

SOLIDARITY ACTION 2017



SOLIDARITY MISSION FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH OF THE WEST AFRICAN SUBREGION AND THE SAHEL IN THE GAMBIA

28 to 31 March 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, faithful to one of its primary missions “To promote the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security”, brought together women and young leaders from a dozen countries in the West African sub region and the Sahel to testify their support to women in The Gambia following the post-election crisis of December 2016.

Thus, under the leadership of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and ECOWAS, a solidarity mission of women and youth, members of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel was conducted to Banjul, The Gambia, from 28 to 31 March 2017.

The mission, made up of some 15 people from 12 countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal, Chad and Togo achieved positive results under the leadership of **Mrs. Agathe Kéméalo M. Télou**, UNOWAS Gender Advisor and Coordinator of the working group. The mission was made possible through the funding of several institutions including UNOWAS, UNFPA, UNDP, UNIOGBIS, OHCHR, UN Women and REPAOC. The delegation was hosted by The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), whose Executive Director, Mrs. Hannah Forster, also serves as focal point of the Senegal-Gambia-Guinea Bissau Women’s Forum for Peace and Security as well as Co-Chair of the Gender Action Team (GAT).

OBJECTIVES OF THE MISSION

The objectives of the mission were to engage in discussions on the new challenges facing The Gambia with a focus on women and youth; to contribute to the development of an action plan for future actions that would strengthen peace and social cohesion in The Gambia; to promote the involvement of women and young people in peace processes considering the approach to parliamentary elections; and to strengthen relations between the sub-regional networks and those in The Gambia.

OUTCOMES OF THE MISSION

The mission mobilized several actors of the Gambian society (state and non-state) and achieved convincing results, the most important of which are listed below:

1. First meeting of the President of the Republic of The Gambia, His Excellency Adama Barrow with a group of women and youth from West Africa and the Sahel;
2. The commitment of the Head of State to take account of the integration of gender in the decision-making mechanisms and to promote the promotion of human rights as well as the principles of democracy;
3. Revitalization of the UN Women, Youth, Peace and Security Working Group in The Gambia;
4. Increased synergy between civil society actors; Commitment of the University of the Gambia to include in its curriculum education and awareness-raising on the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (CPCC) as well as UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and related Women, Youth, Peace and Security, in peace education strategies;
5. Regional advocacy through the development and sharing of a joint declaration of women and youth for peace and security in West Africa through institutional stability and human security in The Gambia.

THE PROGRAM OF THE MISSION

The four-day solidarity mission to the Gambia was an opportunity that has enabled women, young people, especially from the civil society, and all those in the Gambia who are peace-loving, to work to consolidate maturity and democracy-awareness of its citizens; both being recently demonstrated in critical times in the history of their country.

On the first day of the mission, a working session was held to review the actions to be carried out as well as a sharing of tasks. Two groups were then formed, one to finalize the logistics and the other to work on the declaration on the Gambian context. It was decided that Ms. Hannah Foster, Director of the African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, would start each meeting with introductory words, complemented by another representative of the group elaborating on the reasons for the mission.

The mission started by a visit to **Mrs. Binta Jammeh Sidibeh**, Executive Director of the Women's Bureau of The Gambia. After greetings, discussions centred on women's involvement in the Gambian crisis. The visit resulted in Ms. Sidibe's commitment that her Office would accompany the mission's initiatives to follow up on the commitments made by the State of Gambia to improve the living conditions of women in the country and to appoint a Gambian focal point for the Working Group.

The meeting to **Mr. Halifah SALLAH**, Spokesperson for the Coalition for Change, focused on a discussion of the political context of The Gambia. After having welcomed the women's initiative of the sub region, Mr Sallah returned to the post-election period in The Gambia and the importance of maintaining peace and respect for the people's decision, which he qualified as a sovereign decision. The members of the delegation welcomed his courage, bravery and commitment to peace through the appeasement he has repeatedly addressed to the Gambian people throughout this impasse and acknowledged his courage to share the sufferings of the situation. His spouse also congratulated the women of West Africa and the Sahel for overcoming geographical distances to speak to their sisters in The Gambia and to the entire population.

The second day was marked by a visit to the United Nations Office in The Gambia, where the Resident Representative and Coordinator of the United Nations system, **Ms. Ade Mamonyane Lekoetje**, praised the women's work in the Gambian crisis. According to her, this mission was timely, considering the critical stage that The Gambia is going through in its peace process.

