because of uncertainty of the confidentiality of the information at the destination country. This led to the founding of the West African Joint Operations initiative (WAJO).

23. The WAJO initiative commenced as a collaborative effort between Nigeria's National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Regional Office in Lagos. The focus of WAJO is to contain the exploding illicit drug trafficking problem across the sub-region. This, in turn, would create the opportunity for harmonization of the core activities of policing agencies within the region, and help to expand the collective drug law enforcement scope, capacity and effectiveness for improved social security and well-being of the people of the Region.

24. In furtherance of this cooperation strategy, the WAJO Initiative is aimed at achieving the following: Establishment of channels of constant communication among drug law enforcement bodies; Provision of a framework for co-operation between member countries to allow for joint actions towards combating or minimizing all forms of cross-border criminalities, illicit drug trafficking and movement of illegally acquired assets;

Development and management in a sustainable manner of reliable regional database;

Enhanced planning and strategic studies in combating crime at sub-regional level;

Fostering of greater cooperation through reciprocal and mutually beneficial joint training efforts;

Engendering of stronger interaction within the region on the one hand, and with other regions of Africa, the INTERPOL, UN bodies and other International organizations, on the other;

Facilitation and justification of the deployment of Drug Liaison Officers (DLOs) to coordinate drug law enforcement activities in countries outside of the region;

Provision of basis for bilateral agreements between countries affected by specific forms of criminal misdemeanors, illicit drug networking groups and money laundering cartels;

Service as a platform for mutual cooperation in the implementation of regional plan of action, and ratification of resolutions adopted at meetings and conferences held in the region or as it affects the region;

Assistance in the harmonization of legislation on particular aspects of drug trafficking and money laundering. Facilitation of development of a workable and comprehensive information sharing mechanism.

25. Today, the membership of WAJO is open to all the 15 ECOWAS member countries. Cameroon was also admitted as a member due to its strategic location. Other Central African countries have been accorded observer status.

26. Despite these initiatives, however, some of the following problems persist:

-Absence of appropriate institutional coordination

-Disparities among the structures of the various Member States

-Lack of qualified human resourcesLack of adequate legislation in some countries

-Non-ratification of relevant international Conventions by some States; and

-Absence of a regional drug control programme and non-involvement of the most representative segments of society in the fight against the menace.

27. In the bid to vigorously combat this scourge, GIABA has been mandated to consider the eradication of drug trafficking as part of its programme and immediately review the status and existing structures with a view to proposing a more practical and realistic Plan of Action, with specific and measurable activities and benchmarks.

28. The designation of GIABA as the ECOWAS institutional Focal Point is a demonstration of the renewed commitment of Member States to address the drug menace in a more pragmatic way. It presents a number of opportunities and challenges as well. ECOWAS and other International Organizations

29. The mandate of ECOWAS is to promote regional integration in West Africa. This, however, cannot be achieved without security and stability of the Region. The ECOWAS involvement in drug and crime issues is motivated by the desire to remove obstacles to meaningful integration, including the fight against drug trafficking, promote respect for rule of law, democracy and good governance. In this connection, the ECOWAS has been cooperating, and will continue to collaborate with other international organizations and development agencies to address these problems with a view to deepening our integration process. The ECOWAS Master Plan on drug control and the ECO Fund; UNODC's five-year program of action which clusters around critical issues like rule of law, criminal justice reform, conventional crime, corruption, money laundering ,drug abuse, terrorism etc, are all part of the collaborative efforts to bring about positive and qualitative change in the Region.

What must be done to combat the scourge:

30. The illicit drug problem has three main elements:

Cultivation and production,

Trafficking and retailing,

Consumption and abuse,

31. Drug control programs have the goal of reducing the production, availability and use of illegal drugs. Greater success at tackling these issues will depend on the commitment of ECOWAS Member States, at the highest level, as well as development partners to turn containment of the drug problem into a sustained reduction everywhere. The Drug Control Strategy we envision will include the following elements:

First, there is need for prevention and education to protect children from the perils of drugs, that is, research and analytical work to increase knowledge and understanding of drugs and crime issues and expand the evidence base for policy and operational decisions.

Second, treatment to help the chemically dependent. This would require the establishment of rehabilitation centers both at national and regional levels.

Third, we must focus on interdiction to reduce the flow of drugs into the Region. Law enforcement capacity must be enhanced and strengthened to achieve that.

Fourth, we must strengthen the criminal justice system and bring traffickers to justice; that is, normative work to assist States in the ratification and implementation of the international treaties and the development of domestic legislation on drugs and crime.

Fifth, field-based technical cooperation projects to enhance the capacity of Member States to counteract illicit drugs, crime and terrorism.

Sixth, we must promote international cooperation to confront drug cultivation, production, trafficking and use.

Seventh, combating drug-related money laundering requires strengthening of financial investigation capacity and intensified inspection of banks; sensitization of banks and other non-designated financial institutions on international money regulations, as well as on the reporting standards as a means of discouraging money laundering activities.

Eighth, the EFFECTIVE Regional Drug Control Strategy should emphasize public health approaches, investment in our children and confronting the underlying economic and social problems, which are the root causes of drug abuse. In other words, we should strike a balance between law enforcement, treatment and prevention efforts.

#### Justification

32. Combating the menace of drug trafficking like other transnational organized crimes presents daunting challenges, most of which emanate from the socio-economic and political conditions in society. Isolated efforts by individual countries to tackle the problems of drugs will not yield the desired results.

Bearing in mind the increasing sophistication of illicit drug trafficking networks, there is the urgent need for greater and more concrete cooperation among countries in the Region in all areas of drug control, backed by a strong political will.

#### Conclusion;

33. The aim of this meeting is to review the current status and Regional Master Plan with a view to determining the strategic problems and solutions, and developing a new Regional Action Plan with specific objectives, related activities to be carried out both at the national and regional levels with specific timeframes, as well as measurable benchmarks and success indicators. This process would also transfer the ownership of the initiative to those that are required to implement the Action Plan at the national level.

34. Recognizing the commendable efforts the ECOWAS has made in the past, the round table is not designed to be a one-time exercise; on the contrary, it is envisaged as the beginning of a long-term process aimed at creating strong partnerships and building capacity within Africa to tackle drugs and crime.

35. Finally, I wish to thank you all for coming to this meeting. I do hope that our deliberations over the next two days will be constructive, expert-driven and productive. I wish to call on the civil society, not to relent on their promise to support this initiative and promote it. It is therefore my honor and privilege to declare this meeting open. I wish you successful deliberations!

36. I thank you all for your kind attention.

GIABA SecretariatDakar, Senegal. Monday, 10 September 2007