



# *Women, Endogenous Governance and Conflict Prevention in West Africa*

Workshop organised by  
Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD

Niamey (Niger), 26 to 28 April 2006

**Volume 1 ♦ Summary Report**

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## **Workshop**

« Women, Endogenous Governance and Conflict  
Prevention in West Africa »

This workshop was the occasion to consolidate the West Africa Women's Group.

### **Volume 1 ♦ Summary Report**

prepared by

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# 1. Workshop Presentation

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## *1.1 Governance, conflict prevention and the gender issue*

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From the United Nations Decade for Women (1975 to 1985) to the Beijing Conference in 1995 until its evaluation in 2005 at the Beijing +10 meeting in New York the gender issue has taken evermore importance at international meetings on human development. If sexual equality still remains a current topic, the debate evolves towards the woman's role as a development actor and notably in conflict prevention, mediation and resolution.

The vote by the United Nations Security Council of Resolution 1325 adopted on 31 October 2000, on women, peace and security was one of the most remarkable policy acts over the last years at the international level. This Resolution reaffirms not only the need to respect the rights of women as victims of conflict but also encourages institutions, national, regional and international mechanisms for dispute prevention, management and resolution to increase women representation.

Within the African Union, the Supplementary Protocol, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of women in Africa places particular emphasis on the promotion of equality between men and women at all levels of society. At the regional level, several Articles of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance are devoted to this issue. Nevertheless, despite recognising women as development actors, their role and place within the political arena remains under-estimated even if more and more initiatives for women or promoting women are created as regards conflict mediation, prevention and resolution.

In the 1990s, as countries started to engage in the process of democracy, women were only marginally represented in governments whereas traditionally they are bestowed with a certain power as regards conflict prevention and mediation. Currently, their participation in State power structures remains limited, even if there have been positive evolutions in this regard. The most recent example is that of the accession of Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President of Liberia.

In West Africa, women represent only one quarter of members of Parliament or Governments. And once they are members, they are usually entrusted essentially to sectors linked to social development.

At the legislative level, women are rarely Presidents of Parliaments; few are in the public administration, and the number of female mayors or regional council members remains very low.

The same is for civil society organisations, NGOs, professional organisations and grass-roots organisations where women are not directly involved.

Most national Constitutions in the region advocate citizen equality, but the practices that ensue, patriarchal values and representation take precedence over law.

The objective of this meeting initiated by the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat on the theme, "Women, Endogenous Governance and Conflict Prevention in West Africa" is to assess the role and responsibilities of women as regards endogenous governance and conflict prevention. It is also in line with the strategic thinking on this issue within the framework of the Women's Group set up in Gorée in 2004.

In November 2004, within the framework of the Gorée workshop, in preparation of the Forum of Political Parties, the Media and Civil Society, a dozen female participants met informally so as to ensure adequate representation of women in the organisation of this Forum. They participate actively in identifying women from political parties, media and civil society within their countries as well as the dissemination of this initiative and its effective organisation. This group of women actively participated at this Forum which was held in Cotonou in June 2005.

Subsequently, this Group has been regularly associated with the Secretariat's activities in the areas of governance and conflict prevention. In March 2005, at the workshop entitled, "Initiative on the Capitalisation on African Endogenous Capacities in Governance and Conflict Prevention" which was held in Conakry in 2005, the participants highlighted the need to follow-up the dialogue on a broader level within the framework of the Inter-Generational Forum on Endogenous Governance. Furthermore, one of the work areas retained was the involvement of women in the region and the capitalization on their role and place in the updating and solidifying endogenous conflict prevention capacities and governance.

The idea being to:

- Strengthen the understanding and information from the viewpoint of the place and role of women in the endogenous governance and conflict prevention.
- Encourage and synergise various initiatives on women in this area.

With this in mind, the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat is organising this meeting in Niamey.

## 1.2 *Key questions*

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1. What are the roles and responsibilities of women in endogenous governance, conflict prevention and resolution in West Africa?
2. What are the endogenous capacities of African women as regards conflict prevention, socio-political regulation and governance?
3. In what manner can they be capitalized on and valorised?
4. How to strengthen women's participation in governance bodies?
5. How to coordinate the already existing regional mechanisms linked to women's roles in exercising responsibility in conflict prevention? How to encourage the States to apply them?
6. What strategies emerge from mediation and conflict prevention experiences led by women's organisations?



## 2. Workshop Sessions

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### 2.1 *Introduction*

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At the invitation of the Sahel and West Africa Club, a group of 20 or so women from civil society organisations, governments and NGOs from 13 countries in the region gathered in Niamey from 26 to 28 April 2006 to take part in a workshop entitled “Women, Endogenous Governance and Conflict Prevention”.

For the Sahel and West Africa Club, this meeting marks a stage in the process of achieving a more general acceptance of the gender balance issue in its work, notably in the fields of governance and conflict prevention. In this domain, it shares the goals of the African Union, the institutions, networks and states of the region which are taking measures and drawing up policies aimed at promoting the role of women in the construction of peace, democracy and development in West Africa.

The objective of the “Women, Endogenous Governance and Conflict Prevention in West Africa” workshop was to contribute to this acceptance and to the mobilisation and action which it implies on the part of decision-makers in state and non-state bodies at the national and regional levels. It was intended to deepen informed debate and strategic thinking at the regional level by helping reduce the isolation of women’s organisations and by building lasting synergies between those responsible for the promotion of the status of women at the regional level.

The West African women involved in this initiative are already involved via various structures in international debate and action on the gender issue. The aim then is not to create another structure to this end but to give substance to the recommendations made at previous meetings, among which the Conakry workshop in March 2005 marks an important stage.

The Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) set three principle objectives at this workshop which lasted two and a half days:

1. **To consolidate the Women’s Group** set up by the Club at the workshops in Gorée in 2004, in Conakry in 2005 and at the Cotonou Forum in 2005.
2. **To initiate a review of the role and responsibilities of women in West Africa** in the fields of governance and conflict prevention. This meant:
  - Describing the experiences of women and their organisations in the fields of governance, conflict prevention, dialogue preservation, facilitation and mediation;
  - Sharing the lessons drawn from these experiences and identifying strategies to reinforce roles and capacities in these fields.

