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***Press Conference to Mark  
The 36<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of ECOWAS***

**ECOWAS Commission, Abuja  
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## **Driving a People-centred Regional Integration**

**Address by:**

**H.E. James Victor GBEHO  
President of the ECOWAS Commission**

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Members of the Press,

Good Morning and Welcome to the ECOWAS press conference on the eve of our anniversary.

On 28 May 1975, when the leaders of this region met in Lagos to sign the Treaty that brought the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) into being, the ECOWAS concept was received with high expectations and scepticism in equal measure. Today, as the Community prepares to enter its 37<sup>th</sup> year of existence, a dispassionate assessment reveals that ECOWAS has matured into a sustainable and vibrant brand in regional integration worldwide and a model on the continent of Africa. Always striving to facilitate the realization of the aspirations of over 230 million Community citizens for human security under its integration project, ECOWAS has continued to earn and enjoy the respect and cooperation of an ever growing list of international partners.

With a combined population of more than 230 million culturally diverse but harmonious people, united in purpose, mission and goal, ours is a result-oriented partnership owned by our Member States and Community citizens. Our integration project is a success story that continues to enjoy tremendous support from a growing list of international partners.

As we pay merited tribute to the founding fathers of our Institution, the best way of celebrating and rewarding their foresight is by continually renewing ECOWAS' institutional and programmatic frameworks to enable our Community Institutions to drive the processes aimed at maximizing the benefits of the region's potentialities by harnessing the boundless resources of its constituent Member States for the benefit of its peoples.

Since 2006, therefore, our Community institutions have been undergoing deep transformations both in structure and strategy to respond to the challenges of the times. The transition of the ECOWAS Secretariat into a Commission, as well as the realignment of the Community Parliament, the Community Court of Justice and other specialized agencies to their core objectives, were carried out in this spirit.

In the same vein, the Community Work Program underpinning the regional integration process is constructed on a solid strategic framework that flows from the *ECOWAS Vision 2020*, the aim of which is to transform the region from an *ECOWAS of States into an ECOWAS of peoples living in a peaceful and secure environment and benefitting from the abundant potentialities and resources of our region*.

The ECOWAS region has begun to reap the benefits of our collective endeavours in terms of economic outlook and the consolidation of good governance and political stability. It is worth, at this point, outlining some of our Community initiatives and achievements.

## **ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Despite the shocks of exogenous factors, including the on-going global financial and food crises, the economies of West Africa continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience, thanks to a combination of prudent macro-economic policies and strong demand for the region's resources. In 2010, for example, the region achieved an estimated growth rate of 6.2 percent, even though this figure masks significant disparities between the States and remains below the minimum 7 percent economic growth rate required for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Continuing efforts by Member States aimed at scaling up investment in the social sector, formulating economic policies within the framework of a regional development program, and diversifying the export base of their economies, will ensure sustainability and mitigate the impact of future exogenous shocks.

## **ACCELERATING THE CREATION OF A COMMON MARKET**

The ECOWAS Community Program has continued to lay the foundations for the emergence of a veritable economic and financial Union. ECOWAS is in the process of finalizing the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (ECOWAS-CET) which

should lead to the establishment of a Customs Union and the pursuit of efforts towards the realization of financial and monetary integration. Progress has been achieved in this regard with the effective take-off of the ECOWAS Multilateral Surveillance Mechanism and the adoption, in 2009, of the Road Map for the introduction of an ECOWAS Single Currency – the Eco – by 2020.

### ***Free Movement of People, Goods and Services***

ECOWAS has progressively pursued the implementation of its flagship Protocol on Free Movement of People and Goods, and the Right of Residence within the region. Even though, greater effort is needed to address the challenges associated with its effective implementation, this first and only visa-free travel regime on the continent of Africa is one of the boldest statements by Member-States on regional integration.

With regard to the challenges of free movement, including extortion and harassment of citizens at border check-points, initiatives are underway to address them. For instance, with the help of a grant of 63.8 million Euros from the European Union, the ECOWAS Commission has begun the process of implementing its transport and transit facilitation program, the major part of which involves the construction of five joint border-posts along the major corridors in the region. This is a first major step towards the elimination of internal borders, and detailed technical studies have been finalized for this project.

