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**STATEMENT BY OMAR ALIEU TOURAY, PRESIDENT
OF THE ECOWAS COMMISSION AT THE INAUGURAL
SAHEL GOVERNANCE FORUM**

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PROTOCOLS

On behalf of ECOWAS institutions, I wish to thank the United Nations Development Programme, the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation and the International IDEA for jointly convening this important forum on the Sahel. I would also like to thank his Excellency President Adame Barrow, the Government and People of the Gambia for graciously accepting to host the Forum . Your Excellency thank you for repositioning the Gambia not only as a tourist destination but also as a favourite spot for international conferences.

Indeed the Forum is taking place at a particularly crucial moment when the security and governance landscape of the Sahel is undergoing profound changes. By many counts this forum provides a unique opportunity to share perspectives, foster meaningful dialogue, and co-create solutions for advancing a renewed governance agenda that prioritizes social cohesion and public trust across the Sahel region, and beyond.

In a sense, the Sahel is synonymous with ECOWAS not least because until recently 70 million ECOWAS citizens were from Sahelian States: namely Burkina Faso Mali and Niger. Even with their formal departure, ECOWAS continues to consider the three countries as part of the community. And there is strong evidence that the three Countries share

similar sense of belonging to the West African community. This is why ECOWAS and the three countries have agreed that despite the withdrawal from ECOWAS, and until a new agreement is reached, the people of West Africa will continue to enjoy the gains of regional integration realized over the past 50 years. In other words, until a new agreement is concluded between ECOWAS and the member states of the Alliance of Sahelian states, the Status quo remains with respect to the free movement of people and trade within the region. In addition, the two sides have agreed to work on conditions that will facilitate collaboration in the area of Counter terrorism. The three countries have also indicated their intention to remain as members of some of the ECOWAS agencies such as GIABA and the EBID.

Excellencies, what all this shows is that some misgivings might surround the institutional frameworks, but nobody in either ECOWAS or in the three countries questions the imperative of working together for the benefit of people of West Africa.

It is in this context that we look forward to the outcome of this Forum, which I am confident will include innovative strategies to enhance social cohesion and citizen-state relations as well as the advancement of governance through stronger democratic Institutions that will promote accountability, discipline and results delivery.

Yes accountability, discipline and results are values that we cannot over stress. Excellencies ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by sharing my personal thoughts about the relationship between governance and development. You see, for many people governance is all about elections. But what a narrow and dim view of governance. Governance, Excellencies Ladies and gentlemen, is about accountability, It is about discipline, It is about results. Therefore unless accountability governs citizens and government relationships, unless disciplines permeates our social fabrics and unless results drive our public engagements (in other words unless we fix governance) Africa will continue to sit on gold mines and gaz and oil wells - but African people will continue to wallow in poverty.

I thank you for your attention.