

March 13, 2025

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE WEST AFRICA DEMOCRACY SOLIDARITY NETWORK (WADEMOS) 3RD ANNUAL CIVIL SOCIETY REGIONAL CONVENING ON THE THEME: “LEVERAGING SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY ACROSS WEST AFRICA: CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNT, AND PERSPECTIVES”**

## Introduction

West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) held its 3rd Annual Regional Convening in Accra, Ghana, from March 3-4, 2025. This year’s Convening, on the theme **“Leveraging Solidarity Movement in Defense of Democracy across West Africa: Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Perspectives”**, drew participants from civil society organizations and other civic formations from all the countries in the ECOWAS Region. Also in attendance were representatives from the ECOWAS Commission. The two-day conference deliberated on the state of democracy in West Africa and the future of multilateralism with a focus on ECOWAS and its reform agenda, the changing face of civil society and the civic space in the Sahel states and West Africa, and the potential for strengthening democratic solidarity and resilience in the region in the face of growing threats.

West Africa continues to grapple with challenges that not only threaten the stability and security of the region but undermine efforts and gains made over the past five decades in the area of economic and political integration. Participants at the conference expressed deep dissatisfaction with the alarming situation in Togo, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, The Gambia, and Cote d'Ivoire, which are facing significant challenges to their democratic systems, developments that contribute to the broader trend of democratic backsliding and the fragmentation of the region resulting from the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger from ECOWAS:

- In Togo, the recent constitutional changes pushed through by the Faure Gnassingbe regime have been roundly condemned by civil society groups as a "constitutional coup," calculated to circumvent presidential term limits. These alterations were rushed through by lawmakers just days before the pivotal legislative elections set for April 29, 2024, blatantly contravening the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.
- In Guinea Bissau, the political landscape is equally troubling. President Umaro Sissoco Embaló’s increasingly authoritarian behaviour is in contravention of the nation’s commitment to democratic principles. His continued stay in office and

Solidarity for Democracy | Solidarité pour la Démocratie

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 Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Development Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin

dissolution of parliament in Monday, December 4, 2023, executed without regard for constitutional timelines for new elections, underscore an alarming disregard for democratic norms and fuels concerns over the future of governance in the country.

- In Guinea Conakry, the political situation is complex and has been marked by instability since the military coup in September 2021. The prospects for elections are uncertain, with the military junta led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya having postponed elections multiple times. Initially, elections were promised for December 2024, but they have been rescheduled for 2025, which is sparking concerns about the country's democratic transition.
- The Gambia is entangled in its own set of challenges related to constitutional reform and adoption of presidential term limit. The deliberate avoidance of establishing a new constitution with clear term limits is creating a climate of uncertainty as the nation approaches the 2026 presidential elections.
- The political environment in La Côte d'Ivoire remains tense, as the country prepares for the 2025 elections, with President Alassane Ouattara's bid for a fourth term fueling growing apprehension. His abrupt reversal of a prior decision not to seek re-election has raised serious concerns about the prospects for peace and stability in the country.
- ECOWAS, once notable among Africa's RECs for its successes in championing democratization in its region, is now at a crossroads, facing numerous challenges that threaten its internal cohesion, triggering growing demand for structural and institutional reform.

## Resolutions

Participants resolved as follows:

1. We recognize the gains made in the region, particularly with the recent elections held in Senegal which marked a significant milestone, as President Macky Sall stepped down after his constitutionally limited second term, paving the way for a new leader. Other countries in the region have also made strides in consolidating democracy. Nigeria, Liberia and Ghana have demonstrated commitment to democratic principles through peaceful transfers of power.
2. We recognize that over the past decade, support for democracy has declined and opposition to military rule has weakened, but there is a growing demand for

Solidarity for Democracy | Solidarité pour la Démocratie

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 Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Development Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin

government accountability, and the rule of law, but support for democratic norms such as election and term limit have held steady. On average, support for democracy still remains high within the ECOWAS region. We resolved to work collaboratively across borders, and in solidarity, to support the consolidation of democracy in the region, with special emphasis on the AES, Togo, Guinea Bissau and Guinea Conakry. In The Gambia, we commend efforts on the constitution amendment process and call on all actors to come to a consensus on the adoption of a new constitution for Gambians that respects term limit. In Cote d'Ivoire, we urge President Alassane Ouattara to recommit to his decision, not to seek reelection for the fourth time.

