



REMARKS TO THE MEDIA

Mohamed Ibn Chambas calls for inclusive, credible and peaceful presidential election in The Gambia

Banjul, 10 November 2016

- Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for being here,

Earlier this year, in May, I came to Banjul as a member of the ECOWAS-AU-UN Joint High Level Mission. During that mission, we reiterated the international community's support to the people of The Gambia for the electoral process. We also encouraged the political parties and all electoral stakeholders to work together and to address all disagreements through peaceful means and dialogue, with a view to ensuring the conduct of inclusive, credible and peaceful election.

I have just concluded my second visit to Banjul this year. During this visit, I met with the members of the Inter-Party Committee, civil society representatives, as well as members of the diplomatic community, including Ambassadors of ECOWAS countries, as well as the Ambassadors of the EU, UK, and US, the Chargé d'Affaires of Spain and other development partners.

I am pleased with the outcome of my various interactions, which provided an opportunity to discuss issues, as well as possible concrete steps to contribute to creating the conditions for the successful conduct of a participative, credible and peaceful presidential election.

We commend the Gambian people for their strong attachment to democracy manifested by the animated campaigns of the various political parties. We observe a pre-election atmosphere more conducive to the functioning of the political parties than during our previous visit.

It is against this background that I reiterate the calls by the UN and other partners on the Government to conduct an independent investigation into the deaths in custody of Ebrima Solo Krummah and Solo Sandeng. I entreat the government to release the thirty protestors involved in the April demonstrations, as well as the fourteen others who are in pre-trial detention following the May demonstration. It is also my expectation that in the post-electoral period the government would conduct a review of existing legislation pertaining to the exercise of the right to assembly and peaceful demonstration.

I want to take this opportunity to remind the security forces of their duty to provide security for the electoral process, including the protection of all candidates and voters. In that regard,

I urge the police and other security services to discharge their noble responsibilities in a diligent, impartial, professional and strictly apolitical manner. Security services must at all times avoid public display of loyalty to any political party.

The UN is appealing for the holding of a transparent presidential election, and would like to stress the importance of a level playing field as a key precondition. In this respect, I would like to remind the Government of its obligations stemming from the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance as well as the AU African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

I would like to stress the primordial role of a strong, independent and professional Electoral Commission and I welcome the Chairman's commitment to "uphold electoral integrity" and the principles of "electoral democracy, ethical conduct, accuracy and transparency".

Political parties and the presidential candidates have a responsibility to defend not only the interests of their own party and supporters, but also to safeguard the unity of the whole nation. In this regard, I urge all political parties to make use of the existing mechanisms, like the Inter-Party Committee, to engage in meaningful dialogue as a means to resolve disputes peacefully and in the spirit of cooperation. It is regrettable that the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, defining best practices and guidelines for a peaceful and fair campaign period, scheduled for 8 November was called off. I therefore call for a rescheduling of the signing ceremony without further delay.

Healthy and strong civil society organizations have a very important oversight role to play in each society, and especially so, during the electoral period, in particular through voter education and electoral observation. I would like to call on the Gambian Civil Society Organizations, religious and traditional leaders, women and youth organizations, as well as other stakeholders to stay actively involved and to contribute to safeguarding the principles of an open, transparent and peaceful electoral process.

While I renew the commitment of the United Nations to accompany the people of The Gambia throughout the elections of 2016 and beyond, I also call on all Gambians to commit individually and collectively, to working towards a successful 2016 presidential election.

Thank you.

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