

Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector: Disseminating Best Practices in ECOWAS Member States

Regional Parliamentary Workshop

Hosted by the National Assembly of Mali and organised by
the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and
the African Security Sector Network (ASSN)

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CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction

Parliaments in West Africa are expected to enact and monitor implementation of security, intelligence, public order and defence-related legislation. They are also expected to scrutinize and approve the budget of the defence and security sector and to ensure that security policies reflect the needs and aspirations of the citizens they represent. Such parliamentary oversight is vital to democratic security sector governance.

However, the capacity of parliaments, and in particular parliamentary defence and security committees, to deliver on these expectations is usually limited. This may be due to combinations of any of the followings reasons:

- Poor appreciation by parliamentarians of the scope of their constitutional roles and powers;
- Lack of capacity by parliamentarians to fully exercise their roles;
- Lack of parliamentary research or advisory support capacity;
- Inadequate incentives and resources required for effective parliamentary oversight;
- A legacy of executive monopoly on security and defense matters.

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the African Security Sector Network (ASSN) have conducted a number of activities in different West African countries aimed at building the capacity and expertise of defence and security committees and their staff so as to strengthening the role of parliaments and enable them to carry out effective oversight of the security sector.

The seminar on *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector in West Africa*, hosted by the Senegalese National Assembly in Dakar in September 2010, was the first joint activity organized by DCAF and the IPU at the regional level aimed at analysing the relevance of general principles and mechanisms of parliamentary oversight of the security sector in West Africa.

Follow-up regional workshop in Bamako, Mali

Focus and objectives

DCAF, IPU and ASSN are now joining forces to organize a two-day follow-up regional workshop, to be hosted by the Parliament of Mali, which will look more closely at how parliaments and their members can apply principles and mechanisms of parliamentary oversight in specific areas such as:

- The politics of security sector oversight: making allies
- Oversight of defence and security budgeting/ arms procurement
- Gender-mainstreaming of security sector reform policies and programmes
- Oversight of intelligence structures and trans-border crime/ small arms and light weapons

The seminar will draw on the recommendations of the ECOWAS Parliament-DCAF Guide for West African Parliamentarians "*Parliamentary oversight of the security sector*", which is modeled on the IPU-DCAF Handbook for parliamentarians entitled "*Parliamentary oversight of the security sector: Principles, mechanisms and practices*" issued in 2003. Various experts in the field of security sector governance, many of whom are members of the ASSN, have contributed to the guide for West African parliamentarians which is tailored to the realities of the region. The guide was unanimously endorsed by the plenary of the ECOWAS Parliament on 29 September 2010.

Programme set-up

The workshop will start with a plenary session. Participants will subsequently take part in working group sessions with a view to discussing challenges to the full implementation of the recommendations contained in the ECOWAS Parliament-DCAF Guide and ways of addressing the challenges. Each working group will focus on one topic and will be facilitated by an expert on the topic to be discussed. Each working group will report back to plenary on day-2 on the outcomes of their discussion.

The workshop will also allow further discussion on policy development around parliamentary oversight over the security sector. In that perspective, it will constitute a valuable opportunity for participants to network, share experiences and exchange ideas and best practices.

Participants

The ECOWAS Parliament and parliaments of ECOWAS member states will be invited to send a delegation, preferably comprised of members of defence and security committees as well as parliamentary staffers, to take part in the seminar. Parliaments will be requested to cover the costs of participation of their delegations. The host Parliament will be requested to provide on-site logistical support.

Representatives of civil society, including the media and contributors to the ECOWAS Parliament-DCAF Guide, will participate in the event. Partner organisations will be invited to contribute to the organisation of the seminar or be invited as observers.