



West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

PRESS STATEMENT

THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA: A CALL ON ECOWAS TO STRENGTHEN THE 2001 SUPPLEMENTARY PROTOCOL ON DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Background

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) on behalf of its 550 member organisations spread across the 15 Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), expresses concern over the recent decline in the democratic landscape in West Africa with implications to peace, development and security of its people. Notable trends include the re-emergence of military coups and overthrow of democratic governments as recorded in Mali and Guinea in 2020 and 2021 respectively. These have not only stymied democracy, but also led to political uncertainties in the affected countries. The second concern is the trajectory of efforts towards constitutional amendment in relation to Presidential term limits and tenure elongation as recently witnessed in Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea with growing fears of attempts by other Member States adopting this trend. This has further undermined governance leading to fractured civic space, social incohesion, manipulation of the electoral processes and violent dissensions between citizens and political actors. This has not only weakened public confidence in the transparency and accountability of institutions of democracy across ECOWAS Member States, but has also gradually eroded the trust in ECOWAS leadership as a best example of political practice on the continent in line with its application of the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

In view of these emerging political challenges to the region, the call by Member States during the extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government of September 16, 2021, instructing the President of the Commission to initiate the process of reviewing the Supplementary Protocol, was received with enthusiasm by all stakeholders, including civil society. The call was seen as an effort to regain ECOWAS dwindling political relevance amongst its citizens and also shore up a renewed wave of democratic stability in the region. It led to series of ECOWAS and civil society initiatives including a stakeholders meeting organized by the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security in Accra from November 16-17, 2021. This was on the heels of a related civil society consultative meeting held by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) from November 15 to 16, 2021. A common outcome and recommendation of these multi stakeholder meetings is the need to review critical aspects of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to respond effectively to the declining democratic governance in the region, including the issue of presidential term limits and tenure elongation.

it was therefore sad to note that these recommendations were not considered during the Sixteenth Extraordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government held on 12 December 2021 in Abuja, Nigeria, despite its relevance to governance stability, peace and security in the region.

WANEP's Concerns

Given the prevailing cauldron of widening regional citizen disenchantment to the dwindling democratic governance across most Member States, it is expedient that ECOWAS Member States recommit themselves to democratic ethos through the review of the Supplementary Protocol to stem the tide of political disputes that exacerbate regional insecurity and instability. Specifically, WANEP expresses the following concerns:

1. Inability to review the Protocol to effectively respond to the declining democratic governance has the potential to erode democratic ethos and political gains attained by ECOWAS over the years in the region;
2. The credibility of ECOWAS as a regional interlocutor will be undermined by its citizens, opening the space for conflagration of violent protests, increased alignment of youths and other interest groups to armed militia groups seeking alternative inclusive and equitable governance and therefore, reinforcing the region as a zone of instability in the continent;
3. It has the potential of derailing the ECOWAS Agenda 2050 aimed at promoting a "people-centred" community.
4. It will further embolden military intransigencies and widespread military takeovers across ECOWAS Member States which weakens regional democratic governance and the credibility of ECOWAS as a supra national entity in the region;
5. It will lead to further impunity by incumbent governments across Member States by weakening democratic institutions and manipulation of their constitutions to extend their term limits in power. This will exacerbate instability in the member countries and across the region;

WANEP therefore urgently calls for the following:

- The need for ECOWAS to commit to the review and strengthening of the Protocol as already recommended by multi stakeholders as a panacea to bad governance and multiple conflicts in the region;
- CSOs should intensify advocacy campaigns and further stakeholder engagements with political actors at Track one to push for collective action for good governance and peer to peer support for strong democratic institutions in the region;
- The need to raise public awareness on the imperatives to democratic governance in the region and the need to review the Protocol to address the pitfalls.

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