3. As AES and ECOWAS drift apart, maintaining dialogue and coordinating security and development policies is vital to safeguard the interests of West African citizens, who are bound by kinship, history, and culture. Stability and economic prosperity in the region require that ECOWAS and AES take a pragmatic and flexible approach. We urge ECOWAS and AES to prioritize a common framework within the 6-month transition period that upholds the security and free movement of persons and goods in the region to ensure peace and stability.
4. We acknowledge the declining civic space, particularly in the Sahel, and the fragmentation of civil society due to new media and the rise of shadow civil society movements. We note with concern the growing foreign information manipulation and interference, targeted misinformation and disinformation, and we therefore commit to providing support to combat information disorder in West Africa, particularly in the Sahel, by supporting efforts aimed at promoting digital resilience and manipulation and improving information integrity required for the active and meaningful participation of citizens in a democracy.

We further seek to engage ECOWAS on the development of a region-wide policy framework to guide ECOWAS member countries in combating disinformation and digital repression in West Africa. Additionally, we resolved to build consensus on key transformational approaches and strategies to enhance the advocacy and activism of the region's CSOs, social movements, and other pro-democracy actors, while strengthening WADEMOS' solidarity initiatives across West Africa and beyond.

5. Recognizing the change in the aid and development landscape, specifically the cuts and dwindling funding to the civil society sector by traditional aid architecture, CSOs in the region agreed to explore a self-financing assistance module to fund NGOs/CSOs; and to diversify and develop appropriate funding models and/or structures. In addition, we resolved to enhance collaboration by involving other

## Solidarity for Democracy | Solidarité pour la Démocratie

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 | Africvistes, Senegal | Sindicato de Jornalistas e Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Development Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin

external partners, such as the business community and private sector, including transnational corporations who are interested in civil society issues. We further agreed to develop an operational framework that transcends traditional projects or donor assistance by prioritizing a people-centered approach, ensuring that our activities resonate with the public, and encouraging investment even in the absence of international funding.

6. Noting the evolving regional and global political and security dynamics, the geopolitical and geostrategic competitions, and the emerging multipolar order, we found it relevant to leverage solidarity and contribute to the constitution of an ECOWAS Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in pursuit of ECOWAS of the People. We therefore acknowledge ECOWAS' quest to convene a Special Summit on the Future of Regional Integration in West Africa.

We resolved to develop a civil society position on ECOWAS reforms and support the realization of ECOWAS of the people, recognizing that ECOWAS is indeed at a critical juncture, and reforms are necessary to prevent its potential disintegration. Participants further called for the adoption of ECOWAS oversight committees in Parliaments at the national level to enhance reporting on the protocols to the ECOWAS Parliament. This will also allow for debates on the resolutions from the ECOWAS Parliament within national Parliaments and enhance its legitimacy and convergence with the executive which overtime has dominated ECOWAS decision making organs and wields overbearing influence.

## Conclusion

West Africa is facing numerous challenges that threaten its very foundation. The military takeovers, human rights violations, civic space restrictions and disinformation, breaches of presidential term limits and public dissatisfaction with governance in the region are eroding citizens' trust and faith in democratic institutions. The West African sub-region is struggling to make democratic progress due to the presence of military-led governments, insecurity, geopolitical pressures, and bad governance characterized by economic misgovernance, corruption, and youth unemployment. As ECOWAS approaches its 50th anniversary, it is grappling with ideological shifts and tensions and an existential threat not just to its credibility but to the fundamental goal of regional integration. The official withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from the regional bloc has raised concerns about the future of integration in West Africa and underscores the precarious state of democratic transitions in the region.

