

Statement delivered by the Ag Network Coordinator of WADEMOS on behalf of West African CSOs during the Second PSC, ECOSOCC and Civil Society Consultative Meeting held on 6th June 2023, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

H.E Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security

H.E. Ambassador Mohamed Lamine Thiaw, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Senegal to the AU and PSC Chairperson for the month of July, 2023

Ambassadors and Distinguished members of the PSC

Colleagues from Civil Society from the five sub-regions of Africa,

On behalf of Civil Society Organizations in West Africa, the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) extends our appreciation and goodwill to the PSC for sustaining engagement with CSOs on peace and security.

WADEMOS is a coalition of over 35 civil society organizations and other pro-democracy actors across West Africa with the primary objective to mobilize, coordinate, and leverage the collective power of pro-democracy actors, resources, and opportunities within the region, including engagements with regional bodies and instruments to respond to the urgent problem of democratic reversal, and advance democratic norms and reforms in the Sub-region.

WADEMOS commends the efforts of the African Union in engaging civil society in responding regional peace and security initiatives. Particularly, we acknowledge the inaugural PSC, ECOSOCC and CSOs Joint Consultative Meeting held on 14 September 2022 which provided the opportunity for the PSC and CSOs to reflect on several issues related to the contribution of CSOs in the promotion of peace, security, and stability on the continent. WADEMOS participated in the deliberations and reflections which reaffirmed the need for the implementation of Assembly Decision adopted at the 16th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa, held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in May 2022; as well as the Declaration of the Reflection Forum on Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa (Accra Declaration) held in March 2022, in Accra, Ghana and adopted by the PSC.

Regional Context

In the early 90s with the end of the cold war, significant transformations happened in many African political systems. The institutional changes of what has been referred to as the third wave of democracy resulted in establishing rule-of-law-based governance

systems characterized by constitutionalism and constitutional government, including reforms such as term limits.

However, in more recent years, there has been an alarming democratic backsliding and rising of authoritarianism, with Sub-Saharan Africa contributing to the highest level as reported by the 2020 Freedom Report. Of the 12 countries with the largest most significant year-on-year score declines around the world in 2019, no fewer than five are in West Africa. Between 2021 and 2022 constitutionally elected governments were overthrown by military regimes in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea.

In other countries, governments attempt to extend their stay in power beyond their constitutional mandates with varying degrees of success has led to violence. Reports of constraints of individual freedom and human rights violation have been on the increase since 2020. In many parts of the region, there are serious concerns about the stability of countries as citizens' grapple with government and human rights violations, economic hardship, food insecurity, unemployment, and a growing refugee crisis spurred by internal conflicts as rebels, jihadists, security forces, farmers, pastoralists and pirates fight over territory and natural resources. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies highlighted a 70% increase in attacks in the Sahel region by militant Islamist organizations, rising from 1,180 to 2,005, with spillover risks to neighboring countries between 2020 and 2021.

WADEMOS interventions on democracy, peace and security in West Africa

Your Excellences, Ambassadors and Distinguished members of the PSC, WADEMOS contributes to peace and security in ways that complement regional efforts and interventions particularly addressing threats to democracy and challenges with the governance systems that have the tendency to derail the peace and stability of the region and trigger violence and instability. WADEMOS implements these initiatives within the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance which is supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.

A. Elections:

Election has become a source of instability and violence in the region. WADEMOS supports the quality of elections by promoting solidarity among civil society and WA citizens. It sees election as a regional activity that requires transnational engagement to enhance accountability and thereby promote its transparency and credibility. Since the inception of WADEMOS, we have implemented the following initiatives and mechanisms under our election program.

- Pre-election observation and assessment in Sierra Leone and Nigeria with the focus of identifying early warning challenges and threats including security ahead of the election and engaging with stakeholders to promote response to these challenges.