3. **To involve the Women's Group** in the preparation, organisation and monitoring of the Inter-generational Forum on Endogenous Governance which the secretariat of the Sahel and West Africa Club was going to organise in Ouagadougou in June 2006.

**The first day** provided an opportunity to carry out a general review of the subject of "Women, Endogenous Governance and Conflict Prevention" and to situate it in the regional and sub-regional context, notably through an enumeration of the main existing legal instruments and mechanisms. Particular attention was given to the role and responsibilities of women in this domain.

The women were also invited to undertake strategic thinking on the ways in which the Group could be involved in conflict prevention at the regional level, as well as the ways in which the women constituting this informal group envisage its evolution.

**The second day** was devoted to the sharing of experiences between women who are active in the field of conflict prevention. Participants were able to identify the challenges they needed to take up and the actions they needed to take to facilitate their efforts and initiatives.

The SWAC next presented the main lines of the Inter-generational Forum on Endogenous Governance it will be organising at the end of June in Ouagadougou. It wanted to involve the Group in the conception, organisation and management of the Forum. After a brief presentation, the SWAC collected questions, suggestions and comments on the organisation of the forum.

Discussion continued **during the morning of the third day**, before the official closure of the meeting by Niger's Minister for the Promotion of Women and for the Protection of Children, Ms. Ousmane Zeïnabou Moulaye,

The group of women then formed themselves with the SWAC into a delegation for an audience with the **President of Niger, Mr. Mamadou Tandja**, Chairman of ECOWAS, who encouraged them to pursue their work in the field of conflict prevention in West Africa and in development in general. He stressed that, taking into account the meagre results achieved by men in the field of conflict prevention during the last 40 years, it was time that women involved themselves more in political action so as to advance the cause of peace and democracy in West Africa.

## 2.2 *Opening of the meeting*

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The meeting set to work in the presence of a hundred or so women representing Niger's civil society organisations and political parties. This strong feminine presence illustrates perfectly their state of mobilisation and their commitment to the gender issue in this country, where the fertility rate, at eight children for every woman, is the highest in the world. The Niger Government is none the less convinced of the necessity to work with women's groups and to advance their cause. In the most recent reshuffle at the end of 2004, the President named six women ministers<sup>1</sup>. In 2000, moreover, the women of Niger succeeded in having voted a law setting quotas for political representation which seems to be inspiring women in other countries in the region. As a result, the number of women in parliament has risen from 1 to 14 in only a few years.

Because of timetable problems, the two ministers with responsibility for women, the Minister for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection, **Ms. Ousmane Zeïnabou Moulaye** and the Minister of Population and Social Action, **Ms. Boukary Zila Mamadou**, were unable to take part in the opening. They were nevertheless represented by their general secretaries, **Mr. Adamou Mahaman Batouré** and **Mr. Ibrahima Halilou**.

The choice of Niger as the host country for this workshop was not the random. It was linked to the current context in the country. As was recalled in his welcome address by **Mr. Massaër Diallo**, Head of the Governance, Conflict Dynamics, Peace and Security Unit at the Sahel and West Africa Club, the meeting opened the day after the Day of Peace and Concord commemorating the end of the Touareg conflict in Niger and emphasised national reconciliation. The Niger parliament was in the process of debating ratification of the Supplementary Protocol Relative to Women's Rights contained in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Finally, the meeting was taking place only a few days before Women's Day which is celebrated in Niger on May 13. This regional meeting was also being hosted by the country of the president in office of ECOWAS, Mr. Mamadou Tandja, who is himself very much committed to the cause of women in West Africa..

In his opening address, **Mr. Mangone Niang**, African Union representative and Director of the Centre for Historical and Linguistic Studies by Oral Tradition (CELHTO/UA) stressed the need for Africa to seek the solutions to its problems within its own societies. He recalled that in the field of conflict resolution, the mechanisms at Africa's disposal dated from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs, Co-operation and African Integration, Ms. Aïchatou MINDAOU DOU; Minister of Urban Planning, the Habitat and Land, Ms. Diallo AISSA ABDOULAYE; Minister of Public Services and Employment, Ms. Kanda SIPTEY; Minister of Population and Social Action, Ms. Boukari Zila MOHAMADOU; Minister of Privatisation and Company Restructuring, Ms. Gazoli LAOUALI RAHAMOU; Minister for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection, Ms. Ousmane ZEINALOU MOULAYE.

In 1236, weary of conflict and discord, men and women met at Kangaba in present day Mali to discuss new ways of negotiating and reaching understanding. Their efforts led to the elaboration of one of the first known texts on the organisation of society in the Sahel and West Africa: the Kurukan Fuga Charter for Peace and Concord. He pointed out that, at present, traditional negotiations are limited and distorted by economic issues. As regards women in conflict, he recalled that, while all Africans suffered from conflict, women paid most heavily. In his view, the time had come to change things. With regard to the place of women in African society, he affirmed that the African Union was already committed to advancing the cause of women and would pursue its efforts to this end.

Recognizing that the gender issue had taken an increasingly important place in international human development conferences and that women represented the majority of the population in West African states, Mr. Adamou Mahaman Batouré, General Secretary at the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection, argued that women had a right to a peaceful existence. He recalled the commitment of the Niger Government to the promotion of women and noted that his country had six women ministers, that President Tandja had an adviser on the gender issue and that 671 women councillors and 14 women deputies had been elected by the country's voters. He also stressed the importance of making full use of Africa's endogenous capacities for conflict prevention.

### 2.3 *First session: Current situation*

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#### WHAT ARE WOMEN'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN WEST AFRICA?

