

REMARKS BY DR. ABDULLAHI SHEHU, DIRECTOR GENERAL, GIABA, AT THE 10TH GIABA TECHINICAL COMMISSION/PLENARY MEETING, ON 17-18 NOVEMBER 2008, DAKAR, SENEGAL

Protocols

I have the honour to welcome you to the 10th Plenary Meeting of the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA). It is both an honour and privilege for me to host this statutory meeting in Dakar for the first time since I assumed duty as Director General of GIABA. On behalf of all of you, I wish to express our profound gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Senegal for supporting us to organize this meeting in Dakar. In particular, I thank the Honourable Ministers of Finance and Foreign Affairs for their assistance towards this meeting. I also thank the National Correspondent of GIABA in Senegal for his cooperation and support. I hope you would find this meeting as interesting as the previous ones.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I seldom deliver lengthy speeches, nor do I even write my opening speeches at our plenary meetings. But this is an exception for 3 main reasons: First, this is the first meeting I am hosting in the host country since I was appointed to this position; secondly, we are more than half way in the implementation of our 3 Year Action Plan, therefore, an ample opportunity to reflect on some of the challenges we have encountered in the past two and a half years; and thirdly, it is also a good opportunity to highlight the lessons learned in the performance of our core functions and draw your attention to some issues that will soon be presented before you for consideration.

Let me begin with the lessons learned.

Over the past two years, we have established effective mechanisms for the mutual evaluation of our member States Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) framework. We have adopted 4 mutual evaluation reports and published two – those of Sierra Leone and Nigeria. The reports on Cape Verde and Senegal are yet to be published. The most important lesson learned in this process is that it promises to be a transparent and objective assessment of the existing mechanisms in member States. It also provides useful recommendations that if diligently implemented would improve the AML/CFT regimes in

the region. Further more, the Secretariat is prepared to assist States to develop strategic implementation frameworks by prioritization. And, also, the Secretariat is committed to provide technical assistance within the limited resources provided to it.

Despite all these, however, we still need to understand the importance of this process and give it the necessary attention it deserves from the beginning to finish at the state level. No matter what we can do at the regional level, ultimately it all depends on the states to demonstrate strong political commitment to implement the recommendations arising from the process. This is why I humbly urge political authorities in member States to increase their support to the Inter-ministerial Committees and other AML/CFT organs to enable them work more efficiently.

One of our major challenges has been the feedback from member States from the stage of responding to questionnaire to the on-site visit, and finally to getting the report published. We must recognize that the evaluation is based on the FATF Recommendations and Methodology. Whilst we respect all systems in member States, we can not but assess their systems using the guidelines provided by the FATF and not by any other body. The FATF Recommendations and Methodology are not perfect, indeed there is no such a perfect system on earth, but these standards have been globally accepted and adopted, including by all our member States, therefore, we must make them work, the challenge of low capacity notwithstanding. The process is not complete if the final report is not published as required. If a report has been discussed at plenary, delaying its publication could impede the entire process and creates a wrong impression with regard to the commitment of States to this process. Based on the lessons learned, we may need to review our publication policy in accordance with the FATF practice.

Still on the mutual evaluation process, is the need for us to respect our calendar so as to make the process more systematic and predictable. Of course, where there are genuine reasons to defer on-site visits, we will do so, but this should be the exception rather than the norm. No amount of time is enough for a country to put all structures in place and prepare for this exercise, but countries should understand that it would amount to a waste of resources, if the calendar is changed without the prior decision of plenary and approval of the Ad hoc Ministerial Committee.

In the next coming months, the Secretariat will engage those countries that have been evaluated and are expected to submit follow up reports in

due course to assist them where necessary, in implementing the recommendations in their reports. But such engagement can only be meaningful when a country's report has been published. If a report is not published early enough, it would be difficult for us to determine the level of assistance to give to country.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me therefore seize this opportunity once more to appeal to our development partners to inform us on the nature of the assistance they can provide to us to assist our member States to implement recommended actions in their mutual evaluation report. Coordinating technical assistance under the framework of GIABA promises to balance need with comparative advantage. Indeed, the purpose of GIABA is to ensure that technical assistance are spread evenly among members.

One other lesson we have learned is the functioning of the network of our National Correspondents. Over years, this network has been very productive and I commend all our National Correspondents for their commitment and support. Despite this, there is still room for improvement. May I therefore humbly call on our respective States, and particularly those Ministers who supervise our National Correspondents directly to give them more support in order to build a robust AML/CFT regime in the States.

With regard to typologies and other threat assessment processes, significant progress has been made. The details of this will be discussed in my report to plenary shortly. Suffice it to state here that we will continue to determine typologies and research themes that have direct impact on the FATF 40+9 Recommendations, as well as deepening our regional integration process under the ECOWAS. In other words, our typologies themes must reflect global and regional concerns, and must produce reports that address those concerns and how to remediate them.

In conclusion, although I did say at the outset that I would attempt to address some major issues and concerns arising from our experiences so far, it is not possible to touch on all important issues during this opening session. Some of those issues will be put before you for decisions, while others may be just for information. I urge you to participate fully in the discussion, particularly the mutual evaluation reports that will be presented to you. The quality of the process is greatly enhanced by your constructive discussion, which also suggests how well we understand and appreciate the process. It is not an easy task though as you need to read

the reports properly before you can contribute meaningfully in the discussion.

Finally, I wish to reiterate our gratitude to all member States for their continued support and to in particular to the ECOWAS Commission for the support we have been given.

I thank you all for your kind attention and wish you productive discussions.

GIABA Secretariat
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