



## UNDP Regional Seminar “Towards Strengthening the Role of Parliaments in Crisis Prevention and Recovery”

Accra, Ghana (27-29 June 2010)

On the basis of UNDP Guidelines for the International Community on Parliaments, Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP hosted a regional seminar “Towards Strengthening the role of Parliaments in Crisis Prevention and Recovery in West Africa”, in Accra (Ghana) on June 27-29 2010 with 60 participants representing 13 parliaments from the region<sup>1</sup>, the ECOWAS Parliament, key international and regional organizations (such as the *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)*, the *United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC)*, The *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)*), civil society organizations (*West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA)*, *West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)*), and practitioners (European Commission Delegation, Canadian CIDA, the Parliamentary Centre, and UNDP colleagues ) with the financial support of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



past and future capacity development activities in the field of crisis prevention and recovery: what has been successful and the impact of such activities for parliaments in West Africa. Participants stressed that strengthening parliaments as a whole institution is a major crisis prevention tool as this allows the parliaments to effectively conduct their oversight, legislative and representative functions including on crisis prevention and recovery

issues such as the creation of dedicated peace parliamentary committees (Ghana), legislating on gender-based violence in application of UN Resolution 1325 and 1820 (Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire), oversight of the implementation of peacebuilding or prevention and reconciliation strategies (Togo, Guinea-Bissau), and parliamentarians mediating with the rebellion at the local level (Mali).

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<sup>1</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Republic of Congo, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Liberia, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo.

At the **regional level**, participants recognized the multiplier effect of the ECOWAS parliament and its



capacity to interface with national parliaments on crisis prevention and recovery issues (particularly during the Niger and Guinea Conakry crisis). The ECOWAS Parliaments sits at a critical stage of evolution with the newly adopted vision 2020 moving from an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of the people with the establishment of a single economic region (single currency, single central bank, and a legislative community parliament). Mainstreaming peace and security issues throughout the 13 standing ECOWAS committees was highlighted as a way forward. The launch of the ECOWAS Female

Parliamentarians Association (ECOFEPA) provides another opportunity to further engage on gender equality and gender-based violence issues in the region.

The regional approach was recognized by the parliamentarians as highly relevant as it provided them with an open space to exchange inspiring good practices and challenges they face on sensitive issues such as personal security concerns, independence of the parliament from the executive, corruption when dealing with gender-based violence, independence from political parties' positions within the region. This regional approach made parliamentarians less isolated in their opinions and questions on the role they can play on crisis prevention and recovery issues.



At the **national level**, participants stressed that parliamentary institutions often remain weak in relation to the executive, armed groups and other non-state actors in post-conflict situations. As stated in the UNDP guidelines, *'building effective democratic governance requires correcting this imbalance'*. The presence of strong and legitimate parliaments is crucial for a greater role in crisis prevention and recovery (e.g. Niger crisis).



Participants recommended strengthening the role of parliamentarians in the area of crisis prevention and recovery; by building their mediation and communication capacities to intervene positively in, for example land disputes, border issues and to better engage with their communities on local crisis issues before they escalate. Joint investigation missions by parliamentarians, government representatives and civil society organizations were also recommended. Parliamentary outreach to citizens and civil society was also highlighted as an important legitimacy strategy to work on crisis prevention and recovery. The question of finding the right balance between strong political parties and weak parties also came up during the discussions. Mainstreaming a conflict sensitive approach to law drafting and review of existing laws was also identified as an opportunity for parliamentarians to play a greater role in crisis prevention and recovery.

***On the basis of the recommendations of the regional seminar, UNDP will share the findings with its country offices in the region to better integrate this conflict-sensitive approach in existing parliamentary development projects. The UNDP self-assessment tool on parliaments and crisis prevention will be piloted in two countries in the region in the coming months to support two parliaments to better address crisis prevention and recovery issues. UNDP will continue engaging parliamentarians and partners at the regional level to consolidate the network of parliamentarians and identify and pilot south-south solutions and recommendations. Finally, all knowledge and research available will be shared on-line under the dedicated West Africa page available in French and English on AGORA (<http://www.agora-parl.org/node/2713>) and parliamentarians will be invited to continue the discussions and experiences sharing on the trusted area of AGORA.***