Recognizing these challenges, participants resolved to deepen cross-border cooperation and expressed their support and cooperation to the democratization, peace and security

### Solidarity for Democracy | Solidarité pour la Démocratie

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 Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Development Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin

processes in the region. We call on governments, ECOWAS, civil society and the media, private sector and the business community, the youth and all stakeholders to commit to redeeming the calamitous state of the region and avoid any further decline.

## Appreciation

Participants at the 3rd Annual Regional Convening expressed profound gratitude to the *Swedish International Development Agency* for the generous support to WADEMOS. Participants further appreciate the Political Affairs, Peace and Security of ECOWAS Commission for engaging in the discussions. WADEMOS further extends its deepest appreciation to all the organizations, participants and experts who attended the conference particularly the chairperson, keynote speaker, development partners and stakeholders who delivered goodwill messages, moderators, discussants, and panelists. *Refer below for the full list of Organizations who participated in the conference.*

**-End-**

**Signed:**

***Representatives of civil society organizations across West Africa***

## 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.

**For more information and media interviews, please contact:**

Name: Jonah Eledi

Designation: Communications and Digital Platforms Officer

Email: [j.eledi@wademosnetwork.org](mailto:j.eledi@wademosnetwork.org)

Phone Number: +233 26 373 5330

Solidarity for Democracy | Solidarité pour la Démocratie

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 Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Development Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin

## **Participants at the Convening**

- Dr. Ibrahima Kane, Regional Integration Expert
- Amb. Napoleon Abdulai, Retired Diplomat and Ghana's Former Ambassador to Mali
- ECOWAS Commission
- Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt, Germany
- Afrobarometer – Regional
- West Africa Elections Observers Network (WAEON)
- Africa Governance Institute
- FactSpace, West Africa - Ghana
- Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana)
- AfrikaJom - Senegal
- GIZ - Ghana
- West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) – Regional / Ghana
- Reseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Devellopement - Benin
- Le Balai citoyen – Burkina Faso
- Forum Cabo-Verdiano da Sociedade Civil – Cape Verde
- Centre de Recherche Politique d'Abidjan – Ivory Coast
- Gender Center for Empowering Development (GenCED) - Ghana
- Media Foundation for West Africa – Ghana
- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) - Ghana
- Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) - Ghana
- Center for Research and Policy Development (CRPD) – The Gambia
- Peace Hub - The Gambia
- Citoyen pour la Paix et la Justice (CPJ Guinea) - Guinea
- Sindicato de Jornalistas e Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC) – Guinea Bissau
- Center for Democratic Governance (CDG) - Liberia
- Coalition for Citizen Observation of Elections in Mali (COCEM) – Mali
- Institute of Security Studies Africa (ISS Africa) – Mali
- Sahel Institute - Mali
- Femmes, Actions et Développement (FAD) - Niger
- Women in Politics Forum – Nigeria
- Center for Democracy and Development West Africa (CDD-West Africa) - Nigeria
- Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) – Nigeria
- Africivistes – Senegal
- Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO) – Senegal
- National Election Watch (NEW) – Sierra Leone
- Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) – Sierra Leone
- Clinique d'Expertise Juridique et social (CEJUS) – Togo
- Front Togo Debout - Togo
- Tournons la Page – Togo
- IDEAL Afrique

Solidarity for Democracy | Solidarité pour la Démocratie

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 Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Development Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin

Solidarity for Democracy | Solidarité pour la Démocratie

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 | Africtivistes, Senegal | Sindicato de Jornalistas e Tecnicos de Comunicacao (SINJOTEC), Guinea-Bissau | Association Femmes Leadership et Development Durable (AFLED), Mali | Network of Women Leaders for Development (RFLD), Benin