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In her introductory remarks, **Ms. Fatoumata Agnès Diaroumeye Bembello**, a sociologist and General Secretary of the Organisation Maillon Africain pour la Paix et le Développement (MAPADEV), linked the gender issue to the status of women, saying that the status of women determined their role and responsibilities. Taking a retrospective approach, she found that women and men in Africa had unequal status. In the fields of governance and politics, cultural prejudice and stereotypes were deeply rooted in society. She argued that, whatever strategies were adopted, whether it was male-female parity or positive discrimination, what counted most was uncompromising respect for the principle of equality – equality of opportunity for advancement and promotion.

Accepting that there were pitfalls and difficulties along the path to achieving this, she insisted on the need for co-ordinated action to defend women's interests through a pan-African movement like the Pan-African Women's Organisation which existed at the time of the struggle against colonialism. It was the first major women's political action movement. She encouraged African women and their allies around the world today to bring back into existence a comparable movement. She stressed the need for solidarity among women to achieve this whatever their political persuasion, age or culture. Discussing the role of women in the struggle for political independence, she said that they had played a role at different levels but without getting beyond the status of grass roots activist and without obtaining high level posts in the political hierarchy.

Next, she presented a brief historical review of the action plans adopted at African and international levels under the auspices of the major pan-African and United Nations organisations and drew attention to the lack of political will to implement them. According to her, the responsibility for this lay with African women who failed to "defend, maintain and enrich" these initiatives. She recalled that the world action plan for women, which was adopted in Mexico City in 1975, was based on an African regional action plan. At the time, women like Ms. Jeanne Martin Cisse (Guinea), Ms. Sira Diop (Senegal), Ms. Jacqueline Ki-Zerbo (Burkina Faso) and Ms. Madeleine Téfak (Cameroon) fought to convince the United Nations to institute the Decade for Women. Subsequently, however, in her view, African women had failed to capitalise on these gains.

She deplored the insufficient number and even lack of African women at all levels in political decision-making bodies. She called for the drafting, application and monitoring of legal texts marking out the path to greater visibility for women in politics, while at the same time stimulating and reinforcing their action as simple citizens. She insisted, however, on the lack of political will to implement the numerous recommendations of the various regional and sub-regional bodies.

She presented the major challenges facing women seeking to participate in politics, governance and conflict management and, to meet them, proposed:

- Encouraging the development of feminine leadership;
- Exchanging experiences and knowledge between women leaders;
- Setting up the basis of sub-regional and regional resistance;
- Carrying out studies to identify and list the endogenous capacities of women in the fields of governance and conflict prevention;
- Making better and more widely known research and procedures related to women's rights;
- Elaborating a regional five-year action plan to be applied rigorously and without complacency;
- Making use of the experience of women who were in the front line of struggle and war in countries affected by conflict;
- Reactivating institutions like the Pan-African Women's Organisation or at least women's co-ordinations to avoid spreading action too lightly;
- Setting out the basis for political concertation between women on the major African and worldwide social problems.

In her conclusion, she insisted on the idea that one of the major challenges facing African women was that of *African enrichment as opposed to that of poverty reduction*, which is based on a different conception of the continent's development.

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**REVIEW OF THE MAIN LEGAL INSTRUMENTS AND MECHANISMS FOR WOMEN IN CONFLICT PREVENTION, BY MS. JULIETTE KHADY SOW, JURIST (SENEGAL)**

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With a view to informing discussion, the *jurist* **Ms. Juliette Khady Sow** was asked to make a brief presentation of the mechanisms and conventions relating to women. As she recalled, legal instruments and procedures relating to women are not in short supply. She therefore confined herself to the most pertinent ones which she briefly described and commented on.

They are the following;

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or the "Declaration of Women's Rights";
- Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council voted in 2000;
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and its Protocol on Women's Rights;
- The ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

➤ At United Nations level, Resolution 1325 is the most important one to have been adopted in recent years in the field of the rights of women in conflict. It is the first to address the impact of women on conflict. It prescribes that women should be involved at every level and, notably, that women should be appointed to high-ranking posts. It encourages the recruitment of women in United Nations peace-keeping teams. It recommends the use of endogenous processes for conflict management during and after hostilities. It highlights the absence of women in the mediation process. It insists on the responsibility to protect young girls and women whatever the parties in conflict.

Ms. Sow said that many of the texts relating to women's rights were not known.

➤ At African level, there are two principal mechanisms:

- Article 18 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1986) which establishes the principle of equality between men and women in Africa. But, as Ms. Sow pointed out, a supplementary protocol, adopted in Maputo in 2003, was required to confirm it and encourage states to apply it. This protocol is based on three major principles relative to the elimination of discrimination against women, women's participation in governance and the right to peace. It encourages active participation by women in conflict prevention.
- More recently, in 2001, the ECOWAS states adopted the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, a large part of which is devoted to women's rights in West Africa.

Ms. Sow concluded by saying that the major challenge remaining was for these provisions, whether they were UN Resolutions or conventions on women's rights or African mechanisms, to be effectively implemented and integrated into national statutes. It would seem that reticence is more present at local and family level than at national and international levels. She argued, too, that the work of disseminating these texts needed to be carried out on a continuous basis to ensure that all women, educated or not, knew their rights.

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## DISCUSSIONS

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Several proposals were made to in order to effectively apply these mechanisms in favour of women:

- Establish regulatory measures to define and enforce various responsibilities;
- Set up of compulsory measures for the application of resolutions adopted by Heads of State;

- Institute the application of resolutions such as quotas for women as a condition for the receipt of funds from donors.

**The role of education** was emphasised as a means of enabling young girls and boys to become aware of existing rules and for these rules to be applied. Education encourages behaviour change. Some people remarked, however, that school, as it is conceived in Africa today, is a left-over from colonisation which is not suited to African culture. Financial problems apart, this could explain the low level of school attendance of young Africans.

It was recalled that **the use of African languages** is important for informing and communicating with African women.

It was stressed that **young boys and men need also to be involved** in gender issues and to participate in women's meetings. It is important to work together to better understand each other. This begins in the family unit.