- Election Day observation as part of regional solidarity within the network and to observe the electoral process for transparency and credibility and contribute to successful electoral outcomes
- Post-election reviews and recommendations in support of electoral reforms including election peace and security

WADEMOS notes the following observations and lessons which have implications for election peace and security in the region:

- National Threats Assessment and Pre-election assessment helps in identifying early warning signs and challenges and map interventions targeting regional and national response
- Regional response and interventions remain very critical to peaceful and credible elections especially as election date gets closer internal mediation and conflict resolution structures including EMBs begin to lose support and confidence of political parties because of high level of polarization, suspicion and mistrust characterizing the political environment on the continent.
- Voter register is a major source of contestation and agitation
- We are seeing evidence of voter suppression in elections which has the tendency of undermining the credibility of elections and also threaten election security
- Vote tabulation transparency challenges are emerging in election witnessed in recent times in the sub-region and this is an early warning signs and threat to peaceful elections
- Trust in EMBs remain all time low (as confirmed by the Afrobarometer recent survey findings) and also the increase in the use of incendiary language and hate speech in politics have implications on the security of the election environment.

B. Political Transitions and Unconstitutional Changes in Government

WADEMOS under this portfolio extends solidarity to civil society to promote accountability and inclusion in the transition mechanisms in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

- WADEMOS constituted a high-level CSO delegation to Guinea following the overthrow of the constitution and had a meeting with the junta.
- We note progress in Mali with the adoption of a new constitution through a referendum held in June. However, the post constitutional institutional reforms and strengthening mechanisms are key in achieving successful transition in Mali. (e.g. electoral reforms)
- WADEMOS commissioned a study on the transition process in the three countries. We will organize a regional dialogue in August to reflect and share experiences on the challenges and prospects for the transition process in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso within the framework of the transition charter. The conference will release a communique to share its position and observations on the transition process as well as the state of democracy in Francophone West

Africa. WADEMOS will like to use this opportunity to extend an invitation to the PSC.

- Additionally, from mid-May to mid-June 2023, the National Council of the Transition in Guinea initiated constitutional orientation debates in which WADEMOS Network Members made significant contributions represented by Stat View International.

C. Tenure Elongation and challenges with the civic and political spaces for engagement

Presidential Term Extensions have been a source of political instability and violence in the region. Related to the issue of term limit is the closing spaces for political and civic participation through the use of online regulations and laws that suppress democratic spaces and platforms for dialogue and engagement. WADEMOS contribution to protecting the civic space from deteriorating and in support of term limits are as follows:

- WADEMOS is embarking on a regional campaign against tenure elongation and constitutional changes to term limits including a call on ECOWAS to outlaw tenure elongation and resolve to term limit in WA
- On the closing spaces, we have issued alerts on major happenings in the region and monitoring incidents that suppress or violates civil liberties and freedoms including assembly and expression
- We plan to review cyber security regulations in West Africa to assess its impact on rights and security in the sub-region

D. Peace and Security

WADEMOS is working with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding to enhance CSO response to early warning signs and alerts on peace and security within the ECOWAS region. Additionally, WADEMOS Network members have embarked on a number of initiatives to enhance regional peace and security including violent extremism.

- CDD-Ghana, a member of WADEMOS has launched a campaign to raise awareness and sensitization on violent extremism and radicalization to enhance information sharing and early warning around the northern borders of Ghana which share boundaries with Burkina Faso and the Sahel region.
- WADEMOS is supporting local initiatives at preventing and countering violent extremism through the DEMOS-Fund.
- WADEMOS will continue to monitor the human rights and humanitarian conditions in countries faced with VE and contribute to continental and regional early warning mechanisms.
- WADEMOS is supporting the development of a Democracy Capture Index to serve as Early Warning Systems and early response mechanisms on democracy and governance in Africa championed by CDD-Ghana.

In conclusion, we express appreciation to the UNDP for their support to CSOs in complementing AU interventions on the Declaration of the Reflection Forum on Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa, through the program on Silencing the Guns through cross-border mobility.

Your Excellences, Ambassadors and Distinguished members of the PSC, WADEMOS is once again grateful to the PSC and ECOSOCC for the invitation to speak on behalf of CSOs in West Africa and we reaffirm our commitment to continental peace and security, particularly on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa.

Thank you