



**Extraordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of
Heads of State and Government on COVID-19**

Statement by H.E. Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General
and
Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the
Sahel (UNOWAS)**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Accra, 23 April 2020

Excellence Monsieur Mahamadou Issoufou, Président de la République du Niger, Président en exercice de la Conférence des Chefs d'Etats et de Gouvernement de la CEDEAO ;

Excellences Messieurs les Chefs d'Etat et de Gouvernement de la CEDEAO ;

Excellence Monsieur Moussa Faki Mahamat, Président de la Commission de l'Union Africaine ;

Excellence Monsieur Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, Président de la Commission de la CEDEAO ;

Distingués Invités ;

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Je vous transmets les salutations et la solidarité du Secrétaire Général des Nations Unies, Monsieur Antonio Guterres, qui suit de très près et avec beaucoup d'attention la situation dans notre sous-région.

Il salue cette heureuse initiative que vous avez prise de tenir cette réunion pour échanger sur la pandémie du COVID-19 et particulièrement, son impact en Afrique de l'Ouest. Cette pandémie contribue à accroître la pression sur nos systèmes de santé et de gouvernance avec de sérieuses conséquences sur l'économie, le social, la paix et la sécurité dans la sous-région.

Les projections de la Commission économique des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique montrent que cette crise sanitaire entravera davantage la capacité, déjà fragile, des pays africains à fournir les services de base, à créer des emplois notamment pour les femmes et les jeunes.

S'agissant de l'impact du COVID-19 sur la paix et la stabilité de la sous-région, comme l'a déclaré récemment le Secrétaire Général Guterres, « La pandémie menace non seulement le développement, mais accroît également les risques d'instabilité, de troubles et de conflits. »

Si elle n'est pas contenue, la pandémie pourrait : 1) rendre plus complexes les défis de paix et de sécurité dans la sous-région, 2) aggraver la situation humanitaire déjà désastreuse en particulier dans le Sahel et le Bassin du Lac Tchad, 3) bloquer les processus politiques déjà difficiles, notamment les élections et les réformes politiques. De manière générale, la crise pourrait affecter la capacité des États à répondre aux menaces nationales et régionales contre la paix et la sécurité.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The leadership, solidarity and sense of urgency that you have demonstrated since the spread of the pandemic into the region is

central to an effective response at the national and regional levels in the short, medium and long term.

I would also like to highlight that even though necessary under the circumstances, the measures that have been instituted are having a toll on our populations, particularly the most vulnerable including women and youth, which is why we should take all necessary steps to put them at the centre of our decision making and ensure their meaningful participation in the process.

This is even more relevant given that we are now seeing an increase in community transmissions which will require a community approach with the support of traditional, religious and civic leaders. The togetherness by all actors at the national level to fight the threats posed by this pandemic has been remarkable thus far. It is my fervent hope that in the same spirit, we shall be able to address other prevailing challenges to our respective states such as sustainable development, insecurity and democratic consolidation which may be exacerbated by this pandemic. For instance, given the potential impact of the pandemic on upcoming electoral processes, it is crucial for us to seek consensual and genuinely inclusive ways of addressing any disruptions to electoral schedules.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we face this deadly pandemic, you should be assured of the UN's unflinching support. The assistance provided by the World Health Organisation and other UN entities is being complemented

by several actions undertaken by the Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres.

He has launched a \$2 billion global humanitarian response plan to support the world's poorest countries fight against COVID-19 and called for an immediate ceasefire in conflict areas to ease the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable to COVID-19.

He has also been advocating for more international solidarity, in terms of financial aid and exchange of expertise as well as debt relief for African countries.

To this end, we welcome the decision by the G20 to freeze the debt obligation of several countries, including some ECOWAS countries. We also applaud the call by President Macky Sall for a total debt cancellation for African countries.

I am also pleased to report that the United Nations is working closely with national governments, including in West Africa, to set up regional humanitarian hubs. In Africa, these hubs which are expected to be established in Accra, Addis, Cairo and Johannesburg, will function: 1) as cargo hubs to receive medical and humanitarian supplies from United Nations global hubs for distribution to UN entities in the region; 2) as regional aviation services to ensure the transportation of UN humanitarian personnel around the region in the absence of commercial flights and; 3) as locations for the establishment of regional treatment

centers for UN staff who are staying in the region to deliver on humanitarian and development mandates. In the coming days, the SG will be writing to ECOWAS Heads of State to seek your support for this particular initiative.

In Nigeria, the United Nations is working with ECOWAS in making available UN procurement system to obtain value for money in the acquisition and speedy delivery of essential medical supplies needed by WAHO for distribution to Member States in the fight against COVID-19.

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,

En conclusion, je vous souhaite de fructueuses discussions. Et puisque nous sommes au début du mois du Ramadan, je souhaite aux Excellences Chefs d'Etat et de Gouvernement et à tous les musulmans dans notre région et au monde entier, *Ramadan kareem.*

Je vous remercie pour votre aimable attention.

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