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**STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP WITH
THE SWAC FOR ADVANCING THE ECOWAS AGENDA
IN 2007 AND BEYOND**

*The Representative of the Honourable Minister of Cooperation
and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany
Mr. Charles Goerens, President of the Sahel and West Africa Club,
Mr. Norman Lawson, Director of the Sahel and West Africa Club,
Distinguished Participants,
Colleagues and friends from the CILLS and ROPPA,*

It is with a great sense of hope that I speak to this year you on the theme “Strengthening the Partnership with the SWAC for Advancing the ECOWAS Agenda in 2007 and Beyond”

My optimism is driven by three key considerations. First, when we take stock of what ECOWAS has accomplished up until 2006, you will agree with me that we have been making some progress on virtually all fields, particularly in areas of peace, security and political governance.

In the peace and security sector, if for about two decades our sub-region, for reasons associated with civil wars in the Greater Mano River Basin, had been hit by a spell of instability and insecurity, this is no longer the case. At least, thanks to the strong political will of our regional leaders, their shared purpose coupled with the active support and vigilance of our peoples, there is no active war in West Africa today.

Within the domains of democracy and governance, the culture of pluralism and democratic elections is taking root, driven by an increasing commitment to constitutionality, democracy and the rule of law.

Regarding economic development, we have made some modest progress in the process of developing the basis for propelling regional infrastructural development capable of facilitating our productive capacity and regional trade. The West African Power Pool, the imminent launch of studies on railway inter-connectivity in West Africa, and the planned creation of a GSM roaming system in West Africa are but a few examples. Plans are also advanced to develop a regional airline on the same lines as ECOMARINE was created.

Yet, despite these gains amongst several others, our region remains, according to the latest UNDP Human Development Report, one of the poorest performers in the world in terms of socio-economic development.

For instance, of the 177 countries, the last 5 countries happen to be from West Africa, representing 1/3 of our member states.

Thus, acutely conscious of these stark realities and also aware that we cannot rest on our rather modest achievements in integration, ECOWAS leaders have shifted gear from containment to repositioning ECOWAS institutions such that these bodies can respond, in a timely and predictable manner, to the proximate and root causes of instability in an increasingly globalised and fluid world. The conflict prevention/development nexus drives the thinking here. Distinguished Participants, this is my second source of optimism as we look to the future.

Indeed already, the ECOWAS Community Parliament and Community Court of Justice have been re-organised to enable the legislative and judicial wings of the two institutions respectively concentrate on their core competencies and be more efficient. Similarly, the ECOWAS Bank For Investment and Development (EBID) has also been re-structured and is already mobilising additional funds to support our priority integration programmes.

In the particular case of the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat, it became a Commission effective January 1st 2007 with a President, Vice President and seven (7) Commissioners covering more focused and manageable sectoral areas.

The ECOWAS Commission has its agenda clearly set out in at least three priority challenges spelled out by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government and articulated in the acceptance speech of the new Chairman of ECOWAS, President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso:

- Poverty reduction
- Development of basic infrastructure
- Trade negotiation capacity building to enable the participation of ECOWAS and that of Africa as a whole.

These three priority challenges will continue to be dictated by the need to promote and consolidate human security architecture in West Africa.

In all these challenges, the ECOWAS Summit of January 2007 in Ouagadougou recognised with gratitude the support to our development partners and it is our hope that we can continue to count on your commitment to our development agenda. This brings me to ECOWAS/Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD relations, my third source of optimism for the future.

ECOWAS-Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD Collaboration

The Club's 2006 Progress Report describes their efforts in the four areas of interest for the region and for the international community: (i) Medium-and Long- Term Development Perspectives; (ii) Rural Transformation and Sustainable Development; (iii) Local Development and the Process of Regional Integration; and (iv) Governance, Conflict Dynamics, Peace and Security. These areas of concentration correspond to the concerns for the region's future set out in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) the Vision of the African Union, and most notably, in the partnership framework recently signed last November (2006) between the SWAC and ECOWAS.

