



ECOWAS – AU – UN Joint Mission to Banjul

Press Statement

From 4 to 5 May 2016, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) undertook a joint mission to Banjul.

The Mission was led by the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Mr. Marcel Alain de Souza; the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Dr. Aisha Laraba Abdullahi; and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for West Africa and the Sahel, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas. The Mission also included the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights through its Regional Representative for West Africa.

The Joint Mission aimed at developing an understanding of the viewpoints and perspectives of Gambian stakeholders on political and other developments affecting The Gambia ahead of the presidential election due to take place in December 2016; assessing compliance with regional and sub-regional standards on elections, democracy, human rights and governance, including the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; and exploring options to further support dialogue among Gambian stakeholders with a view to promoting consensus on critical issues in order to contribute to inclusive, credible, participatory and peaceful elections in The Gambia.

The Joint Mission consulted widely with Cabinet members. The delegation also interacted with the Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission, representatives of the ruling majority and opposition parties, religious leaders and representatives of civil society organizations. The Joint Mission also met with Gambia's diplomatic partners including Ambassadors from ECOWAS countries,

the Head of the European Union Delegation, the British and US Ambassadors, and the Spanish Charge d' Affaires.

The Mission appealed for credible and inclusive elections in an atmosphere of peace and tolerance throughout the electoral process. The Mission noted progress in the preparations towards the elections and welcomed all stakeholders' commitment to the holding of peaceful elections. The Mission commended Gambian stakeholders for the reinstatement of the Inter Party Committee, which may serve as an effective platform for the resolution of contentious issues ahead of, and during the electoral process. In particular, the Mission urged political parties to work together to create consensus around electoral laws and enhance outreach to increase the participation of youth and women. The Mission encouraged the establishment of an Elections Situation Room, which is best practice in many African countries.

In regard to ongoing judicial proceedings and in particular to the events on 14 and 16 April 2016, the Mission evoked international and regional standards according to which the State has the duty to protect the rights of its citizens, in particular, the freedom of expression, assembly and political participation. The Mission reiterated calls for a credible and independent investigation, and urged the Government of The Gambia to allow due process of law.

The Mission also welcomed the announcement by His Excellency the President during the State Opening of the National Assembly, and looks forward to the establishment of the proposed National Human Rights Commission.

The Joint Mission expresses the wish that The Gambia will emulate the ongoing trend of peaceful and inclusive elections across West Africa, as a precondition to confront challenges of development, in line with the aspirations by the Gambian people.

On the border issue, the delegation appealed to the two countries to continue the dialogue underway, and in particular, to convene the bi-lateral meeting scheduled for the middle of May with a view to arriving at a mutually agreed solution.

United in the vision to contribute to a better future for the peoples of Africa, ECOWAS, the AU, and the UN re-affirm their continuing commitment to supporting the Government and the people of The Gambia in their quest to realize the universal Sustainable Development Goals.