



THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT IN WEST AFRICA



Regional Conference organized jointly by
the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Abidjan, 28-30 October 2013

INFORMATION NOTE

BACKGROUND

For several years West Africa has often been subjected to quasi endemic socio-political instability. Armed conflict, post-election, interethnic or interreligious violence and unrest of all kinds are recurrent in this part of the continent. These problems not only weaken the foundations of the rule of law, which is a sine qua non for the socioeconomic development of the countries concerned, but also unsettle the region's balance and thereby undo the gains made towards regional integration, which is necessary for peace, security and stability.

Some initiatives have been taken with a view to preventing conflicts, supporting peace restoration efforts and enabling national reconstruction. At the regional and international levels, the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission¹, Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Support Office, the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), and the ECOWAS Protocol² relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security³ were established to that end.

These various initiatives have facilitated the conclusion of peace accords and in so doing the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes for former combatants, the resettlement of displaced persons, reform of the justice system and the security sector as well as reconciliation processes.

Nevertheless, in spite of these efforts, crises persist within the ECOWAS area, further accentuating the vulnerability of the countries experiencing them. Given the recurrent nature of these crises, it is necessary to rethink the strategies aimed at preventing and managing them. Conflict resolution is a process, the first phase of which entails the conclusion of a peace accord between warring factions intended to end the war and foster a return to the established order. Therefore, it must be more inclusive and involve all stakeholders in society. The atrocities committed by warring factions during a conflict do not spare any member of society.

Given its powers, parliament is a key stakeholder in the quest for effective and lasting solutions that rise to the challenges of conflict prevention and management.

Representing all segments of society, parliament is the national forum where decisions affecting all aspects of life in society are taken. Its contribution to crisis prevention and management is

¹ Tasked with assisting countries in moving from armed conflict to sustainable peace and in reducing the risk of war, in 2005 *World Summit: An Overview*, 14-16 September 2005.

² Economic Community of West African States.

³ (December 1999) This instrument came about as a result of the review, in July 1993, of the Treaty establishing ECOWAS in which political cooperation, peace and security were set as priority areas for action.

significant, particularly in the case of crises experienced by countries in the West African sub-region. Due to their contact with the people they represent, parliaments are able to detect the first signs of conflict and prompt mediation and dialogue-based initiatives with a view to snuffing out any potential trace. Similarly, in cases of conflict, and as witnesses to atrocities committed against the people, parliaments are also able to help initiate a constructive dialogue aimed at bringing an end to the violence and weeding out any sign of socio-political instability. In this way, their representation and law-making functions give them the ways and means to become involved in both the prevention and management of conflicts and in particular to monitor:

- ▶ The establishment of a social and legal environment that is conducive to peace and national reconciliation;
- ▶ Implementation of reform, including reform linked to the security sector and the justice system, so as to build peace and foster economic development;
- ▶ Effective implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women and peace and security;
- ▶ Application of sanctions for violations of women's fundamental rights and acts of sexual violence, as well as reparation and rehabilitation of victims of sexual offences committed in conflict and post-conflict periods; and
- ▶ The involvement of women in national reconciliation and conflict prevention and management processes.

Although such parliamentary initiatives do exist in ECOWAS countries, parliament is largely absent from this process in spite of its resources and the major role it can play.

It is with a view to taking up this challenge and allowing parliament to fully play its role, and based on lessons learned from the Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations in New York on 13 and 14 November 2006 on *Conflict prevention and peacebuilding: Reinforcing the key role of the United Nations*, that the IPU wishes to encourage and support the joint initiative of the National Assemblies of Mali and Côte d'Ivoire on *The role of parliament in conflict prevention and management in West Africa*.

This initiative will be implemented within the framework of a Regional Conference, whose objectives, expected outcomes and format are defined as follows:

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Conference is to sensitize the parliaments of West African countries to the significant contribution they can make to conflict prevention and management from the perspective of enabling them to play a pivotal role in this area both at the national and regional levels.

This would consist of encouraging them to develop their oversight role by sensitizing the public to the fundamentals of peaceful co-existence and social stability, including but not limited to, respect for human rights, increasing dialogue-based and mediation initiatives and helping to defuse crises or work towards their peaceful settlement. Efforts will be made to include women throughout all of these processes. This Conference will also provide an opportunity to strengthen the role of parliamentarians in the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women and peace and security.

Specifically, and with a view to ensuring the active participation of ECOWAS parliamentarians in tackling this problem, this Conference seeks to:

- Inform parliamentarians of regional and international mechanisms for conflict prevention and management;

- Enable them to acquire the necessary expertise in conflict prevention and management, especially by strengthening the legal environment and making it conducive to peace and the rule of law;
- Encourage a sharing of experience in peacebuilding;
- Build the knowledge and capacity of parliamentarians to secure implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820;
- Encourage parliamentarians to affirm their status of representatives of the people through courageous conflict prevention and management initiatives;
- Draw up guidelines to promote their involvement in this process; and
- Ensure that women are involved in this process.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- ECOWAS parliamentarians are aware that they must make a contribution to conflict prevention and management;
- Parliamentarians are familiarized with requisite tools;
- Parliamentarians become more involved in this process through concrete action, including the establishment or enhancement of a social and legal environment that is conducive to parliament's involvement;
- A regional roadmap is drawn up based on national parliamentary initiatives, in particular those aimed at facilitating the application of national action plans related to implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820;
- A regional parliamentary mechanism is set up to implement the recommendations of the Conference and to serve as an early warning, monitoring and mediation system in times of crisis; and
- Women are involved to a greater extent in the process.

FORMAT

The Conference will be moderated by UN and ECOWAS experts as well as by members of parliament designated by the IPU. It will take the form of presentations followed by a debate. A roadmap to guide national and regional activities will be drawn up at the end of the Conference.

PARTICIPATION

The Conference will be open to all ECOWAS parliamentarians. The Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (CIP-UEMOA), the ECOWAS Parliament, the African Parliamentary Union (APU), representatives of: the ECOWAS Commission, UEMOA, the Parliament of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), the Amani Forum, civil society and international organizations will also take part in this event. In all, about 100 participants are expected to attend.

Parliaments are invited to send a delegation composed of men and women members of parliament.

VENUE AND DATE

National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire, 28-30 October 2013.