



WEST AFRICAN ELDERS' FORUM STRATEGY MEETING

Venue: Imo/Rivers Hall, Transcorp Hilton, Abuja, Nigeria

Date: March 23rd, 2022

Communique

The West African Elders Forum convened a strategy meeting that was held in Abuja, Nigeria, on 23 March 2022.

In attendance at the meeting were the Chairman of the Forum, H.E. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (former President of Nigeria), H.E. Ernest Bai Koroma (former President of Sierra Leone), H.E. Kadre Desire Quedraogo (former Prime Minister of Burkina Faso), H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (former President of Nigeria) and H.E. Madam Aminata Toure (former Prime Minister of Senegal).

The meeting assessed the emerging threats to democracy, peace, and stability in the West African sub-region. Discussions were especially focused on recent military interventions, the continuing threats posed by violent extremism, the persistence of human trafficking, and the dire socio-economic conditions facing the bulk of the populace.

At the end of proceedings, the Elders:

1. Joined ECOWAS leaders and other persons of goodwill to register their grave concerns about the present and looming threats to sustenance of democracy in West Africa, and called on all stakeholders to combine efforts to ensure that the gains of democratisation in the sub-region are not rolled back but rather advance.
2. Noted that despite the several challenges to democratic governance in West Africa that have resulted in the overthrow of constitutional order in a number of countries, there are still many examples of democratic advancement and consolidation that must be acknowledged and celebrated.
3. Expressed satisfaction that democracy still remains the governance system of choice among the citizens of the West African sub-region, even in the face of immense difficulties, as reflected by most public opinion polls, notably, Afrobarometer.
4. Encouraged the governments of West Africa to strengthen their investments in good governance, including taking conscious steps to overcome the adverse consequences for democracy-building of weak institutions of accountability and checks and balances.
5. Advocated for the strengthening of parliaments and the judiciary as an autonomous arm of government so that they can play the oversight roles expected of them in a robust and fulsome manner.
6. Appealed to the judicial arm of government across West Africa to uphold fairness, equity, and justice in a transparent, independent, and consistent manner that can contribute to the enhancement of democratic governance in the sub-region.
7. Called for the adequate resourcing, professionalisation, and independence of election management bodies across West Africa. These bodies are also enjoined to exercise their mandate with integrity, transparency, and diligence, understanding that electoral integrity is central to national political stability.

8. In order to enhance electoral integrity in West Africa, election management bodies should be open to explore all good practices for enhanced election administration and the deployment of technology as an additional layer of protecting the credibility of the ballot.
9. Called on politicians in general and political office holders in particular to eschew a zero-sum approach to public affairs, and instead embrace a spirit of respect for the rule of law and the common good at all times.
10. Recent machinations that can be qualified as constitutional coups d'état carried out by politicians, including the brazen manipulation of elections, are to be condemned as much as military coups d'état carried out by soldiers. Also, actions that cause unnecessary stress to the domestic political order must be avoided, including ruptures between incumbent leaders and their predecessors.
11. Encouraged ECOWAS as a matter of urgency to conclude the process of the review and updating of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance so that its implementation can start as soon as possible.
12. Saluted the efforts of the ECOWAS Commission to advance the West African regional agenda and encouraged it to deepen its communication and outreach in member countries so that citizens can gain a greater awareness of its work. A revamped communication and outreach strategy is made more urgent by the need to counter the impression in some quarters that ECOWAS is simply a club of leaders.
13. Called on the leadership of the Sub-region to devote attention to the menace posed to security and governance by ungoverned spaces in several Sahel countries by extremist groups and various traffickers.

14. Expressed their readiness to continue to make their experience and good offices available as a way of contributing their own quota to the stability, peace, and progress of West Africa. In this connection, they called for much greater proactive action to nip problem in the bud and not allow them to fester until they lead to a breakdown.
15. Resolved to take a number of immediate steps as part of their programme of engagements in 2022 which should go a long way to contributing to the strengthening of the idea and ideals of West African integration and the promise of democratic governance.

Abuja, 23 March 2022