There are socio-cultural barriers which make women afraid to seek to have the law applied. The women jurists present pointed out that certain women magistrates and lawyers did not apply these laws either through ignorance or through fear that their decision would be ill perceived. Women are sometimes afraid to have certain measures in their favour applied out of fear of reprisals at the social level.

It is necessary to work on these regional and international instruments which can be adapted at the local level. International mechanisms should be applied at the local level although national particularities should be taken into account.

Frequently, members of national parliaments are not even aware of the mechanisms which have been voted at the international level.

#### **The debate between generations:**

- It is important for young people to be involved in debates of this type. Young women concerns today are not the same as those of the pioneers of the women's cause.
- Older women have an essential role in the transmission of positive and negative values to young girls. It is older women who transmit values. They are the ones who marry their daughters too young, who perpetuate sexual mutilation.

**The role of women in reconstruction:** they are not sufficiently involved in this phase of conflict or in projects for the reconstruction of socio-economic or development infrastructures. Women must get donors more involved in and more aware of these issues.



**Africa must give greater attention to endogenous models of conflict prevention:**

- Africa must set on record more of what has been done in this domain through research and the writing of history at the basic community level.
- Research into conflict prevention must be active. It would be interesting to know about the successes of women in certain countries in their struggles and in conflict prevention. There is not enough transmission of knowledge and experience sharing between countries.

**The role of women in the democratisation process:** some participants argue that women have played a major role in the process of democratisation but that the results in terms of the positions devolved to women at the political level remain insufficient even if there have been some advances.

A debate was held on the issue of quotas. No consensus on the issue emerged at group level. The group proposed resuming the debate within the electronic forum which the SWAC is going to set up.

The question of the representation of women in international organisations responsible for women was discussed. No African woman is present in the new CEDAW Commission. How are African women's concerns going to be taken into account?

Why have Africa's traditionally matriarchal societies switched to a patriarchal system?

Why have Asian, European and American women succeeded in forming pressure mechanisms in their countries and not African women?

## 2.4 *Second session: Consolidation of the Women's Group*

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### WAYS AND MEANS OF INVOLVING THE GROUP IN CONFLICT PREVENTION ISSUES AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

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One of the objectives of the Niamey meeting was to consolidate this group of women which was constituted in an informal manner in Gorée in November 2004 and then reunited in Conakry in March 2005 as part of the preparations for the Forum of Political Parties, Media and Civil Society (Cotonou, June 2005).

The SWAC's objective is not to create a new organisation but to bring together women who are leaders in their countries to exchange and share their experiences in the field of conflict prevention, endogenous governance and peace.

The SWAC was concerned with establishing a balance in the group so that all the 18 West African countries covered by its activities – from Cape Verde to Chad and from Mauritania to Cameroon – could be represented without enlarging it too much. The aim then was to create a core group to which could be added, according to the circumstances and the themes of the different meetings, a second group representing women's groups from the country hosting the meeting, as was the case at Niamey.

ECOWAS, which is linked to the regional group through its Executive Secretariat in the person of Dr. Adrienne Diop, Director of Communications, must serve at the political level to relay the thinking and the actions undertaken by this group of women.

#### Presentation of the Group:

The 22 women present in Niamey came from 13 West African countries. Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia, Chad and Togo were not represented on this occasion. Seven representatives of civil society in Niger also participated in the meeting. The group also welcomed six representatives from the University of Niamey and the Centre for Historical and Linguistic Studies by Oral Tradition (CELHTO/AU).

All the women present have in common an interest in the gender dimension in their professional capacities and/or are engaged in civil society organisations in this domain. The group included teachers, jurists, researchers, retired teachers, health sector personnel, heads of companies, writers, members of parliament and ex-ministers.

## Constitutive elements

The women present in Niamey identified a certain number of constitutive elements in the Group:

1. **Perpetuation of the Group:** the women want to perpetuate this Group but without making it too formal. The group is going to set up a data bank with an individual presentation of each of them with a view to enabling themselves to network.
2. **Co-ordination and organisation:** this Group will be organised by the SWAC which will initiate this type of meeting. The SWAC will set up a page dedicated to the Group on its internet site and launch an electronic forum to enable the women to discuss subjects of common interest, share best practices and establish a continuous dialogue. The choice of subjects will be determined at a later date but could be renewed every two months.
3. **Commitment:** the Group is represented by its individual members and not institutions. The women who participate in it are recognised for their leadership in the Group's domains of interest. The women must be committed to participate personally as much as possible in the meetings organised by the SWAC.

## The initiatives:

To date, the Group has actively participated in the preparation of the Forum of Political Parties, Media and Civil Society which took place in Cotonou in June 2005. In future, it should intervene in four main domains:

1. **Follow-up on the Forum of Political Parties, Media and Civil Society.** It was decided to target certain countries for the purposes of follow-up on the forum. The countries are: Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and Togo.
2. **Campaign for the ratification and implementation of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocols** on Democracy and Good Governance and on Women's Rights and for the African Union's African Charter on Human and People's Rights.
3. **Preparation and organisation of the Inter-Generational Forum** on Endogenous Governance in Ouagadougou at the end of June.
4. **Involvement in the activities of the SWAC and joint action** relative to women's rights, conflict prevention, democratic governance and political dialogue.

## 2.5 *Third session: Exchange of experiences*

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### EXPERIENCES OF CONFLICT PREVENTION, MEDIATION AND RESOLUTION IN WEST AFRICA

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The third session, chaired by the **Honourable Zainab Kamara**, Member of Parliament in Sierra Leone, provided an opportunity to exchange experiences of conflict prevention, mediation and resolution. The experiences were grouped by zone of instability, taking into account the interaction between the different conflicts and/or their repercussions in other countries.

#### EXPERIENCES IN NIGER AND MALI DURING THE TOUAREG CONFLICTS

- ✓ Experiences in Niger, Ms. Ben Wahab Aïchatou, President, CFNGG (Coalition of Niger Women Against the War)
- ✓ Experiences in Mali, Ms. Bintou Sanankoua, COFEM (Mali Women's Collective)

#### EXPERIENCES IN SENEGAL AND GUINEA BISSAU

- ✓ Experiences in Casamance in Senegal, Ms. Seynabou Male, Coordinator, CRSFPC/ACAPES
- ✓ Experiences in Guinea Bissau, Ms. Maria Baraï, Coordinator, Citoyenne de Bonne Volonté.

