

## Statement by Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas

### **Statement by Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas at the 51st Ordinary Summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Monrovia- Liberia, 04 June 2017**

Your Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, and Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government;

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government;  
Honorable Ministers;

Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria;

The Prime Minister of Israel, H. E. Benjamin Netanyahu;

Your Excellency Mr. Marcel de Souza, President of the ECOWAS Commission;

Excellency Federica Mogherini, Vice-President of the European Union Commission and EU High Representative

Excellencies Ambassadors and Heads of Regional and International Organisations;

Commissioners and Statutory Appointees of ECOWAS Institution;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to be here with you today, and a pleasure to convey greetings from the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, to this august body. The Secretary-General who is following events in West Africa with keen interest is confident that the decisions to be taken at this summit will help further consolidate the sub-region's remarkable achievements in the areas of peace and security, development and human rights.

A lot has happened since we last met in Abuja six months ago. At the time, we deliberated on measures to be taken to ensure that the will of the Gambian people, expressed in a transparent, peaceful, and credible presidential election, would be respected. Thanks to you and our collective efforts, the duly elected President of The Gambia is now among his peers. Welcome to Monrovia, Your Excellency Adama Barrow!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The democratic transition in The Gambia is a triumph of collective efforts, of working together as one, and this has been rightly acknowledged as such across the globe. Your collective resolve, commitment and determined efforts, supported single-mindedly by your partners towards a common goal, have yet again cemented West Africa's growing reputation as a paragon of deepening democratic standards each step along the way. Equally, your success has showcased the strength of your Community's institutions and mechanisms, which others, particularly in Africa, are keen to emulate.

Allow me already, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, to congratulate Cote d'Ivoire on its election as a member of the United Nations Security Council.

I take this opportunity to also welcome the call by the 38<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Mediation and Security Council at the Ministerial level of 31 May to strengthen the collective engagement and collaboration of ECOWAS, the African Union and the United Nations.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Even as we celebrate our successes, we must acknowledge that sources of concern remain. Over the past months, men on motorcycles have forced themselves into schools, shouting that education must stop; teachers have been threatened or killed (I pay tribute to the teachers who refuse to be intimidated and continue to equip the students with their most precious asset in life, education); police stations, symbols of the authority of the state, have been attacked; camouflaged fighters have overrun military border posts, killing soldiers, and carrying away weapons and materiel.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must reverse the state of lawlessness that has afflicted much of the Sahel, creating entire ungovernable zones where the presence of the state can hardly be felt. Despite our vigilance, merchants of organized crime, preachers of hate, and smugglers of drugs, persons, and weapons, continue to criss-cross borders.

The widening security vacuum across the Sahel has produced two counter-veiling forces: on the one hand, violent extremists and criminal networks are competing to fill the void. On the other hand, this has led local communities and their vigilante groups to increasingly take up arms to protect their families, land and property, including their cattle. In the face of such gaps, people turn to the primordial bonds of language and lineage to seek protection within groups, even if they may not agree with their extremist ideologies that threaten to rip communities apart. We must continue to make every effort to prevent, at all costs, the quest for safety turning into conflict and more criminal violence.

On this note, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I applaud the steps taken by Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso to pool forces under the Liptako-Gourma Authority to enhance collaboration across their common borders, and I am impressed by their efforts, together with Chad and Mauritania, to set up the G5-Sahel Joint Force to combat their common enemies. While our action must be immediate and have impact, our vision must continue to be strategic and holistic. Accordingly, the United Nations remains resolute in working with G5- Sahel countries in the implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel around its pillars of governance, security, resilience and development.

Excellencies,

About a month ago on 6 May, we all rejoiced when 82 girls who had been captured by Boko Haram in the town of Chibok regained freedom. Efforts to free the remaining girls as well as many other abductees are ongoing. Boko Haram no longer holds territories; refugees and internally displaced persons are returning; and reconstruction is accelerating. This success is

due to the concerted military efforts of the Lake Chad Basin countries (Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad) the impressive military exploits of the Multi National Joint Task Force, as well as to the steadfast determination of the people and Government of Nigeria.

This, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, is good news, and the United Nations will continue to support these initiatives. We cannot lower our guard. As we enter the lean season, thousands of women, men, innocent boys and girls, many of whom have been displaced across the Lake Chad Basin, are struggling for their very subsistence.

This is not only a stain on our common conscience, but it is also counter-productive. Failure to provide basic services and viable livelihood opportunities in the affected areas risks derailing our recent successes against Boko Haram. As the extremists continue to instil terror, through suicide attacks and other means, and as thousands more are held captive, we must redouble our efforts at gathering and sharing intelligence, strengthening cross-border cooperation, and winning the trust of communities.

I feel equally encouraged by the determination of several West African governments to tackle the menace of corruption, which can corrode the very fibre of our societies, stifle economic development, and undermine the legitimacy of the state. We have no doubt that, while dedicated efforts at combating the spread of exclusionary and extremist ideologies are necessary, it is equally important for states to promote improved transparent governance; inclusive development; provide infrastructures, cater for basic social needs such as health and education; as well as to work to combat and prevent injustice and impunity. This is required to ensure peaceful societies.

Excellencies, this, in my view, is the essence of addressing the root causes of instability. Towards this goal, I am happy to note efforts by countries across the region to modernize the institutions of governance to reflect the aspirations of their people and to strengthen the foundations for democratic, cohesive, and resilient societies.

In this vein, we encourage Guinea and Togo not to relent in the pursuit of dialogue aimed at breaking long-standing political deadlocks and consolidating peace and democracy. In this spirit, I wholeheartedly salute the joint declaration by the Liberian political parties, committing to a free and non-violent presidential election, which we will be privileged to witness in October. I trust Sierra Leone will equally move forward with holding free, fair, and credible elections in the spirit of consensus and dialogue in March 2018.

In the same vein, I urge stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau to accelerate consultations, as a matter of priority, in order to end the prolonged paralysis of government, which continues to foster political instability and worsen the difficult socio-economic conditions of the country and its suffering people.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The recent events in Cote d'Ivoire have again shown that political leadership, national reconciliation, the fight against impunity, and Security Sector Reform must go hand in hand. We all agree that bringing the security sector under full democratic control must be a priority. With ECOWAS, the African Union and the European Union, we have recently concluded a tri-partite mission to The Gambia, and stand ready to provide assistance to the full operationalization of the ECOWAS Framework on Security Sector Reform and Governance.

Excellencies,

More collective efforts are needed to domesticate and implement the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. It goes without saying that the easy availability of weapons in

the sub-region fuels the transformation of simmering tensions into violent conflict. In this regard, it is important to note that the casualties of conflicts between herdsmen and farmers in 2016 surpassed those caused by extremist groups in the region. Let me assure you that you can count on the United Nations to intensify our close collaboration in support of the implementation of your Decision on transhumance and its related action plan.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to emphasize that no development can be holistic without the full participation by the female half of our populations. It is imperative that we strengthen our commitment to fully apply laws and mechanisms to make our societies more gender-sensitive, more dynamic, more equal, and more prosperous.

Excellences, Mesdames, Messieurs,

Comme nous sommes dans le mois saint du Ramadan, permettez-moi de souhaiter à celles et ceux qui jeunent « Ramadhan Kareem ».

Que l'esprit du Ramadan anime vos travaux.

Je vous souhaite des délibérations fructueuses, et vous remercie pour votre aimable attention.

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