



African Union

a United and Strong Africa

Opening Remarks by His Excellency, Joseph Chilengi, Presiding Officer of AU ECOSOCC and Chairman of the WANEP 13th General Assembly and Partner's Forum – 19 to 22 January 2015, Accra Ghana

Protocols: The Chair and members of the Board of WANEP, Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ghana, Your Excellency, the keynote speaker and Ghana Ambassador to Nigeria, The outgoing and Incoming Executive Directors of WANEP, Representatives of ECOWAS Member States and the WANEP partners and friends of peace, Dear Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all, on behalf of the members of the 2nd General Assembly of ECOSOCC, to express my sincere gratitude to the leadership of WANEP for inviting me to Chair its 13th General Assembly and partner's forum. This is one of the very few initial official functions I am performing in my capacity as the current Presiding Officer of ECOSOCC following my election in December 2014. Even with my very crowded programs especially the forthcoming African Union Summit, I could not have resisted or hesitated in accepting this generous invitation from WANEP. My identification and passion for WANEP dates back to the early years of its operations and since then I have followed with admiration its giant strides and contributions to peace and security on the African continent.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, whose progress over the past 16 years cannot be overemphasized, continue to be the pride of all Africans that indeed we can nurture and groom an African institution that is professional in operations and result oriented in delivery. While the responsibility of peace and security resides mainly with our member states, the RECs and the African Union; civil society organisations like WANEP have demonstrated their capacity and competence to influence policies on peace and security as well as other developmental challenges confronting the African continent. Our leaders and the African Union Commission has come to realize the increasing strength and potentials of civil society in the entire peace and security regime. The need for civil society to complement the efforts of the Union at national, sub-regional and regional levels cannot therefore be overstated.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, An enhanced civil society involvement in the implementation

of the AU protocols and normative frameworks reinforces peoples participation/collaborative action with the Union and member States in order to address development and human security challenges caused by poverty, and limited access to the rich resources prevalent in the continent – this is what ECOSOCC is set forth to do. Juxtaposed to this is the continuous threat to citizens and communities arising from illegal smuggling of arms across Africa’s porous borders, violent extremism and terrorism, maritime crimes and piracy which has contributed to the increased dimension and gruesome nature of ethno-religious, communal and political violent conflicts. The rapidity and often simultaneous occurrence of these conflicts overwhelm the limited resources of security operatives of our member States, the RECs and African Union. The current scenario has further raised concern and fear of insecurity among communities and populace in Africa who are continually foisted with the responsibility of protecting themselves, their families and livelihoods

The uprisings and mutinies in North Africa in 2011 and the recent crises in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea-Bissau as well as the insurgence in Kenya, Somali and Nigeria have raised more questions about the efforts of the African Union (AU) and its member states towards successfully preventing violent conflicts on the continent. In Mali, the military take-over in March 2012, which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré, ensued only two days after a ministerial meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council was held in Bamako to consider the situation in the Sahel region and the Tuareg rebellion in the northern part of the country. In fact some of the delegates were trapped and caught up in the coup. Barely one month later, the equally unforeseen crisis in Guinea-Bissau erupted while an ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council ministerial meeting was taking place in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, in April 2012.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, if we must continue to sing the mantra of Africa solution to African problems, we must come together as a people and devise the best strategy to respond to our internal challenges. This is why I am always sentimental about WANEP and how it is constituted in a manner that gives hope that indeed the challenges may be enormous but the will and creativity to address them abound. I therefore implore you to continue to be honest in your deliberations and constructive in the options you offer, bearing in mind that the dignity and pride of the African people is in our ability to manage our differences and ensure a future for our unborn generation. On my own part and under my leadership, WANEP will be given priority to play its role as a lead organisation in peace and security. The incoming Executive Director and I worked so hard to dislodge what was apparently becoming an autocratic rule within ECOSOCC and I look forward to working with him and all of you in ensuring that ECOSOCC’s

operations reflects the wishes and aspirations of the African people

I cannot end this opening remark without thanking immensely the outgoing Executive Director of WANEP, Mr. Bombande for his leadership and the foresight to groom and handover to a younger brother of mine that I have no doubt in mind will surpass his records and especially that he did so when the ovation is loudest. I have followed and learnt a lot from the WANEP transition process and hope that our leaders would take a leap from this in the interest of our continent. Let me therefore invite you all especially the development partners to support WANEP overwhelmingly as that would translate to support to the commission and its member states

Thank you for your kind hospitality good luck in your deliberations!