#### EXPERIENCES IN THE MANO RIVER ZONE

- ✓ Experiences in Côte d'Ivoire, Ms. Salimata Porquet, President, OFEP (Organisation of Eburnie Women for Peace) and Ms. Françoise Kaudjhis Offoumou, Vice-President.
- ✓ Literature and violence against women, Ms. Dieynaba Koumanthio Diallo Dieng, writer and poet (Guinea).

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#### EXPERIENCES IN NIGER AND MALI DURING THE TOUAREG CONFLICTS

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- ✓ Experiences in Niger, Ms. Ben Wahab Aïchatou, president, CFNGG (Coalition of Niger Women against the War)
- ✓ Experiences in Mali, Ms. Bintou Sanankoua, COFEM (Mali Women's Collective)

**Ms. Aïchatou Ben Wahab** briefly recalled the underlying causes of the Touareg conflict in Niger. She highlighted several factors, which she said had played a determining role in the start of the conflict.

- Breakdown of confidence between the nomads and the State;
- Loss of herds because of the great drought;
- Forced sedentation;
- Departure to neighbouring countries and the constitution of armed rebellions.

She said that women had been heavily involved at the beginning and that many of them had perished. The women collected funds for the rebels and helped them hide their arms.

The Niger Government wanted to settle the conflict by force. When the situation deteriorated, it became necessary to recommend dialogue and this enabled the conflict to be resolved.

Now that the conflict was over, she thought that attention needed to be turned to conflict prevention and better anticipation of the crises which could resurface. She considered that rebellion was not the sole source of conflict: the contested elections, for example, were another.

**Ms. Bintou Sanankoua** drew attention to the points of convergence between the causes of the Touareg rebellion in 1990 in northern Mali and that in Niger.

- The great drought of 1973-1984 which caused the nomads and the sedentary population to leave the country. In their countries of exile, some went to training camps and formed armed groups. Subsequently, following the democratisation of the 1990s, these exiles sought to make their voices heard and imposed their will by force. From the start, the government reacted in a military, security-minded way. The rebels, who were well prepared for war, were able to resist, and the consequences were dramatic. In the face of the carnage which followed, women reacted and tried to interpose themselves as mediators. It was the first time that the women had involved themselves in a conflict.
- Ms. Sanankoua explained that, traditionally in Mali, war was considered to be men's business, not out of discrimination against women but out of a concern to protect them. Women were not killed since they were respected as the source of life. On the other hand, they could fall victim to kidnapping. For a long time, women had the right to protect children until the day after the start of the conflict in 1990 when this rule was no longer respected. The foundations of society had begun to disappear.
- Malian women forged their strategy within the democratic framework and involved themselves in civil society as a means of ending this situation. They participated in the preparation of the conference on the rebellion in Ségou and Mopti. Political change in Mali brought about a change in approach to the rebellion in the north. The government opened negotiations. The women were present on the ground and negotiated with the rebels despite the reticence of the authorities.
- The end of the conflict resulted in women being marginalised. An agreement was signed between the government and the rebels without the women. Ms. Sanankoua insisted on the need to preserve women's mediation and negotiation expertise so that they could be represented in decision-making bodies. She also suggested that women should be better represented in ECOWAS' Council of Elders, which currently counts only 3 women among its 15 members. She also stressed the importance of carrying out research on the role of women in conflicts in West Africa.

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## DISCUSSIONS

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- ✦ There are **similarities between the causes of the conflict in the countries of the sub-region**. All have experienced dictatorships which have encourage the development of rebellions, supported by allies ready to intervene militarily when an opportunity presented itself.
- ✦ One of the key factors to take into account is the **change in the nature of conflict** over the last 30 years. For a long time, countries fought each other using regular armies. Today, it is more a case of rebellions which have serious consequences for the civil population.
- ✦ **Respect for women in conflict situations** varies from one country to another. In certain countries, by tradition a man will not kill a woman, taking the view that to do so would be to lower himself. But, in many cases, women are not respected and pay dearly.
- ✦ In considering **the role of women in conflict**, one should not have an idealised vision of women or imagine that they are never at fault. The traditional role of women in conflicts was to encourage the men to go to war. Sometimes, they even took part in the conflict alongside the men. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, they played a role of combatant, initially in self-defence but subsequently as parties to the conflict. Today, they are also parties to conflict resolution.

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## EXPERIENCES IN SENEGAL AND GUINEA BISSAU

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- ✓ Experiences in Casamance in Senegal, Ms. Seynabou Male, Coordinator, CRSFPC/ACAPES
- ✓ Experiences in Guinea Bissau, Ms. Macaria Barai, Coordinator, Citoyenne de Bonne volonté

**Ms. Seynabou Male** presented a certain number of socio-economic factors which played a determining role in triggering one of West Africa's longest rebellions.

- The geographical situation of the region situated between the Gambia and Guinea Bissau gave part of the population the feeling that it belonged to another country than Senegal.

- The region was affected by a great drought which pushed the population in the North towards the South. Then, the discovery of oil off the coast of Casamance created new hopes and ambitions.
- The region is marked by strong religious influence. There are women fetishists who control the sacred woods where wars were decided in the past.

From an economic point of view, women have an important place because it is they who produce the rice. Husbands are monogamous. Women only look after their families, therefore.

The generation gap between the traditionalists and the new generations with little knowledge of the traditions is widening. In the current conflict, women cannot see their way because those involved are no longer people who share the same customs and traditions. At the present time, efforts are being made to acquaint the young generation with these traditions.

Traditionally, women intervened in domestic and public conflict. They used “strikes”, rites, prayers, libations and processions to show their involvement. Armed conflicts today involve more diverse parties who can come from outside the immediate territory. Women are consulted when no other outcome can be perceived. Ms. Malé recommended prudence with regard to traditional conflict management mechanisms which she said could be useful but which were not always a source of progress for women.

