“State-Citizen partnership crucial for peace and development in West Africa”, says Dr Abdel- Fatau Musah

Ambassador Abdel-Fatau Musah, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, has called on West African nations to build a strong and cordial partnership with their citizens to ensure trust and cooperation and to foster long-term peace and development in the region.

Dr Abdel-Fatau Musah noted that many peace and security challenges that have bedevilled the West Africa region have emanated from the weak and in some cases non-existent citizen-state relationship, exclusionary politics, and non-participatory development paradigms.

Dr Musah made this statement while delivering a keynote address under the theme: “A Retrospection of State-Citizen Relations in West Africa: Implications for the Realization of ECOWAS Vision 2050” at the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding’s (WANEP’s) second Peacebuilding Fellows’ Conference, Partners Forum and 17th General Assembly in Accra, Ghana from 21 to 23 March 2023. The ECOWAS Commissioner identified WANEP as playing a major role in furthering peace and security in West Africa and thanked the Network for its continuous partnership with ECOWAS over the last two decades, a partnership that continues to be a global model and reference for effective IGO-CSO collaboration for sustainable peace and security. He further encouraged WANEP and other partners to strengthen their collaboration with ECOWAS and its Member States to realize the objectives of ECOWAS Vision 2050.

In his welcome address, Dr Chukwuemeka B. Eze, Executive Director of WANEP, underscored the importance of citizen engagement in promoting sustainable peace and security in West Africa. “We believe that a key ingredient to enhance the trust and confidence of citizens and the state lies with the way citizens are carried along in the conceptualization, design and implementation of State policies”, Dr Eze said. It is therefore important to support civil society organisations such as WANEP to continue to play the role of intermediaries between governmental and intergovernmental institutions and the citizens of the region.

Prof Oumar Ndongo, the outgoing Regional Board Chair of WANEP highlighted the organisation’s significant achievements over the past years and gave credit to the consistency and commitment of its partners. "We are aware that every dollar spent on peace and security in West Africa must reflect on the people and communities we serve and this is why WANEP will continue to remain prudent and judicious in its development of priorities and application of funds”, he said.

In a related development, Mrs Florence Iheme was appointed the new Regional Board Chair by the Network’s Regional Board. Mrs Iheme is a seasoned peacebuilding and development practitioner with vast experience in and outside the West Africa region.
The West African Peacebuilding Fellows (WAFeF) Conference is a critical component of WANEP, providing a platform for exceptional West African citizens who work within and beyond their countries of origin to discuss ways to leverage their skills and experience in support of WANEP, ECOWAS and its Member States, and other development partners in their interventions aimed at conflict management and transformation in Africa. The WAFeF aims to support research, teaching, publication, and practical field experience on themes of peace, conflict resolution, and African development, while also inspiring people to form relationships that promote a culture of tolerance and peace.

Likewise, the Partners Forum is designed to engage current and potential partners and exchange perspectives on the state of peace and security in the region and how WANEP is responding through its strategic plan. Partners discussed new governance and partnership principles and procedures for purpose of synergy. This event provided an opportunity for WANEP to work with its partners to develop effective strategies and mechanisms to promote sustainable peace and security in West Africa.

The 2023 General Assembly provided an opportunity for WANEP to take stock of its interventions over the previous two years, evaluate its strategies, and establish methods for further collaboration with constituencies and stakeholders. Participants at the event deliberated on the Network’s accomplishments and challenges; and considered new ideas and solutions for enhancing its work.