In addition, the unanimous adoption by Member States of the ECOWAS Passport scheme is further testimony to Member States' determination to create a single Community space where citizens can move, settle and trade freely in any country without let or hindrance.

## **SOCIO-ECOMIC PROGRAMS**

### ***Agriculture***

Our Community is basically agrarian and rural. Consequently, the development of the agricultural and rural sectors has become a priority area in the efforts to achieve an ECOWAS of peoples. In this regard, the adoption of the ECOWAS Common Agricultural Program (ECOWAP) in 2009 constitutes a major milestone in our efforts to maximize the region's comparative advantage and ensuring food security.

Under the program, a Regional fund for Agriculture and Food and a Regional Technical Agency for Agriculture and Food for the implementation of ECOWAP projects and programmes have been established. Achievements in this regard also include the finalization in 2010 of a logical framework and a regional agriculture investment plan amounting to US\$900 million for the implementation

of ECOWAP for the 2011-2015 period; and commitment by the ECOWAS Commission to contribute US\$150 million over a five-year period towards the implementation of the regional agricultural investment plan. In addition, development partners are being mobilized to support the ECOWAP implementation at the regional level through the constitution of an ECOWAS-Partners Group". So far, the initiative has attracted 25 international partners under the aegis of the Spanish Cooperation Agency.

The Commission is also using this process to support Member States in the formulation of their National Agricultural Investment programme (NAIP) and the 2011-2015 investment plans. Some Member States have already started receiving assistance and resources from technical and financial partners to implement their programs.

Furthermore, the European Union is funding a 20 million Euros "Food Facility Project" for the region for the year 2010-2011), while ECOWAS and the French Government are funding a 10 million Euro "Regional Project on Food and Nutritional Security in West Africa" for the period 2011-2014.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Transport***

Programmes relating to the facilitation of road transport and regional transit through the corridor approach are being implemented with financial support of the World Bank, European Union and the African Development Bank. ECOWAS is also facilitating feasibility studies for the improvement of air and marine transport. In this regard, efforts are underway towards the realization of the ECOAIR air transport project and the further development of the ECOMARINE initiative, with the cooperation of the private sector and financial institutions.

### ***Telecommunications***

The Commission has launched the ***INTELCOM II*** program with the identification of 32 inter-State telecommunications liaisons to constitute a joint infrastructural broad-band network which will be connected to the international global network via submarine cables. As at December 2009, 55 percent of the liaisons had been completed and 45 percent had become operational. Cost estimates for the completion of the ***INTELCOM II*** have been submitted to the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank for consideration and financing.

The completion of the regional broad-band infrastructure and the installation of sub-marine cables would create real competition within the sector and offer less costly access to both national and international communication services, including roaming facilities on mobile telephony.

## ***Energy***

The Commission undertook measures in 2010 towards updating the Master Plan for the production and transmission of electrical energy in the ECOWAS region, access to energy services for the rural and peri-urban population, promotion of clean energy in addition to other activities relating to the coordination and monitoring of regional energy projects. The Commission has also facilitated the establishment of the ECOWAS Centre for the Promotion of Renewable Energy with the headquarters in Praia, Cape Verde.

In their efforts to assist in the resolution of the acute energy crisis facing post-conflict Member States, ECOWAS and UEMOA signed a contribution agreement worth US\$10 million with the Government of Guinea Bissau in August 2010 for the development of the energy sector in that country. ECOWAS is likewise advancing a concessionary loan worth USD 30 million to the Government of Guinea to meet its energy requirements for the city of Conakry.

### ***The Community Development Program (CDP)***

Fourteen (14) national studies have been validated as at November 2010 as part of the Commission's continued formulation of Community Development Program (CDP) and making the Commission's programmes impact the grassroots within Member States. In this regard, financial assistance would be provided to the National Committees of the CDP following the submission of their work programs to the Commission.