She pointed out that, as early as 1990, women from northern Senegal and Casamance began to react to the conflict in Casamance. They protested, organised workshops in favour of peace and formed the regional women’s solidarity committee for peace in Casamance, USOFORAL.

She pleaded in favour of the application of the African Union’s supplementary protocol. International instruments apart, however, she said that it was important to support women at the grass roots, notably by helping them to gain recognition of their organisations. Women needed to exert pressure to ensure that they were included in the peace negotiations. Ms. Male suggested that solidarity between women at all levels was also a key factor. She suggested that demobilisation, disarmament and rehabilitation programmes (DDR) should include provisions for women.

**Ms. Macaria Barai** recalled that Guinea Bissau had experienced only one conflict which had lasted 11 months. The experience of conflict resolution she described took form out of inter-religious dialogue. Imams, pastors and archbishops were induced to work together. Women played an active part in the war effort, as well as in the coups of 2003 and 2004 and in the elections which were marked by violent incidents. They worked particularly to unite the active forces of the country favourable to a settlement of the different crises.

Ms. Barai next presented other experiences of conflict resolution, notably at the Guinea Bissau-Senegal border. As part of an effort to settle these conflicts pacifically, several cultural events were organised involving young people from both countries, who were joined by other young people from the region. A conference was organised, principally for young people, to discuss the role of Islam and the Catholic Church in the search for peace and its preservation. Out of these gatherings came cross-border initiatives which allowed certain balances to be re-

established and thus reduced sources of conflict. Women organised cultural events on the theme of religion, women and conflicts, to which they invited young people. Today, the latter share their experience of conflict resolution with young people from other countries in the region. ECOWAS was involved in this process and decided to perpetuate these initiatives through the organisation of a festival to take place in Cambadju in 2006.

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## DISCUSSIONS

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- ✚ The participants considered what were **motivating factors** for avoiding new conflicts.
- ✚ The **importance of neighbouring countries remaining neutral** when conflict broke out on their borders so as to avoid the conflict spreading was underscored.
- ✚ Among the consequences of crisis in neighbouring countries, the **influx of refugees** is very often mentioned as a problem, which serves as a destabilising factor for the host country and the country of origin. These refugees can in the long term represent a threat to the countries of origin if they find external support.
- ✚ Civil society organisations working in conflict management must provide **training** for conflict management.

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## EXPERIENCES IN THE MANO RIVER ZONE

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- ✓ Experiences in Côte d'Ivoire, Ms. Salimata Porquet, President and Ms Françoise Kaudjhis Offoumou, Vice-President, Organisation des Femmes d'Eburnie pour la Paix (OFEP)
- ✓ Literature and violence against women, Ms. Dieynaba Koumanthio Diallo Dieng, writer and poet (Guinea)

**Ms. Salimata Porquet** talked of her experience of mediation in the conflict between the regular army of Côte d'Ivoire and the rebels in the North, known as the Forces Nouvelles. In 2002, in the middle of the crisis, a group of women went to Bouaké under French escort to talk with the Forces Nouvelles leader Mr. Guillaume Soro. The group encouraged the rebels to participate in the peace negotiations organised in France at Marcoussis. Several women's groups involved in peace promotion also went to France and worked on the sidelines of the official meeting.

Ms. Porquet regretted the insignificant presence and even absence of women in the decision-making process and at the negotiation tables. There was not a single woman among the signatories of the agreements even though women were present in certain delegations.



Following these negotiations, a new government was formed with just four women ministers out of a total 32.

Her organisation is demanding effective participation by women in the peace process. It proposes that more women be appointed in political, military and diplomatic decision-making bodies. When the Prime Minister was due to be designated, it put forward the name of three women for this high-level post.

**Ms. Françoise Offoumou**, who belongs to the same organisation as Ms. Porquet, devoted her contribution to the definition of governance. Governance is the impartial, transparent, conscious, organised and responsible management of public affairs through the creation of a regime of structures accepted as the legitimate authority with the aim of promoting and restoring the social values which individuals and groups in favour of the legitimacy of the public and private sphere are seeking. Governance is therefore a process which focuses on voluntary acceptance by the governed to submit themselves to the management of public affairs. Endogenous governance will never be real if West African women are not integrated into the development process. She insisted on the need to inform women, communicate with them and train them. She concluded that, if women could exist without democracy and good governance, democracy and good governance could not exist without the participation of women.

**Ms. Koumanthio Zeinab Diallo Dieng** is the inheritor of an extremely rich Peulh poetic tradition and founder of the Guinean section of International PEN. She is also a member of the International Committee of Women Writers and several other literary associations. She obtained a first Peulh poetry prize in 1990. She exercised the profession of agronomical engineer, development expert and consultant for the United National Development Programme (UNDP). Today, along with other women writers, she uses her writing to describe the horrors of war and denounces violence against women. She argued that literary and poetic involvement should not be neglected in conflict prevention and management and made the point that African societies, which are essentially oral societies, do not leave sufficient evidence of their history in written form. She said that she had decided to devote herself to this task through literature.

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## DISCUSSIONS

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- ✦ What are the most appropriate modes of communication for conflict management? The participants held that this important question was too often neglected. They proposed to carry out further strategic thinking on this issue at a future meeting.
- ✦ They insisted on the need for conflict prevention through working notably before electoral periods, a favourable time to all sorts of tension in the countries of the region.
- ✦ Women must publish accounts of their experiences in the field of conflict management so as to be able to share them with others.

- ✚ **Art and artistic forms** of all sorts can contribute to building peace and should not be neglected.

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## SYNTHESIS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **The representation of women in national, regional and international bodies**

- ✓ Assure better representation of African women in international women's organisations;
- ✓ Advocate better representation for women on the ECOWAS Council of Elders.

### **Legal mechanisms and instruments**

- ✓ Promote wider knowledge at local, national and regional levels of the regional and international mechanisms and instruments promoting the cause of women;
- ✓ Demand real application of these regional and international mechanisms and instruments and their integration into national statutes;
- ✓ Reinforce the capacities of the group so as to achieve this objective.

