

## The 2017 Solidarity Action: The sub region women and youth solidarity mission to The Gambia

28 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017

### PRESS STATEMENT

Reassured by the calm environment in which the increasing promise of a new Gambia has been put in place with the possibility of enhanced security and stability in The Republic of The Gambia, the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel conducted a Solidarity Mission to the Gambia from 28-31<sup>st</sup> March 2017.

Representatives of the delegation from West Africa came from Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Togo as well as representation from the Mano River – Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone. Supported by The United Nations Office for West Africa and The Sahel, The ECOWAS Gender Centre, UN Women, UNFPA, UNOGBIS, OHCHR, REPAOC and UNDP.

The distinguished delegation from West Africa and the Sahel region was hosted by the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), a regional non-governmental organization based in the Gambia, which coordinates the Gender Action Team (GAT), a national women's lobby and advocacy group of about 22 organisations and associations, established in 2004 and working on gender and women's issues in The Gambia.

The purpose of this visit was to express their solidarity with the citizenry of the noble land, particularly the women and youth and to explore possibilities for the contribution of women and youth going forward, in the search for a continued sustainable, peaceful and non-violent solution to inevitable challenges which may accompany, no doubt, the teething problems associated with developing nations.

Consequently, The Working Group accompanied by GAT members paid a courtesy call to various stakeholders and partners including – His Excellency Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia, The Hon. Spokesperson of the Coalition for Change, The Executive Director of the Women's Bureau; The Minister of Youth Sports and Culture, The Minister of Tourism, The United Nations Resident Coordinator; The UN Gender Team; The Women and Young women and men's Association and Non-Governmental Organisations working on Gender, Women, Youth, Peace and Security issues; The National Youth Council; and The University of The Gambia.

The Delegation continues to urge Gambians to promote and ensure that the peace and stability for which the country is associated with continue to be preserved. It is only in times of peace that sustainable development and democracy can be achieved. The safety, security and protection of its citizens to guarantee a tranquil and harmonious Gambia must remain at the top of the agenda while the sovereignty of the Gambian Constitution and the will of its people reign supreme. The Working Group reiterated that in the absence of peace in any one country of the sub region, all the countries are affected. It is for that reason that this mission is in the common interest to all in the sub region.

While acknowledging the interventions of the Senegal, Gambia and Guinea Bissau Women's Forum, the visiting women and youth leaders shared a copy of their Declaration calling for continued peace and stability as the citizens go to the polls for the parliamentary elections. The Group was mindful of the fact that the local council elections would follow next year and thus the need to be organized with these principles in mind. The need for government to put in place and implement mechanisms that ensure the increased participation and representation of women and youth was also not lost to the delegation, in reiterating their availability and willingness to offer their expertise and time in the quest for a peaceful resolution to the current challenges.

The GAT Members in thanking their visiting sisters and brothers moved a motion of thanks to the representatives and to all who participated in the Mission. This appreciation was also extended to UNOWAS, ECOWAS, UNIOGBIS, UN WOMEN, UNFPA, OHCHR, REPAOC and UNDP for facilitating and ensuring that the mission took place. Furthermore, The Team restated their indebtedness to all who received the delegation in spite of the promptness of requests.

An action plan will be finalized and will form the basis for future engagement.

At the end of the Mission, a press conference was held at the Kairaba Beach Hotel.

BANJUL, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2017