## **EDUCATION, CULTURE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

On Education, the Commission has continued with measures for the implementation of the ECOWAS Convention on Certification Equivalence. A study on this matter made a number of recommendations including the need to: harmonize the academic cycles of primary and secondary schools in all ECOWAS Member States, with regard to duration and academic qualification attained; harmonize the examination system in secondary schools and the award of diplomas in the various educational systems in the ECOWAS region.

### ***Youth***

The Commission through the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre (EYSDC) organized the Fourth Forum of ECOWAS Youth under the theme: "Young Entrepreneurship, Exchange of Experiences and capitalization of Good Practices." The Forum is now institutionalized to hold every two years under specific themes.

Similarly in March 2010, the Commission launched the ECOWAS Volunteer Programme (EVP) in Liberia with the collaboration of the ECOWAS Peace Fund, and with assistance of the African Development Bank and the United Nations

Volunteers (UNV). It is envisaged that in 2011, the first contingent of volunteers will be deployed in Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, which have been identified for the first stage of the programme. As an ECOWAS scheme for ECOWAS, the volunteers will be nationals of ECOWAS Member States.

## **PEACE AND SECURITY**

Gentlemen,

ECOWAS is primarily concerned with economic integration. However, the modest achievements in this core area would have been impossible without the creation of an enabling environment for peaceful economic activity and inward investments. Consequently, since the outbreak of civil wars in the Mano River Basin from the 1990s, ECOWAS has been scaling up its normative instruments and institutional arrangements to anticipate and confront challenges to peace and security in the region, particularly with regard to conflicts and political governance.

### ***Democracy and Good Governance***

Through the adoption and effective application of the ECOWAS Mechanism (1999) and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), ECOWAS has been able to progressively and incrementally pacify the region and promote democratic governance. By applying the policy of 'Zero Tolerance' to power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means, ECOWAS, with the cooperation of the African Union and the United Nations, has succeeded over the past two years to restore constitutional order and legality in the Member-States Guinea, Niger and Cote d'Ivoire. Similarly, the adherence to the constitutional convergence principles of ECOWAS with respect to democracy and good governance, yielded relatively peaceful, transparent and credible outcomes in the conduct of recent presidential elections in Guinea, Niger, Benin, and Nigeria. The aberration to this rule occurred in the post-electoral crisis witnessed in Cote d'Ivoire, which was eventually resolved thanks to the principled stance of the ECOWAS Authority and the concerted efforts of the international community.

We can be justifiably proud that today, due to our effective preventive diplomacy proactive stance, no active war is taking place in our Community and democratic culture is taking root. This benign situation is gradually translating into a more optimistic outlook, with our region becoming a favoured destination for investors.

### ***Persisting Security Challenges***

Despite the remarkable progress achieved, the ECOWAS Commission itself is the first to realize that the security situation in the region continues to be

characterized by fragility and unpredictability. Governance institutions remain weak and greater efforts need to be applied, in collaboration with civil society and other partners, to strengthen institutions, reform the security system to make it more responsive to democratic control and human rights; and ensure greater separation of powers, adherence to the rule of law and anti-corruption principles.

### ***Drug Trafficking and other Forms of International Organized Crime***

Drug trafficking, Terrorism, money laundering and other forms of international organized crime continue to undermine the security of the region and constitute a veritable time-bomb. ECOWAS has stepped up its efforts to combat the menace in partnership with UN agencies, the European Union, Interpol, Member States and Civil Society under various initiatives, including the West Africa Action Plan on Drug Trafficking, adopted by the Authority in 2009 and the ECOWAS Anti-Money Laundering Agency (GIABA). The coming years will see greater and sustained action in this direction.

## **ACTIVITIES OF OTHER COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS**

Following the Decision of the Authority In 2006, the transition of the ECOWAS Parliament, the election of the next group of parliamentarians to succeed the current Parliament, whose tenure expired in 2010, would be by direct universal suffrage. Consequently, the Community Parliament established an ad-hoc Committee to formulate proposals for the implementation of the Authority Decision. Following the submission of the Committee's report in October 2009, the Plenary adopted the proposals and recommendations on the modalities for the election of members of Parliament by direct universal suffrage and the establishment of an inter-institutional Committee for their implementation.