### **Sharing experience and research**

- ✓ Continue exchanging experience and knowledge among women leaders;
- ✓ Improve through research documentation of the role of women in conflicts in West Africa;
- ✓ Carry out studies into the endogenous capacities of women in the fields of governance and conflict prevention;
- ✓ Make better use of the experiences of women in countries in conflict by putting them into written form;
- ✓ Put art to work in conflict prevention and management.

### **Women in the post-conflict phase**

- ✓ Involve women more in DDR and post-conflict programmes;
- ✓ Involve women more in the different phases of post-conflict management, particularly reconstruction and reconciliation;
- ✓ Make donors more aware of these issues so as to obtain their support for initiatives involving women.

### **The education of young boys and girls**

- ✓ Contribute to a better recognition of children as victims in conflicts;
- ✓ Put greater emphasis on the education of young boys and girls as a means of teaching them about their rights and the legal instruments available to them;

- ✓ Take better into account the preoccupations of today's young women, which are different from those of their mothers.

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## QUESTIONS

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- Why did traditional African matriarchal societies switch to a patriarchal system?
- Why have Asian, European and American women succeeded in creating the means to put pressure on their states and not African women?
- What are the most appropriate modes of communication in conflict management?

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## THE THREE FOUNDING PRINCIPLES OF THE WOMEN'S GROUP

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The Women's Group is:

- To become permanent but without excessive formalisation;
- Represented by individuals not institutions;
- Organised by the SWAC which will be responsible for initiating meetings of this type;
- Involved in joint actions.

## *2.6 Fourth Session: Preparation of the Inter-generational Forum on Endogenous Governance in West Africa (FIGEAO)*

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### THE PLACE AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FIGEAO

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#### **Presentation of the Forum**, by Mr. Massaër Diallo, SWAC

The activities of the Inter-generational Forum on Endogenous Governance follow up on recommendations made in Conakry in March 2005 during the workshop on the need for greater recognition of endogenous capacities of governance.

The objectives are:

- To create dialogue between men and women of different generations, who are interested in the issue of values and their transmission.
- To bring traditional African values into phase with these challenges. What purpose does Africa's capital of wisdom serve? On the basis of traditional values and their own experiences, how do the different parties react to the challenges posed by democracy?

Particular attention will be given:

- **To women**, on the basis of the following questions:

- What have they experienced?
- What are the capacities for which they are recognised?
- What are their roles and responsibilities?
- Are their status and their capacities in keeping with the positions they actually have?
- Have women changed the status without having changed the rules?

- **To young boys and girls:**

Although they represent the biggest section of the population in West African, young people, like women, are politically under-represented. How can the link between the youth and their country in the form of citizenship be re-established?

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## DISCUSSIONS

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The participants were invited to make proposals on the Inter-Generational Forum on Endogenous Governance.

### **General ideas on the Forum:**

- The youth have problems specific to their epoch. It is, therefore, important to centre debates at the Forum on subjects which interest them and consider how the Forum can be given a form suited to young people.
- A certain balance of genders will need to be respected in the choice of youth.
- The Forum must be result-orientated: the problems and challenges facing the region are well-known. They were identified on numerous occasions in Conakry and Niamey. The need now is to find solutions and actions to arrive at these solutions.

### Proposed themes

- Governance and immigration
- The hold of ideologies on the young
- Impunity and attitudes to rules
- Governance, culture, gender and development

### **How do the region's values enable it to take up challenges?**

- Traditional African values are insufficiently democratic. Is Africa essentially non-egalitarian?
- The positive aspects of the negative features of traditional values need to be preserved. Society has fundamentally changed. Each age produces its own values. Is the knowledge of the elders now part of the past?

**Democracy:** how is it practised in the region? Is it out of step with values and traditions? Does it push us in a positive direction?

**The question of secularism:** how do religion and ethics co-exist? How should society manage this co-existence?

**Transmission of values:** In the past, places for learning traditional values existed. These places have disappeared. Values are not so well transmitted. In certain religions, communities which are conscious of this loss are trying to revive these areas. How can we strengthen and modernise values which contribute to peace and citizenship?

**The three great flights:** Why do intellectuals, capital and the young flee Africa?

**Forum format**

1<sup>st</sup> day: Grand plenary session on the challenges facing West Africa.

2<sup>nd</sup> day: Workshops by theme.

3<sup>rd</sup> day: Report back in plenary session + cultural expression and dialogue with the youth.  
A cultural activity: a play.

**Composition of the thematic workshops:**

- ✓ Participants need to be mixed together in the thematic workshops. Women, youth and not so young people need to be brought together.
- ✓ The plenary sessions will serve to report back on the workshops.

**Artistic expression:**

- ✓ Put together a short theatre piece which can be used to talk about the identity of the youth. What are they like? To whom do they belong? What and who are their models?
- ✓ Work on the idea of a “Theatre Forum”, given that Burkina Faso is far ahead in this type of expression. In the “Theatre Forum”, those who watch are “spect-actors”. This opens the way to dialogue and deepens the debate.

Ms. Diallo Dieng, poet and actress (Guinea), made suggestions on the possible contribution she could make to this cultural part of the programme. The feasibility remains to be examined by the organisers and the group. She should send proposals on the subject.

Ms. Clarisse Merindol (Burkina Faso) offered to identify theatre groups in Burkina Faso which could take part in the forum.

**Follow-up:**

- ✓ How to involve the group of young people which was formed in Cotonou?
- ✓ Participants proposed pursuing the discussion via electronic forum. They are each ready to help the SWAC identify groups of young people likely to take part in the forum, taking into account the criteria which the SWAC will be submitting to them.

