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HOW CAN PEACE AND SECURITY BE RESTORED SUSTAINABLY IN WEST AFRICA?

LE DÉBAT DE WATHI

Peace and Security

Introductory note

HOW CAN PEACE AND SECURITY BE RESTORED SUSTAINABLY IN WEST AFRICA?

1. Why this theme?

- **Because** since the era of independence, West Africa and its immediate neighbours have experienced a succession of civil wars. Some of which include: the Biafra war in Nigeria (1967–1970), the civil war in Guinea–Bissau (1998 –1999), two civil wars in Liberia, (1989–1996) and (1999–2003), two civil wars in Côte d'Ivoire in (2002–2004) and (2010–2011), in Sierra Leone, a war that lasted over ten years (1991–2002).

- **Because** since 2012, several countries in the WATHI zone (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon) have experienced grave deteriorations in security conditions and an increase in violence resulting from deep political crises, armed rebellions, jihadist terrorist acts, ethnic tensions, violations perpetrated by security forces against civilian populations. All these undoubtedly threaten the stability of the entire African continent

- **Because** the forms of conflict and violence experienced by West African countries are very diverse and the said conflicts often involve multiple overlapping factors that feed off each other: identity, politics, separatism, ideology, economics, as evidenced by the cases of Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Mali, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Senegal (Casamance)

- **Because** terrorist attacks, which were a rarity in West Africa for decades, have now become one of the deadliest forms of violence in the region, as shown by the statistics of the Global Terrorism Index, which identified Boko Haram as the deadliest terrorist group in the world in 2014, ahead of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and as evidenced by data from the the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) research programme, which provides accurate statistics on political violence

- **Because** the number of threats to peace and security keep increasing in the region as evidenced by the situation in Burkina Faso, where 125 security breaches were recorded between 1 July and 15 September 2018, almost double the number recorded throughout 2017 according to the Secretary–General's report on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

- **Because** new forms of insecurity are developing in the region: between 1 January and 23 November 2018, 82 acts of maritime crime and piracy were reported in the Gulf of Guinea, particularly off Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ghana. Other growing factors of insecurity are terrorism, drugs, humans and arms trafficking, and oil−related crimes

- **Because** countries in the WATHI zone have experienced more than 50 successful or attempted coups d'état. Examples of such countries include: Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Liberia, Gambia, Ghana, Chad, Sierra Leone, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso. The recurrence of coups d'état is a symptom of political instability and fragility of security, as in Guinea−Bissau, where five military coups d'état have been carried out over the past decade, and no elected president has completed his term of office so far

- **Because** in several countries in the region, law enforcement forces and regular armies have been and continue to be liable for serious violence against civilian populations. This violence against civilians is sometimes fatal, during opposition protests, student protests, and demonstrations during electoral periods or in the context of the fight against armed groups in Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali or Burkina Faso

- **Because** according to the Centre for African Strategic Studies, 18 unsuccessful peace operations have been conducted by international and regional organizations in the WATHI zone between 2000 and 2013. These peace operations have so far failed in their attempt to sustainably stabilize security in the region

- **Because** armed conflicts negatively impact on economic growth, discourage foreign and local investment and cause social decline, disintegration of national cohesion and loss of public confidence in the states. Armed conflicts cost Africa about $18 billion a year according to the study entitled "Africa's missing billions"

- **Because** armed conflicts cause an increase in forced migration in West Africa: more than 230,660 Nigerians left Nigeria in 2018 to seek refuge in Cameroon, Chad and Niger, according to the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel. In the Lake Chad basin, there were more than 2.4 million displaced people as of October 2018, compared to 2.3 million in October 2017. These statistics are in reality, broken and highly frustrated adults, youth and children in the region

- **Because** women's rights are severely violated in times of war and insecurity: they are victims of abductions, arbitrary detentions, restriction of movements, corporal punishments and sexual violence. Most of these violations are attributed to irregular armed groups; however, defence and security forces supposed to protect them sometimes perpetrate these violations

- **Because** the prospects of peace, security and stability in the region are closely linked to all the other issues crucial to the future of each country and the region as a whole: economic diversification, education and youth employment in the context of high population growth, the quality of political governance, decentralization, the fight against regional inequalities, security systems' reform...

2. What are the main topics to be explored?

- What are the main causative factors of conflict and violence in West Africa?

- What are the conflict management mechanisms at national and regional levels? Are they effective? Do they need to be improved?

- How can civil society organizations participate more meaningfully in restoring, consolidating and sustaining peace in the region?

- What is the role of the media in promoting peace in the countries of the region?

- What is the status of transitional justice mechanisms? What future projections should be made concerning them?

- How can we fight impunity, ensure justice and strengthen public institutions even in the face of threats to peace?

- How can we address the climatic, demographic, economic, historical, political and social causes of conflicts in West Africa?

- How to prevent ethnic, inter-community and religious violence in West Africa?

- What needs to be done to ensure an environment conducive to peaceful elections in West Africa?

- What actionable recommendations can be implemented to end the continued marginalization of women participation in peace and political processes in West Africa and the Sahel?

- What should be the role of national armies in the peace processes of their respective countries?

- What is involvement level of regional organizations in the peace-building process of crisis-ridden countries in West Africa?

- Is the multiplicity of actors involved in the defence of peace and security in West Africa an advantage or an obstacle to achieving their objective?

- What needs to be reformed to ensure effective administration of the security sector in the countries of the region?

- What strategies can be implemented against cybercrime, off-coast piracy and cross-border security threats?

- Where can we find the financial resources to conduct peace operations in the region? How can these resources be effectively managed?

- What are the most appropriate peacekeeping and peace-building mechanisms for the countries of the region?

3. How to participate in the debate?

- Contributions by experts in the issues discussed are welcome. So are observations, accounts, opinions, and recommendations from all citizens.

- We particularly welcome articles that refer to one or more specific countries, are based on concrete examples and include recommendations for action and reform.

- You can submit short articles (500-1000 words) or longer ones (1500-2000 words). Although the maximum length of a contribution is 2000 words, short articles are more likely to be selected and published by WATHI. All articles must be accessible to the general public, well written and structured.

- Without having to write a structured article, you can send your comments, observations, and recommendations to infowathi@wathi.org. The most relevant contributions will be published on the website.

- You can also submit a short audio or video recording to share your experiences and concrete reform proposals.

- We invite you to send your article with a 50-word biography and preferably a good picture of yourself.