Over the past couple of years, ECOWAS has been rationalizing and deepening its relations with partners to mobilise the appropriate human and material resources as well as best practices with a view to helping drive our integration and development.

The Sahel and West Africa Club has actively participated in this process, helping the existing and thriving ECOWAS/Development Partners Coordination mechanism. More specifically, the ECOWAS-Sahel and West Africa Club partnership has significantly evolved since discussions began in 2004. With the signing of the SWAC-ECOWAS partnership framework, the SWAC has undertaken very significant reviews of critical sectors of prime importance to ECOWAS and underpinning human security in West Africa, including South-South Cooperation with Asia in aquaculture development, cotton trade policy, understanding intra and extra-regional migration, food security and most recently medium to long-term strategic thinking for ECOWAS as it begins its new existence as a Commission.

Within our partnership context, ECOWAS and the SWAC have identified five areas of cooperation. In addition to the joint initiatives in each of the four above-mentioned areas, several joint communication and information initiatives are being promoted.

Let me just briefly highlight some recent advances in these areas:

Medium- and Long-term Development Perspectives

As from the beginning of 2007, ECOWAS and the Club will co-produce an Annual Report on West Africa which will be comprised of three parts: (1) the first part will contain an analytical review of the region and the evolution of the economic, socio-cultural, political, institutional conditions; (2) the second part will compile a synthesis of the debates, decisions and actions on key issues related to medium-and-long-term development of the region; and (3) the third part will assemble independent contributions on issues of interest for the region's future. The African Development Bank (AfDB), UEMOA and other partners will be invited to participate in the drafting of this Report.

In addition, ECOWAS and the Club have agreed to launch a joint internet site on West Africa with a focus on regional integration which will regroup all regional and international data and information on the region, and serve as a public information tool which will evolve and adapt with the region.

This year the SWAC will organise an information workshop on NEPAD at OECD Headquarters to share the regional strategies, action plans, implementation process and financing mechanism of various field-level initiatives and their impact on development in the region. This workshop should help clarify NEPAD's objectives and *modus operandi* and assist development partners in identifying opportunities for coherent policies, programmes and partnerships.

In terms of private sector development, ECOWAS and the SWAC will work more closely together this year in areas of strategic importance for region, such as the private sector's role in the management of depleting natural resources like fisheries; access to energy and water resources and their relationship to climate change; and the promotion of investments for development, especially through South-South cooperation. South-South cooperation has become a major stake as regards sub-regional investment as we have seen with the rise of China. ECOWAS governments, through the implementation of NEPAD, have seen how a dynamic and competitive private sector is essential in order to stimulate economic growth, increase revenues and create the environment for investment.

Local Development and the Process of Regional Integration

The Club has been assisting ECOWAS in addressing the key challenge of developing the cross border concept. In 2007 the two institutions will launch two complementary processes aimed at ensuring a more effective mainstreaming of cross-border cooperation in the overall ECOWAS integration strategy.

Re-organising the cross-border cooperation work within ECOWAS aims to position this programme within the framework of ECOWAS' operational projects. ECOWAS indeed implements a large number of programmes which are, in fact, cross-border programmes but which do not fully integrate this aspect. The objective is to be able to focus on some border areas as regards the actions and results of these projects (share border posts, transhumance corridors, health monitoring, shared management of socio-economic infrastructure, community radio¹, etc.) while developing direct dialogue with local actors.

Preparing and holding the First Europe-Africa Conference on Cross-border Cooperation which will take place in Accra in June 2007. This Conference will be co-organised by ECOWAS, the SWAC and the AEBR. It will be an important step in building a political foundation and implementing financial and legal tools of cross-border cooperation in West Africa.

Another flagship project in the ECOWAS collaboration is the **Atlas on Regional Integration**, which has received some well-deserved financing. The SWAC and ECOWAS have worked closely together to produce the first chapter on transportation and telecommunications. During the first semester of 2006, the work on the Vulnerable Sahelian zones, migration, cotton, shared water basins, populations, languages and health chapters has been carried out by the SWAC and should be available during the year, after validation by ECOWAS.