### 3. Conclusion

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- The Women's Group will continue to work to disseminate the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance as well as the also the African Union Protocol on Women's Rights.
- The Group will be involved in the follow-up to the Forum of Political Parties, Media and Civil Society, notably in Togo, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Ivory Coast.
- The Group will be made up of permanent members who will be associated with the SWAC's activities relative to governance, conflict prevention, peace, democracy and women's rights.
- It will be expanded according to circumstance to include women from the country in which it organises its meetings. These women will constitute a second core in the Group. This second core will be kept informed of the Group's activities but will nevertheless not be members of it, since, to be manageable, the Group needs to have a limited number of members.
- The Sahel and West Africa Club will set up an Internet page to accommodate the Group's documents and constitute a database which will be available to all interested persons.
- The SWAC will set up an electronic forum which should help in the preparation of the Inter-generational Forum on Good Governance in Ouagadougou and will enable discussion on the group's themes of interest, such as quota representation for women.

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#### OFFICIAL CLOSURE

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The meeting was officially closed by the **Minister for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children, Ms. Ousmane Zeïnabou Moulaye**. In her speech, she said she was pleased that the meeting had been held in Niamey at a time when the Niger Parliament was prepared to ratify the Supplementary Protocol to the African Union Charter on Women's Rights. She recognised the essential role of women in Niger in the struggle for recognition of their rights and their place in society. She insisted on the need to continue working in order for the cause of women to be brought forward.

## Annex 1: Agenda

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### Wednesday 26 April

9h00 – 10h00      **Welcoming of participants**

10h00 – 10h05      Welcome message to participants and presentation of the Sahel and West Africa Club by Mr. Massaër Diallo, Head of the SWAC Secretariat's Governance, Conflict Dynamics, Peace and Security Unit.

10h05 – 10h15      Intervention by Mr. Mangoné Niang, Representative of the African Union in Niger

10h15 – 10h30      Official opening of the workshop by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of the Promotion of Women and Child Protection, Mr. Adamou Mahaman Batouré

10h30 – 10h45      *Coffee break*

10h45 – 11h00      Presentation of the meeting and expected results by Mr. Massaër Diallo (SWAC Secretariat)

**11h00 – 13h30      FIRST SESSION:  
ASSESSMENT: WHAT ARE THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN WEST AFRICA?**

Moderator: Mr. Ibrahima Halilou, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Population and Social Action (Niger)

11h00 – 11h30      Introductory intervention by Mrs. Bembello Fatoumata Agnès Diaroume, Sociologist (Niger)

11h30 – 11h45      Comments on the main legal instruments and mechanisms concerning women in conflict prevention, by Mrs. Juliette Khady Sow, Jurist (Senegal)

11h45 – 13h30      Discussions

13h30 – 15h00      *Lunch*

**15h00 – 18h00      SECOND SESSION: STRENGTHENING OF THE WOMEN'S GROUP  
Discussion: Modalities and ways in which this Group will be involved in conflict prevention at the regional level.**

Moderator: Mrs. Bembello Fatoumata Agnès Diaroume, Sociologist (Niger)



1. Presentation of members of the expanded Women's Group
2. Organisation of the Group
3. Place and role in the following actions:
  - dissemination of ECOWAS' Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance
  - development of activities as regards conflict prevention
  - follow-up to the Forum of Political Parties, the Media and Civil Society
  - follow-up to the Conakry workshop

☞ End of working day ☜

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## Thursday 27 April

### 8h00 – 13h00 **THIRD SESSION: CONFLICT PREVENTION, MEDIATION AND RESOLUTION EXPERIENCES IN WEST AFRICA**

| Moderator: Honourable Zainab Kamara, Parliamentarian (Sierra Leone)

8h00 – 8h30 *Experiences in Niger, Mrs. Ben Wahab Aïchatou, President of the Coalition des Femmes nigériennes contre la guerre (CFNCG) [Women's Nigerien Coalition Against the War]*

8h30 – 9h00 *Experiences in Mali, Mrs. Bintou Sanankoua, Collectif des Femmes du Mali (Women's Collective of Mali) [COFEM]*

9h00 – 9h45 **Discussions**

9h45 – 10h00 *Coffee break*

10h00 – 10h30 *Experiences in Casamance, Senegal, Mrs. Seynabou Male, Coordinator (CRSFPC/ACAPES)*

10h30 – 11h00 *Experiences in Guinea-Bissau, Mrs. Macaria Baraï, Coordinator, Citoyenne de Bonne volonté*

11h00 – 11h30 *Experiences in Côte d'Ivoire, Mrs. Salimata Porquet, President and Mrs. Françoise Kaudjhis Offoumou, Vice President, Organisation des Femmes d'Eburnie pour la Paix (OFEP)[(Organisation of Eburnien Women for Peace)]*

11h30 – 12h00 *Literature and women as victims of violence, Mrs. Dieynaba Koumanthio Diallo Dieng (Guinea)*

12h00 – 14h00 **Discussions**

14h00 – 15h30 *Lunch*

15h30 – 17h00	<b><u>FOURTH SESSION: PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE INTER-GENERATIONAL FORUM ON ENDOGENOUS GOVERNANCE IN WEST AFRICA (IFEGWA)</u></b> <i>The place and role of the Women’s Group within the IFEGWA</i>
15h30 – 16h00	Presentation of the Inter-Generational Forum on Endogenous Governance in West Africa (IFEGWA), par Mr. Massaër Diallo (SWAC Secretariat)
16h00 – 17h00	<b>How can the Women’s Group be involved in the organisation and participation in the IFEGWA??</b> ➤ Format ➤ Content ➤ Organisation

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## Friday 28 April

8h00 – 11h15	<b>Fourth Session (continued)</b> Discussions on the format and content of the Forum
10h45 – 11h00	<b>General Conclusions:</b> HOW TO PROMOTE THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ENDOGENOUS GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN WEST AFRICA: SYNERGIES, STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS
11h00 – 11h15	<b>Closing of workshop by the Minister of the Promotion of Women and Child Protection, Mrs. Ousmane Zeïnabou Moulade</b>
11h45	<i>Audience with the President Mamadou Tandja with the Group and the SWAC Secretariat</i>



## Annex 2: Final List of Participants

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