

Speech by Ms. Nana Afadzinu, Executive Director of the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) to the Peace and Security Council of the African Union

Esteemed Excellencies, Distinguished ladies, and gentlemen. Thank you for this opportunity.

Your Excellencies, terrorism remains a clear and present danger for West Africa. Terrorist groups have in recent times expanded activities beyond the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin region to the coastal areas along the Gulf of Guinea. Terrorist attacks have been recorded especially in the northern parts of three coastal states, with one state recording its deadliest attacks last year.

This is happening within the context of current democratic retrogression. A Freedom House 2021' report highlighted the level of democratic backsliding on the continent and in West Africa. Out of a total of 22 African countries recording declines, West Africa recorded five countries making it to the list of largest declines globally. The situation shows a huge gap in civil society's role in strengthening democracy and advancing peace, security, and development; not for a lack of interest or capacity but due to lack of adequate platform for engagement and resourcing.

One key area of concern is the appetite for tenure elongation as recently witnessed in three West African countries and the threats of unconstitutional change of government with growing fears of attempts by other Member States adopting this trend.

Undermined governance has led to a fractured and constrained civic space, lack of social cohesion, manipulation of electoral processes and violent dissensions between citizens and political actors. Trust in ECOWAS' leadership in addressing the challenges has waned.

Thankfully, the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government September 2021 extra-Ordinary session, called for the review of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good governance to address these challenges. Civil Society, led by WANEP in collaboration with the ECOWAS Political Affairs unit have worked on this review and presented the recommendations.

The Livingstone Formula also makes a direct call for ECOSOCC as a consultative organ of the African Union to seek civil society's active participation in promoting peace, security, and stability. This engagement with the PSC is a demonstration that this call is being heeded and I commend the PSC and the ECOSOCC for enabling this. I trust this would continue.

Some current noteworthy civil society initiatives, among others, are the CIVICUS monitor that presents accurate, up-to date data on civic freedoms, particularly the freedom of expression, assembly and association and show the continent's progress. WACSI (the West Africa Civil Society Institute) provides the data on West Africa. Also, the West Africa Democracy and Solidarity Network (WADEMOS), which provides a platform for civil society to mobilise around the promotion and

consolidation of democracy in West Africa and reverse its retrogression, and WANE's capacity strengthening work for community groups on Terrorism Awareness, Preparedness and Response. These are initiatives worth engaging and allow me, respectfully, to recommend some additional ways forward for strengthening the collaboration between the PSC and Civil Society.

1. The PSC could partner with civil society to raise public awareness on the imperatives to democratic governance on the continent, and work on the review of the African Charter on Democracy and Good governance as well as promote the African Peer Review Mechanism.
2. As highlighted in the Accra declaration on unconstitutional changes of government, the PSC can work with civil society to strengthen and deepen the participation of citizens on governance issues to address their legitimate concerns - Promoting constitutionalism and not just constitutional change.
3. The PSC can benefit from briefings from CSOs regularly on the governance, peace and security context in the region and access accurate data from credible civil society assessment portals like the Afrobarometer and Civicus monitor.
4. The PSC can work closely with civil society to strengthen post-conflict confidence-building and support reconciliation processes in war-affected regions.
5. CSOs can work with the PSC to encourage resourcing from African philanthropists to support political and economic governance, social justice, and human rights interventions on the continent.
6. CSOs can provide capacity strengthening and technical assistance support to member states to develop programmes that engage more on non-electoral elements of democracy including accountability and access to information, independent media and justice, and relationships between duty bearers and rights holders. The PSC can facilitate this.
7. The PSC can partner civil society organisations to scale terrorism awareness and response initiatives within the various member countries. This would also help strengthen more citizen-centred and timely response mechanisms.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to interact with you, your Excellencies, and we look forward to further opportunities to work with you to achieve the goals of Agenda 2063 for the development and prosperity of our dear continent of Africa.

I thank you for your kind attention.