

## PRESS RELEASE

March 25, 2024

### WADEMOS EMPOWERS 15 WEST AFRICAN YOUTH TO CHAMPION DEMOCRACY AND PROMOTE POSITIVE CHANGE

The West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) has mentored 15 young activists selected from across West Africa under its Next Gen Initiative. The Initiative is designed to empower and equip the next generation of leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to promote positive change and strengthen democracy in West Africa.

The six-month fellowship program, which commenced in October 2023, encompassed a four-week intensive online session, followed by a two-month mentoring program with a recognized civil society organization, and community-based project work.

Referred to as ‘Young Leaders’, the first cohort of the inaugural Next Gen Initiative consists of: Ophelia Awinboma Azure (Ghana), Mark Owusu Twumasi (Ghana), Ndey Fatou Nying (Gambia), Zakari Emmanuel (Nigeria), Ohalete Lynda Chiamaka (Nigeria), Kotobidjo Nehemie (Benin), Sadiya Diallo (Burkina Faso), Diallo Aissatou (Guinea), Roslia Djedjo (Guinea-Bissau), Malamine Badiane (Senegal), Marina Terry (Sierra Leone), Sialyn Hawah Bockarie (Liberia), Ousman Goulo Abdoulaye (Niger), Pitekkelabou-Potchossi Magnudawa (Togo), Tetchi-Yavo N’gbesso Jean-Yves (Cote d’Ivoire).

Addressing the first cohort at a closing ceremony held at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) in Accra, which serves as the WADEMOS secretariat, the Project Director for WADEMOS, Prof. Kwasi Prempeh, admonished the Young Leaders to forge meaningful relationships that will contribute to breaking the barriers that divide citizens of the sub-region.

“WADEMOS has a deep commitment to the youth, making sure that we raise a new generation of democracy defenders and activists. I hope that the few days you spent here have been productive and that you have learned a lot from each other. The idea of WADEMOS is solidarity, learning about democracy, our challenges, our various countries and cultures, and trying to create a common West African city. It is all about offering you and the next generation a real prospect of living in free societies so that you can realize your full potential,” he asserted.

Prof. Prempeh also urged the young activists to keep faith in democracy despite the current challenges, indicating that “authoritarianism produced civil wars, humanitarian crises, refugees moving from country to country, and child soldiers. All of these things are legacies of the authoritarian period.”

Prof. Larry Diamond, one of the world’s leading scholars in democracy, who was the special guest of honor at the closing ceremony, entreated the Young Leaders to remain active voices in their communities against abuse of power and anti-democratic tendencies by their leaders.

“Human nature is such that without scrutiny, without public voice, public media, independent voice, or civil society, you are only going to get new and deeper forms of abuse of power and

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waning public trust. Whenever governance goes bad, it is countered by an informed, active, vocal, peaceful, imaginative, and energetic civil society, and that is what you represent,” he stated.

The WADEMOS Network Coordinator, Paul Osei-Kuffour, emphasized that the recent spate of democratic decline necessitates the grooming of a new crop of leaders to forge a new path for the sub-region and the continent. “The Next Gen Initiative underscores WADEMOS’ quest to help build a new crop of leaders whose leadership skills and commitment to development would be unquestionable. The Network also aims to build the capacities of young leaders, give them exposure, and provide a platform for them to explore their abilities and talents while ensuring diversity, inclusivity, and balance in leadership on the continent,” he added.

Ndey Fatou Nying recounted how her experience has taught her more about other West African countries, stating, “Moving out of my comfort zone to share in the experiences of other incredible leaders across West Africa and learning from their cultures is, for me, worth the miles traveled to be here. I made it a challenge to learn at least one thing from the diverse people in the camp.

Malamine Badiane commended WADEMOS for the invaluable skills and tools he has acquired through the program, noting, “The Initiative has not only equipped me with the knowledge and skills to promote democracy and good governance but has also instilled in me a sense of responsibility to be a beacon of hope in my community.”

Selected from over 150 applicants, the 15 successful Next Gen Young Leaders received certificates from the Network for their participation in the program. Following the conclusion of the six-month program, each person will focus on completing or initiating a community-based project with support and technical guidance from the Network.

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## About WADEMOS

WADEMOS is an independent and non-partisan network of diverse national and transnational civil society organizations and civic groups working to promote and defend democracy, good governance, and inclusive development in the West Africa region. WADEMOS mobilizes, coordinates, and leverages the collective voice and power of civil society and other pro-democracy actors, resources, and opportunities within the West Africa region to advance its mission. The current membership of WADEMOS stands at 47 spread across West Africa. The WADEMOS Secretariat is based in Accra, Ghana.

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