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SIXTH LEGISLATURE

**DELOCALISED SITTING OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON
POLITICAL AFFAIRS, PEACE, SECURITY AND AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM (APRM) |
LEGAL AFFAIRS AND HUMAN RIGHTS | TRADE, CUSTOMS AND FREE MOVEMENT |
SOCIAL AFFAIRS, GENDER, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT & PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

~Banjul, Gambia | 28 April to 2 May 2025~

ADDRESS OF HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA

4th Deputy Speaker of ECOWAS Parliament

28 April 2025 | Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara Conference Centre | Banjul, The Gambia

Your Excellencies,

Honourable Members of the ECOWAS Parliament,

Honourable Representatives of Regional and International Institutions,

Distinguished Representatives of the ECOWAS Commission,

Esteemed Development Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is both an honour and a solemn duty to address you this morning as we commence the proceedings of two meetings of ECOWAS Parliament:

Firstly: the Committee of Administration, Finance and Budget which has chosen the smiling coast of Africa to sit and consider **the 2024 End-Year Budget Performance Report of the Parliament**. Given the evolving challenges in the region, including economic fluctuations, health crises, and social instability, it is essential for the Parliament's financial strategies to align with the core principles of sustainability, accountability, and transparency. In this regard, the relevant Standing Committee periodically reviews expenditures to ensure they effectively contribute to the Community Parliament's mandate and ultimately improve the lives of the citizens in the ECOWAS region.

and

Secondly: the Joint Committee on Political Affairs, Security and MAEP | Legal Affairs and Human Rights | Social Affairs, Gender, Women and Persons with Disabilities Promotion | Trade, Customs, and Free Movement which is sitting in Banjul to consider the political, socio-economic, and humanitarian impact of the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS.

2. Banjul, with its historic symbolism and enduring commitment to regional cooperation, provides an apt setting for the important deliberations before us, and it is both fitting and commendable that the ECOWAS Parliament has chosen to hold its meetings on Gambian soil—at a time when our region faces complex challenges but also holds immense potential for renewal and reintegration.
3. Permit me at this juncture to salute the remarkable leadership of His Excellency Adama BARROW, President of our host State and his constant commitment to regional integration. I also wish to express immense gratitude to the Right Honourable Speaker

of the National Assembly of The Gambia, my boss, and Members of the Gambian Delegation to the Community Parliament, a delegation I am proud to lead, for the unflinching support for the Parliament's activities and the openness to cooperation and collaboration. The Gambian people, have always taken pleasure in welcoming their brothers and sisters from the Community, an attribution of my homeland that I take great pride in. Finally, I salute the presence of the honourable Members of the ECOWAS Parliament, experts, technical partners, and all the personalities whose contributions will enlighten our discussions.

Your Excellencies, Honourable Members of the ECOWAS Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen

4. ECOWAS, born in 1975 from the Lagos Treaty, has for five decades embodied the shared aspiration for a common destiny. It has transformed challenges into opportunities, making our region a model of resilience and cooperation. Thanks to ECOWAS, millions of citizens have benefited from free movement, integrated markets, and relative peace despite the storms. Its crisis management mechanisms, interconnected infrastructures, and progressive social policies are a testament to its vitality.
5. However, today, this precious legacy is shaken. The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, the Republic of Mali, and the Republic of Niger marks an unprecedented fracture. These countries, strategic and demographic pillars, have chosen to leave the common ship. This choice, effective since January, threatens not only our achievements but also the future of 400 million citizens.
6. The impact of this withdrawal is multifaceted.
7. Politically, ECOWAS loses 20% of its members. This erosion, in addition to weakening our voice on the international stage, risks encouraging other States to doubt the Community project, thus undermining our credibility as a model of African integration.
8. Security-wise, the countries of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) are key players in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel. Their withdrawal complicates the sharing of intelligence and joint operations, while terrorist groups continue to threaten our populations. Without coordination, our conflict prevention mechanisms, already weakened, could show their limits.
9. Socioeconomically, the reinstatement of strict border controls breaks a sacred principle: free movement. Trade exchanges, cross-border infrastructure projects, and even humanitarian aid are at risk of being bogged down. The consequences to fear are

forced migrations, increased unemployment, an exacerbated food crisis, and populations caught between insecurity and precariousness.

10. Humanitarian-wise, the isolation of the AES could restrict access to critical areas, worsening the suffering of the most vulnerable. Territorial disputes, once eased by our mediation, could resurface, fuelling new cycles of violence.

Your Excellencies, Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. It is in this context that ECOWAS launched its golden jubilee celebrations last week in Accra, Ghana, with reflections on our journey and our vision for the future. On this occasion, an extraordinary Ministerial Council meeting was held, with one of its agenda items being the examination of the contingency plan regarding the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, the Republic of Mali, and the Republic of Niger.
12. Our meeting follows the same line. It goes beyond a mere diagnostic exercise and aims to:
 1. Rigorously assess the multidimensional impacts of this withdrawal to fully understand its implications.
 2. Imagine bridges where others see walls and explore ways to maintain pragmatic cooperation with the AES countries.
 3. Strengthen our resilience by identifying structural reforms to prevent other states from following this example.
13. By Friday, we must come away with concrete proposals for the future, notably:
 1. A common understanding of the challenges, informed by expert analyses and testimonies from field actors.
 2. Bold recommendations to maintain dialogue with AES, through sectoral agreements, particularly in security, trade, and resource management.
 3. Reform proposals to consolidate ECOWAS towards strengthening internal democracy and better citizen inclusion.

Your Excellencies, Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. The simultaneous withdrawal of three Member States is a wake-up call. It compels us to ask: why did the Member States choose to leave? Have we listened enough to their concerns? Have we been able to adapt our model to their realities?

15. The answer lies neither in rejection nor resignation, but in introspection and innovation. ECOWAS must evolve to remain relevant. This involves more inclusive integration, more transparent governance, and concrete projects that improve the daily lives of citizens.
16. I therefore invite us to work with courage and creativity during these five days. Let our debates be frank, but always guided by the spirit of fraternity that founded our Community.
17. In conclusion, I would say that in 1975, our founding fathers dared to believe in the impossible. Today, it is up to us to write the next chapter. Despite the challenges, I remain convinced that ECOWAS remains the best bulwark against fragmentation. Although ECOWAS may now be fifteen minus three, nevertheless, our vision remains whole. Our peoples, across the Sahel and coast remain bound by ties deeper than treaties. This bond—of history, heritage, and hope—must be our guiding compass.
18. May this meeting in Banjul mark the beginning of a renaissance. A renaissance where each state, each citizen, recognizes themselves in this common project. A renaissance where cooperation triumphs over selfishness, and where hope prevails over pessimism.
19. I wish great success to the Committee on Administration, Finance and budget as well as the Joint Committee on Political Affairs, Security and MAEP | Legal Affairs and Human Rights | Social Affairs, Gender, Women and Persons with Disabilities Promotion | Trade, Customs, and Free Movement of the ECOWAS Parliament.

Long live ECOWAS and the Community Parliament!

Thank you

Merci

Obrigado