Mrs Fatou Kinteh, Gender Coordinator of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), supporting the remarks of the Resident Representative, expressed the commitment of all United Nations organizations in the Gambia to contribute to peace in the country. While the Gambia has benefited from a peaceful resolution of the crisis, there was now a need to consolidate this peace and this group could help to achieve this objective. The meeting strongly emphasized the need for the Gambia to reinvigorate the activities of its Working Group and above all to join the thematic exchanges with other countries by video or teleconference in order to seize the opportunity to increase the possibilities of the sharing of experience and good practice. The Resident Representative expressed the commitment of the United Nations system to collaborate with the Working Group, adding, "Rest assured that you have a partner in us. We need a lot of support for our work. "



Members of the mission to the United Nations Office in The Gambia

Following this meeting, an exchange session was held with the United Nations Gender Group, made up of representatives of United Nations organizations such as UNFPA, UNDP, WFP and UNICEF to consider the development of a work plan that would take into account the involvement of civil society as well as the Working Group. One of the prerogatives of the work plan would be the strong mobilization and empowerment of women for their involvement in decision-making bodies. The approach regarding the parliamentary elections for which 16 women are candidates has sparked considerable interest at the level of women's participation in the process, as this may help to improve their low representation in the country's decision-making bodies; today defined as a major challenge.

Mr. ADENYEHI, UNFPA Resident Representative in the Gambia, welcomed the initiative and expressed his commitment to involve women and youth and to promote peace and stability in the Gambia through UNFPA mandate implementation.

The meeting with TANGO, an NGO platform of The Gambia, was also a highlight of renewed commitments by civil society for a better involvement of the actors in the peace and democracy processes of the country. According to the Executive Director, **Mr. Ousmane Yabo**, this Mission could contribute to appeasing social tensions that have arisen with the post-electoral crisis.

On 30 March, the mission conducted numerous visits to various authorities of The Gambia, among others The National Council of Youth, the Minister of Youth and Sports, the Minister of Tourism and the University of the Gambia.

Discussions with the Program Officer of the National Youth Council (NYC) of the Gambia highlighted that the NYC of the Gambia was an institution under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, whose members are representatives of civil society while the President of the Council is appointed by the Minister of Youth and Sports. The discussions allowed members of the group to familiarize themselves with the current campaign led by a number of young people in several countries including the Gambia, whose slogan "Not too young to run" assumes a presumption that one could not be too young to compete

for and prevail at decision posts. The exchange made it possible to evaluate the functioning of the NYC, which serves as an interface between the young people and the government in terms of needs to be identified and submitted. The Working Group members stressed their focus on sustaining peace and stability in The Gambia, and expressed their committed to the involvement of young people in the process; defined to be of paramount importance.



Visit to the premises of the National Youth Council

The mission then met with the Minister of Gambian Youth and Sports, followed by a courtesy visit by the Minister of Tourism.

Congratulating the mission, the Minister of Youth and Sport pointed out the importance and the obligation to maintain peace in any country in Africa and in The Gambia in particular. He stressed the notion of tolerance and the culture of peace, recalling on several occasions the importance of self-respect and mutual respect as sine qua non condition for any intention of peace. He felt that friendship within political actors was not the most important thing, but rather the mutual respect, which conditions peace. Thereby he emphasized the encouragement given to The Gambia through the strong delegation of women from the sub region. The Minister of Tourism observed that power was in the hands of women and ensured his commitment to greatly respecting women whose rights he has always advocated for.



Meeting with the Minister of Youth and Sports

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts sciences of the University of The Gambia, Professor Pierre Gomez, emphasized the focus on the youth of the university, which represents a natural gathering for the majority of young people, who today represent more than 64 per cent of the African population, which is also the case for the Gambia. Professor Gomez emphasized education as a genuine instrument of peace and development for all nations, as well as anchoring the need for higher education, peace and development in The Gambia.

The Mission was crowned by a meeting with the President of the Republic of The Gambia, His Excellency Adama Barrow, who strongly welcomed this initiative during the meeting, which took place on 31 March. He expressed his gratitude for the visit of the working group, which was the first group of women from the sub region that he had received since his accession to power. President Barrow reiterated his commitment to the principles of democracy and human rights, especially those of women and youth. As proof, several women have already integrated his team including the communication officer as well as the Minister of Commerce among others. Women were also appointed for other important positions in several Ministries and thereby highlighting that the fight for women's rights had only just begun.

The mission concluded with two debriefing sessions: One amongst the members of the delegation and one with the Gender Unit of the United Nations System with a view to informing them of the results achieved during the mission. Participants insisted on the need to further accompany the implementation of the Gambia section of the WGWYPS-WAS and its 2017 work plan.

CONCLUSION

« It is high time that the Gambia finds its glamour of yesterday »

His Excellency Mr. Adama Barrow,
President of the Republic of The Gambia

The Solidarity Mission enabled a valuable sharing of experience and lessons learned.

It has been able to consolidate the links between the state and non-state actors of The Gambia and those of West Africa and the Sahel as well as international institutions based in The Gambia. This visit marked the revitalization of the activities of the GTFJPS Gambia section, characterized by a strong collaboration between the stakeholders on the ground. Moreover, the presence of ECOWAS within the mission enabled the linkage of actions aimed at the implementation of regional and international instruments for women's rights.

Following the mission, the actors met will be able to collaborate for the effective implementation and follow-up of the UNSC's 1325 and related resolutions, including the most recent ones, 2242 and 2250.



Reports:

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PHOTOS GALERY