1 An experience is underway in the Sikasso – Bobo Dioulasso zone with support by the MDP

The Regional Atlas will continue to be a critical tool for ECOWAS member countries in guiding our reflections on the question of medium- and long-term development perspectives.

Regional Agricultural Policy

Over the medium- and long-term, SWAC/ECOWAS joint strategic thinking will be based on the main issue of building and strengthening a West African regional market, as well as the impact of emerging countries (in particular, China and India) on Agricultural and Trade Policies. Strategic thinking will also continue to be carried out in other areas of interest for the region such as the implementation of ECOWAP and the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) as well as agricultural biotechnology policies and their impact on agricultural development in the region.

Within the framework of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (FCPN), the SWAC and ECOWAS in association with the CILSS, UEMOA and ROPPA will carry out further strategic thinking on the prevention and sustainable management of food crises in the Sahel and West Africa. Furthermore, the SWAC and ECOWAS will work on a strategy to ensure sustainable food security in West Africa based on the CILSS mechanism and in reference to the objectives set out in the ECOWAP framework.

Finally, medium- and long-term perspectives on Rural Transformation and Sustainable Development while strengthening the regional market will be an increasingly important area of joint work in 2007 and beyond.

Peace, Conflict Prevention and Democracy Programmes

The Club has also shown keen interest in support of our peace and democracy programmes and our cooperation in this area has deepened. Concerning the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, joint Action Plans concerning its ratification and implementation were developed by a joint working group chaired by ECOWAS at a meeting on 3 and 4 March 2005. This joint initiative has helped raise awareness through dissemination and advocacy in support of the ratification, appropriation and implementation of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

This year, the Club and ECOWAS will jointly organise a second Forum for Political Parties, Civil Society and the Media as a follow-up to the very successful event the SWAC held the year before. It is gratifying to note that the West African sub-region is gradually turning the corner with regard to violent conflicts. Both Sierra Leone and Liberia are currently in post-conflict peace-building phases, the latter having elected the first African woman President who is making great strides despite a very difficult political transition. With the lessons learned in these countries, ECOWAS has enhanced its capacity for early response, as amply demonstrated by its reaction to, and continued engagement in a number of member States.

Conclusion

At the inception of ECOWAS, our goal was to promote regional economic cooperation, growth and development. We never anticipated that so much energy and as many resources would be invested in political issues of peace, security, democracy and good governance. Of course, today we clearly see the inextricable linkages between human security and economic development, especially in making the link between good governance and much needed private investments for the future. As we improve upon and consolidate our democratic governance systems, there is a need to re-focus on the economic imperatives of sustainable growth – as some of the worst performing nations are located in West Africa and it remains one of the poorest regions in the world. Our efforts at promoting regional trade, monetary harmonisation policies, and regional infrastructures of roads, telecommunications, energy, and information technology should be consolidated and the processes are underway. The Club's Regional Atlas and other strategic analysis tools are essential in this area. In addition, the forthcoming Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and West Africa holds great promise for revitalising the trade-development relationship with the EU while helping to tear down external and intra-regional trade barriers. Nevertheless, it will be important to ensure that the steps towards liberalising ECOWAS markets are made progressively and that the gains are shared in ways that foster sustainable economic development and regional integration.

I would like to close this presentation by commending the distinguished President and Director together with their capable staff at the Sahel and West Africa Club, for their continued commitment in working alongside ECOWAS in its mission to advance regional integration, democracy, good governance, economic prosperity and human security for all West Africans. Indeed, the presence of the Director of the Club at the December 2006 ECOWAS Ministerial meetings and the January 2007 Summit in Ouagadougou, is further testimony of this thriving partnership which we cherish and are hopeful it will continue to flourish in the years to come.

I thank you for your kind attention.