

Promoting Regional Cooperation to Advance Democratic Governance, Economic Development, and Security in West Africa

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Dr. Walker, Thank you very much. Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I thought I might end my remarks by offering a tribute to Nancy Walker as she concludes four years as Director of ACSS [Africa Center for Strategic Studies]. That would allow me to bask in her applause. But I realize that Nancy's tremendous achievements deserve their own recognition; so let me take a moment to offer Nancy our gratitude and congratulations. (Applause).

Dr. Chambas, let me add my compliments to you as well for your excellent leadership at a very challenging time.

I have learned, during these past two extraordinary days, that ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] can operate on two levels at once:

- It can think institutionally about the long-term evolution of West Africa; and it can, at the same time, respond in a timely, effective manner to a crisis;
- It can convene military leaders to plan specific responses to an urgent stabilization requirement; and, at the same time, it can focus on the policy questions demanding a cogent response – and let me add that the respective committees of ECOWAS each produced excellent results.
- The ECOWAS ministers showed that they can focus on meeting immediate needs of humanitarian and security relief; yet, in the same two days, they have made clear a profound commitment to the fundamental elements of democracy, civil society institutions, good governance, and justice.

We have seen that West Africa's problems are not confined within national borders. Transnational factors have contributed to the problems in Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, and Liberia. Therefore, solutions must proceed, in many important respects, on a regional basis.

An effort to address West Africa's crisis must tie together all disciplines – military, political, humanitarian, economic, and commercial alike. Our discussions have, I believe, led to the realization that it is not enough to address just one dimension of the crisis. When we consider ways to inhibit illicit flows of small arms and light weapons, or the interposition of stability forces, or the removal of a bad actor – important as those steps are – we need to integrate all the elements of a solution. Those of us who are external players in the region should think about how to administer our initiatives in the most strategic and holistic way.

Here in West Africa, there is no doubt that individual states have particular circumstances and needs. "One Size" may not "fit" all problems for each state in the region. But at the regional level, which is the primary focus of our deliberations here, I am persuaded that ECOWAS has reconfirmed a number of factors that commend it to a leading role in addressing these problems.

- I find in ECOWAS a realism that the crisis in West Africa must be acted upon with urgency and vision,
- a recognition that conflict must be addressed at many levels, including surface manifestations and root causes alike,
- a resolve to lead the societies of West Africa, in partnership with the international community, away from the status quo,
- an ability to mobilize political and military leadership to chart this effort – and here I compliment the ministers,

the senior military leadership, and the ECOWAS leadership including the Secretariat,
and, above all,

- a passionate commitment not only to mitigate the worst conditions arising from the crisis, and to appeal for international assistance, but to chart a path – a realistic path – that accords priority to fundamental goods of political legitimacy embodied in democracy, social development built on a culture of human rights, economic progress gained with a sophisticated understanding of the relationship of corruption and instability to poverty, and the importance of justice in achieving a peaceful society.

I commend you, the conferees, for your excellent efforts these last two days; and I share the hope – with all of you, I am sure – that the momentum from our deliberations will be an engine for greater progress in pursuing this comprehensive vision in all its respects.

The United States is your partner in this quest.