

JOINING THE INITIATIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS FOR AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHILD TRAFFICKING AND LABOUR



Regional seminar jointly organized by the ECOWAS Parliament, the Sahel and West Africa Club/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (SWAC-OECD) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

ECOWAS Parliament, Abuja, 12-14 June 2012

INFORMATION NOTE ON THE REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY SEMINAR IN ABUJA

Context and justification

The general mobilization against child trafficking and labour calls for the involvement of parliaments, whose constitutional prerogatives position them well to contribute significantly to the fight against these two scourges.

As an extension of its efforts to promote children's rights, and in pursuance of its programme of action for the eradication of child trafficking and labour, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has launched a joint initiative with the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC/OECD), with financial support from the Belgian government.

This joint initiative aims to leverage and strengthen the role of parliaments in helping to combat and ultimately eradicate the scourges of child trafficking and labour in West and Central Africa. However, considering the regional scale of these problems, the success of such an effort depends on a regional approach, so as to harmonize national strategies for a targeted and coordinated response to child traffickers. The Regional Conference of Cotonou,¹ held in May, represented a response to this need. The resulting Cotonou Declaration contains recommendations that provide a roadmap for parliamentary action.

Based on this roadmap, concrete national activities have been organized in Benin, Burkina Faso, Gabon and Togo, as part of the reforms inspired by the Declaration and set out in a plan of action.

What is needed now is better strategic coordination of these activities so as to create a more hostile environment for traffickers.

From this perspective, the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as a shared forum for the parliaments of countries concerned about child trafficking and labour, is a key actor that could assume the role of merging separate parliamentary initiatives, capitalizing on the experiences of different national parliaments to date, identifying good practices and reformulating them as recommendations to its members.

It is against this background that the Inter-Parliamentary Union proposes to organize a regional seminar at the ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja. This seminar will also mark completion of the

¹ A large delegation of the ECOWAS Parliament, led by its President, took part in this Conference. Mindful of the importance of the Parliament's involvement, the delegation expressed its wish to host project activity in Abuja and thereby heighten awareness about the issue among the Parliament's members.

joint project on child trafficking and labour conducted by the IPU and the Sahel and West Africa Club.

Objectives

- Inform members of parliament, and/or strengthen their current knowledge, about the various international and regional instruments proscribing child trafficking and regulating child labour.
- Share the experience gained from national project activities as a basis for developing regional strategies.
- Foster the creation of a common legal environment in the region hostile to child trafficking and labour.
- Include the fight against child trafficking and labour among the priorities of the ECOWAS Parliament, taking the following measures to that effect:
 - Include the promotion of children's rights, and in particular the fight against child trafficking and labour, as a subject for parliamentary debate.
 - Strengthen the role of the parliamentary committee responsible for addressing these scourges, providing it with the resources needed to combat them more effectively.
 - Ensure national-level accountability for parliamentary action to combat child trafficking and labour, including a requirement to report regularly on execution of the strategies developed and on the campaign's overall progress.
 - Set up a parliamentary structure, or strengthen an existing committee, to assume responsibility for overseeing the implementation of regional strategies against child trafficking and labour, which has been spreading in particular along the Lagos-Cotonou-Lomé-Accra-Abidjan corridor;
 - Strengthen cooperation with experts on the issue from the ECOWAS Commission and invite them to regular discussions for the purpose of updating the database on child trafficking and labour and redeploying efforts as necessary.

Expected results

- Greater awareness among parliamentarians about the consequences of child trafficking and labour.
- Greater familiarity with international and regional human rights norms that proscribe trafficking in children and regulate their labour.
- Targeted and decisive parliamentary involvement in the fight against child trafficking and labour.
- Sustained cooperation among members of the ECOWAS Parliament and experts of the ECOWAS Commission; strengthened parliamentary capacity for the harmonization of broad strategies for parliamentary action – over the long term, until these scourges have been completely eradicated.
- Consolidated cooperation between the ECOWAS Parliament and other actors resulting in concerted action against child trafficking and labour.

Participants

- Members of the ECOWAS Parliament and their teams;
- Members of the national parliaments of West and Central Africa and their teams;

- Members of the ECOWAS Commission responsible for human rights in general and the rights of the child in particular;
- Members of the Commission and Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA);
- Parliamentarians of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC);
- Representatives of relevant international organizations (OHCHR, UNICEF, ILO, IOM) and regional institutions (to be determined).
- International and regional experts on children's issues.
- Members of the region's civil society organizations working to promote human rights and combat child trafficking and labour.

Dates and place of the seminar

It is proposed to hold the seminar from **12 to 14 June 2012** in Abuja.

The precise venue will be determined in agreement with the host parliament.