Parliamentary oversight in the area of security in West Africa

Parliamentary seminar

Hosted by the National Assembly of Senegal and organized by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) with the support of the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Dakar, 21 - 22 September 2010

National Assembly of Senegal

BACKGROUND

DCAF and the IPU, with the support of the ECOWAS Parliament and in cooperation with the National Assembly of Senegal, will be organizing a two-day subregional seminar in West Africa on parliamentary oversight in the area of security and defence. This event is part of the joint efforts by DCAF and the IPU to bolster the contribution of parliaments, in particular their defence and security committees, to security sector governance. In 2003, the organizations jointly published a handbook entitled *Parliamentary oversight of the security sector: Principles, mechanisms and practices*, which provides parliamentarians with a framework for effective parliamentary action. DCAF, in collaboration with the ECOWAS Parliament, is currently developing a handbook on this topic that is tailored to the needs of parliamentarians in West Africa.

Democratic oversight of the security sector contributes to enhanced security, poverty reduction and greater respect for human rights. In West Africa, the role of the parliament has in the past been challenged in a number of countries due to conflicts and authoritarian regimes. The security of the State has often come above that of its citizens and power has tended to be concentrated in the hands of the Executive to the detriment of other branches of the State. Since the 1990s, however, a growing democratization process has taken place within the subregion. This has created greater opportunities for an effective role of parliament and civil society in security sector governance in West Africa.

The subregional seminar will first examine general principles of parliamentary oversight and how they apply to the context of West Africa. It will subsequently focus on specific ways and areas in which parliaments can become more effective:

▸ Norms relating to good parliamentary ethical standards and transparency;
▸ Gender mainstreaming;
▸ Good practices for effective parliamentary committees (defence and security committees, budget committees, intelligence committees, etc.); and
▸ Mechanisms and approaches for more effective budgetary oversight.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

Through the sharing of knowledge, in particular good parliamentary practices, participants will acquire a better understanding of their role and tools in the field of security and thus enhance their capacity to carry out effective oversight of the security sector in West Africa.

OUTCOME

The participants will identify ways to strengthen parliamentary oversight in West Africa, through a better understanding and implementation of ethical standards, improved efficiency of defence and security committees and budgetary oversight in the subregion. Seminar proceedings and presentation papers will be made available.

ORGANIZATION

The different topics covered during this two-day seminar will be presented by parliamentarians and various experts in the field of security. It is intended for each of the three sessions to be interactive and ample time will be set aside for discussion. On the last day, the participants will be asked to propose different solutions to the challenges identified.

Interpretation will be available from and into English, French and Portuguese, and key documents will be translated into these languages.

PARTICIPANTS

The parliaments of ECOWAS member countries will be invited to send a delegation, preferably comprised of members of security and defence committees, to take part in the seminar. Key members of the ECOWAS Parliament, civil society, including the media and contributors to the ECOWAS Parliament/DCAF parliamentary handbook will also participate in this event.