### ***The Community Court of Justice***

The ECOWAS Court of Justice continues to discharge its functions as the supranational court of last resort in the region in human rights cases. In 2010 the Court recorded eighteen (18) new cases, held 67 sittings and delivered seventeen (17) judgements.

### ***West African Health Organization (WAHO)***

This specialized institution continues to discharge its mandate including support for improving quality in health systems of the ECOWAS region; support for improving health coverage in the region; and support for the development of sustainable health financing.

It has achieved considerable progress in several areas, including; i. in malaria control (particularly in the preparation and submission to the Commission of the

Terms of Reference for a feasibility study for the creation of biolarvicides and biomedical products laboratories in Nigeria, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire); ii. Research into Nutritional and Non-Transmissible Diseases; iii. Helping Member States to strengthen Health Systems, including community health; and iv. Research and monitoring in the control of epidemics.

### ***The ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID)***

From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004 (date of effective commencement of operational activity by the Bank) to December 2010, the Board of Directors of the Bank has approved a total of 107 projects worth UA 704 510 525 (US\$1,049 million) in fourteen (14) of the fifteen (15) Member States of the Community.

In its interventions, the Bank continues to give priority to the infrastructure sub-sector which accounted for 66 percent of total commitments. The infrastructure projects financed related mainly to electricity inter-connection, construction of inter-state roads, construction of roads to open up rural areas and the development of digital coverage.

Various ongoing or completed development projects particularly for the benefit of the rural populations in our region are decisive steps toward moving to an ECOWAS of people mandated by the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

Above, I have taken care to mention some of the cooperative arrangements ECOWAS has struck over the years with diverse partners in the design and implementation of Community programs. Needless to say, ECOWAS, as one of the five pillars of the African Union, maintains healthy relations with the continental body, particularly in the domain of peace and security. In the same vein, ECOWAS continues to strengthen its bonds and cooperation with the United Nations and its agencies.

Our people-centred regional integration approach, which places a high premium on the interests of Community citizens, continues to elicit tremendous goodwill both from within and outside the region to the ECOWAS Commission. Our development partners, who have contributed immensely to the Community integration agenda, include the European Union and its Member-States; the Scandinavian countries; the US, Japan and Canada, among others.

In the last few years, ECOWAS has diversified its partnership to incorporate the emerging economies of Asia (China and India particularly), Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and other Caribbean nations. We cherish the support of our traditional and new partners and are determined to further strengthen these bonds to deliver mutual assistance and win-win relations.

Finally, in the implementation of our Community initiatives, we count on the cooperation, expertise monitoring acumen of civil society in its broadest understanding, particularly the private sector, traditional institutions, women and youth groups, Community-Based Organizations and specialized NGOs. ECOWAS has made conscious efforts to associate this important community in all its endeavours and we shall continue to do so as we scale up our interventions.

## **CONCLUSION**

In celebrating our achievements we are also mindful of the many challenges ahead. But the good news is that the Commission draws enormous strength from the unmitigated commitment and determination of leaderships at all levels and the burning desire of our Community to give real meaning to the slogan ***ECOWAS of Peoples.***

As we celebrate the 36<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our cherished Organization, it is also the right time to pay homage to the Founding Fathers of ECOWAS, whose dream we are living today, and to renew our commitment to the ideals they stood for.

I wish likewise to seize this opportunity, on behalf of our Community Institutions, to express our gratitude to the Authority of Heads of State and Government, especially H. E. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, its current Chairman and the other decision-making organs of ECOWAS for their guidance and tireless efforts in the realization of our objectives. In this regard, I would like to report that the Community has initiated the *"Honorary Founders Award"* and the *"Honorary life Ambassadorship of ECOWAS Award"* to individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the ideals, mission and objectives of ECOWAS. This award scheme has been institutionalized as a way of saying Thank-you to deserving awardees, be they individuals or groups.

Today, we celebrate our achievements. However, we are also acutely conscious of the formidable challenges before us as we strive to construct a respected and prosperous Community of shared values. Together, we will achieve our goals.

Thank you very much for your attention.