

# TOWARDS ENHANCED PARLIAMENTARY ACTION TO COMBAT THE TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN FOR PURPOSES OF LABOUR EXPLOITATION IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Regional Conference organized jointly by the National Assembly of Benin, the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC/OECD) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**Cotonou, 26-28 May 2010**

*International Conference Centre (ICC)*



## INFORMATION NOTE ON THE COTONOU REGIONAL CONFERENCE

### Background

Although it is a global problem, trafficking in persons, in particular children, affects largely the western and central parts of the African continent. The victims of this form of trafficking, in particular children, find themselves in exploitative situations related to sale and forced labour in sectors such as domestic servants, restaurants, organ trafficking and export-oriented crops plantations such as cocoa, cotton and bananas.

These export crops - major sources of revenue for farmers - in fact require more and more inexpensive labour to compensate for the fall in their commodity prices on the world market. These economic arguments, which disregard human rights and human dignity, are used to justify resorting en masse to “little growing hands”.

Trafficking in children and their exploitation in export-oriented crop plantations continue to increase in spite of condemnation and initiatives taken by international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF and regional frameworks such as the ECOWAS-CEEAC Multilateral Cooperation Agreement to Combat Trafficking in Persons, in particular Women and Children in Central and West Africa in July 2006; the ECOWAS Labour Policy adopted in 2009 and above all, at the national level, where a number of measures, actions and programmes have been developed, implemented or are in the process of being implemented such as in Benin, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, etc. Similarly, since 2008, SWAC/OECD has been promoting an initiative at the international level aimed at identifying a regional response to the worst forms of child labour in cocoa plantations in West Africa ([SWAC Regional Cocoa Initiative](#)). A [Joint Position Paper](#) was produced on that matter.

Clearly defined and harmonized parliamentary action at the regional level is sadly lacking in the above-mentioned initiatives. Indeed, the absence of appropriate legislative measures only serves to perpetuate this practice by ensuring that traffickers go unpunished. Given the consequences of this scourge, which seriously jeopardizes the future of the youth in these countries, it is imperative to adopt at the regional level a parliamentary approach that combines the fight against trafficking and child labour and bringing national legislation in line with the various relevant regional and international legal instruments. Through the resolute involvement of parliamentarians, the legal framework could be strengthened in the fight against this scourge, while ensuring greater compatibility between government action and that of

regional economic organizations in response to the problem. Mindful of the greater and more determining role of parliament in managing this problem, the IPU launched in February 2010 a two-year project aimed at bringing a regional parliamentary dimension to the strategy to combat this scourge.

The Cotonou Conference is the first in a series of activities under this project that will be implemented in close collaboration with the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), with financial support from the Ministry for Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of Belgium.

### **Objectives**

The purpose of the Cotonou Conference is not to be just another meeting. Indeed, it aims to:

- Inform MPs about the launch of this project, which will be executed through regional and national activities;
- Sensitize MPs more about the consequences of trafficking in children, in particular their exploitation in major export-oriented crop plantations (cocoa, cotton);
- Take stock of the different practices and measures under way in the countries involved in this project;
- Inform MPs and build their knowledge about the various relevant regional and international legal instruments;
- Set up a forum for discussion among the parliamentarians of the region, and between MPs and other stakeholders such as civil society and the multinational corporations that are involved in managing this problem;
- Identify approaches for conducting project activities at the national level; and
- Encourage and secure adoption by MPs of a regional cooperation approach based on a sharing of experiences in the fights against this practice.

The presentations<sup>1</sup> at the Cotonou Conference will be made by parliamentarians, experts from regional and international organizations and representatives of civil society.

Owing to the participation of English-speaking countries (Ghana and Nigeria) in this Conference, simultaneous interpreting and translation of documents into English and French will be provided.

The main expected outcome of this Conference is the adoption of a roadmap to serve as a framework of action for national parliaments and at the regional level.

### **Participants**

Delegations will be composed of members of parliament and parliamentary staff of the parliaments involved in the project, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

Each parliamentary delegation will be composed of eight members (6 MPs and 2 parliamentary staff). However, the number of MPs and local experts identified will be left to the discretion of the host Parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> See provisional agenda attached.

Members of regional and subregional parliaments of the African Parliamentary Union (APU) will also be invited to attend this Conference as follows: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (IPC-WAEMU) and the US Congress, the Swiss Federal Parliament, the Parliament of Belgium, representatives of the ECOWAS Commission, WAEMU, the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), regional and international organizations (ILO, IOM and UNICEF), multinational corporations concerned, civil society and the media.

In all, about 200 participants are expected at the Cotonou Conference.

<b>Date and venue</b>
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The Conference will take place from **26 to 28 May 2010** at the International Conference Centre in Cotonou.