

PRESS STATEMENT

January 31, 2025

CSOs APPEAL TO ECOWAS AND THE ALLIANCE OF SAHEL STATES TO ENHANCE NEGOTIATIONS AND DIALOGUE IN THE INTEREST OF REGIONAL CO-OPERATION, PEACE AND SECURITY

On January 29, 2024, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger signed the *Liptako-Gourma Charter*, creating the Alliance des États du Sahel (AES). The move to sever ties with ECOWAS, as an established framework, stemmed from some concerns expressed by the AES. These include sanctions imposed by ECOWAS in response to the coups, accusations that foreign powers influence ECOWAS member states, and a lack of support for combating terrorism in the region.

The West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS Network), a transnational Network of CSOs, across the West African sub-region, takes notice of the following developments relating to the exit of the AES:

- ECOWAS' decision in February 2024, notwithstanding its normative frameworks, to lift travel, commercial, and economic sanctions imposed on all three countries and the lifting of the no-fly zone imposed on all commercial flights.
- The initiatives taken by the AES to advance its cause, including the introduction of an AES passport, aim to strengthen cooperation among AES member states and facilitate travel for AES citizens.
- The collaborative regional approach to mediation with the appointment of Senegal's President, Bassirou Faye, as ECOWAS special envoy to mediate the conflict involving the countries, aiming to restore peace and stability and supported by Togolese President, Faure Gnassingbe.
- ECOWAS' letter, dated January 29, indicating a transitional period from January 29, 2025, to July 29, 2025. During this time, ECOWAS is maintaining open channels for cooperation and support.

We further recognize the importance of the Sahel States to protect their national sovereignty while responding to the urgent needs of security, development, and autonomy in a complex geopolitical context. Indeed, economic and trade-related activities should provide deep reflection for the AES and countries in the sub-region, particularly because multilateralism offers mutual benefits for resolving cross-border challenges and promoting regional peace and security.

In light of the above, WADEMOS Network urges the Sahel States' leaders and ECOWAS to consider as follows:

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Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) | Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) | West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) | WANEP | Center for Democracy and Development-West Africa (CDD-West Africa), Nigeria | StatView International, Guinea | Center for Democratic Governance (CDG), Burkina Faso | Africivistes, Senegal | Sindicato de Jornalistas e Técnicos de Comunicação (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Développement Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin

- Following the expiry of the one-year mandatory notice of exit of member countries from ECOWAS, there are still many issues to be resolved requiring the two parties to sustain and promote dialogue and negotiation. These dialogues must consider and reflect the wider interest of community citizens and the security of the region. The WADEMOS Network therefore urges the parties to prioritize inclusive solutions in the interest of millions of citizens in the region. The network remains convinced that regional integration is essential to meet the common challenges of our states.
- ECOWAS should undertake a comprehensive review of its revised treaty and organs and the complementary frameworks to align strategically with the current and emerging context and restore trust and confidence. The ECOWAS of Citizens, through the introduction of ECOSOC, must be integral to the future of ECOWAS. We, therefore, commend ongoing efforts for the formation of ECOSOC and call on ECOWAS to accelerate the process, being the only organ yet to be constituted. The future and sustainability of ECOWAS will largely depend on how it connects vertically with community citizens. It is undeniable that the regional bloc requires fundamental reforms, especially in the areas of conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security, in addition to democracy and good governance. As a civil society intervention, WADEMOS Network will continue to mobilize, engage, and support ECOWAS towards building a strong, democratic, and safe region.
- We recommend a review of the ECOWAS sanction regime and response to the Unconstitutional Change of Governments (UCG) as a tool for strengthening compliance and respect for democratic values and principles. We urge ECOWAS to place more emphasis on supporting member countries through the revised frameworks to improve democratic governance, strengthen democratic institutions, and promote cross-border opportunities for addressing the youth bulge and related social threats and challenges.
- Additionally, ECOWAS institutions and member countries should remain committed to the Standby Force (SF), which has been activated for counterterrorism operations, particularly in areas affected by instability, including Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

Conclusion

Finally, we urge the AES to reconsider and rescind the exit decision in the interest of ECOWAS citizens and to explore the 6-month window provided by ECOWAS as the transition continues. While the pursuit of national sovereignty and the fight against neo-colonial exploitation are vital, cutting ties with a robust regional alliance risks undermining the significant benefits the people enjoy.

The WADEMOS Network encourages leaders to consult their citizens more and to integrate their concerns into the decision-making process to guarantee solutions that truly benefit the population.

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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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