Consultative Meeting of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa
8-10, November 2006
Sunbeach Hotel, Banjul.

Final Communiqué

ECOWAS ESTABLISHES A NETWORK OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS IN WEST AFRICA

ECOWAS in conjunction with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) organized a Consultative Meeting of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) in West Africa in Banjul, The Gambia from 8-10 November 2006.

The main objective of the meeting was to establish a network among NHRIIs in West Africa as a means of enhancing their capacity and improving their performance in promoting and protecting human rights in the sub-region. This is in consonance with the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, 2001, which stipulates that ECOWAS member-states should create independent NHRIIs, and for the ECOWAS Secretariat to strengthen their capacity in the conduct of their duties.

The meeting brought together chairpersons/representatives of National Human Rights Institutions in ECOWAS Member-States, Ministers of Justice from ECOWAS member-states which have not established an NHRI, civil society organizations, professional groups (West African Bar Association), and international technical partner institutions like the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Opening ceremony of the meeting was chaired by Dr. Henry Carrol, the Acting Solicitor General of the Gambia representing the President of the Republic of the Gambia, His Excellency Dr. Alhaji Yaya Jammeh who was the Special Guest of Honour at the occasion. The keynote presentation was delivered by Honourable Justice Sanji Mmasenono Monageng, a member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples
Rights on behalf of the chairperson of the Commission, Her Excellency Madame Salamata Sawadogo. The theme of keynote presentation was “Building a Rights Based Society in West Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and Constraints”.

The Meeting affirms that the promotion and protection of human rights constitutes the minimum condition for the emergence of a democratic and decent society and a means of addressing the raging problem of conflicts in the West African sub-region. It therefore urges a collective effort towards its full realization for the people of West Africa.

The Consultative Meeting noted the progress made by West African countries in the promotion of human rights and commends the initiative of West African leaders in enacting the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, 2001 with the commitment to adhere to the rule of law, transparency in governance, zero tolerance for coups and unconstitutional seizure of power, separation of powers, and the promotion of human rights through establishing independent national human rights institutions.

The Meeting also noted the evolution of the African Charter on Elections, Democracy and Good Governance by the African Union, which is in line with and reinforces the democratic values of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, 2001. These legal and political instruments are important in setting Africa on the path of sustainable peace, stability, democracy and good governance.

The meeting at the end of its deliberations resolved to and effected the establishment of a Network among National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa. The network shall be known and referred to as the **Network of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa**. The purpose of the network is to serve as a platform for strengthening the capacity of national human rights institutions to protect and promote human rights in West Africa. Its main objectives include:

- To serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences
- To encourage harmonisation of legislation and policy framework pertaining to national human rights institutions and their work.
- To identify capacity needs and gaps, with a view to addressing them.
- To promote partnership with other stakeholders (e.g. parliaments, civil society, professional groups, academics etc) in the promotion of human rights in the sub-region.
- Facilitate the creation of Independent National Human Rights Institutions in West African countries where such do not exist.

The Meeting urges ECOWAS Member-states to:

- Put in place legislation and policies that would ensure the autonomy and efficient performance of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa in line with the Paris Principles and the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol.
• Pay particular attention to the issue of appointment and security of tenure of Commissioners including protection against interference whilst in the discharge of their duties.

• Provide adequate funding to NHRIs to enable them carry out their functions effectively.

Furthermore, ECOWAS should continue to support the network in its activities and in strengthening the capacity of NHRIs in West Africa.

The Meeting expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation to the government and people of The Gambia for their hospitality and friendliness throughout the course of the meeting, and commends this initiative by ECOWAS in facilitating the establishment of the network.

DONE IN BANJUL, THE 10TH OF NOVEMBER, 2006