

REMARKS

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE
MANNEH WEAH

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
LIBERIA

FOR THE

EXTRAORDINARY SESSION

OF THE

AUTHORITY OF ECOWAS HEADS OF
STATE AND GOVERNMENT

ON

THE POLITICAL CRISIS IN MALI

ACCRA, GHANA

May 30, 2021

His Excellency Nana Akufo Addo
President of the Republic of Ghana and
Chair of the ECOWAS Authority;

Distinguished Heads of State and Government
of ECOWAS;

His Excellency Goodluck Jonathan
Former President of the Federal Republic of
Nigeria and ECOWAS Mediator of the Mali
Crisis;

His Excellency Jean-Claude Kassi Brou
President of the ECOWAS Comn;

**EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

I would like to express my appreciation to His Excellency Nana Akufo Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana and Chairman of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, for convening this Extraordinary Session on the political crisis in Mali.

Let me also express warm greetings to Your Excellencies, my fellow Heads of State and Government.

We are meeting today in this Extraordinary Session because of what can only be seen as a second coup d'état in Mali in less than nine months. As we are all aware, Mali's former junta leader, Col. Assimi Goïta, has declared himself the country's transitional president. He made the announcement after stripping interim

President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister
Moctar Ouane of their powers.

The two ousted leaders have now been freed from military detention, where they had been held since Monday, due to strong interventions from ECOWAS and other world leaders and international organizations. However, it has been announced that they resigned while in detention, an act which we can reasonably assume was done under duress.

The seizure of power came after a cabinet reshuffle which Col Goïta complained he was not consulted about. Two army officers involved in the previous coup lost their jobs in the reshuffle. Col. Goïta has said elections will still go ahead next year as planned.

We see this unfortunate incident as yet another attempt to return Mali to the military rule of its

recent past, and to reverse the hard-won democratic gains that the Malian people deserve and demand.

Liberia categorically condemns this illegitimate action in the strongest possible terms, which is completely unacceptable under the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and which poses a major security threat to our entire sub-region. Articles 1 (b) and 1 (c) of the Protocol states that: “Every accession to political power must be made through free, fair and transparent elections”, and that there will be “zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means”.

Excellencies, you will of course recall that we have met several times on the situation in Mali, where a legitimate President, who had won through the ballot box, and who was the head of a democratically-elected Government, was overthrown by a coup d’etat led by elements from the military. We quickly came together as leaders of ECOWAS to find a solution to this assault against democracy in our midst.

We sent in a team of mediators led by the former President of Nigeria, His Excellency Goodluck Jonathan, who himself had shown great respect for the tenets of democracy by accepting the results of a free and fair election which showed that he had lost, and handed over to the declared winner in a peaceful transition of power.

In his findings, conclusions, and recommendations to us, the ECOWAS Mediator indicated that he had discerned a willingness and desire on the part of the Malian people, through his interaction with the government and opposition leaders, as well as civil society and the military, to embrace and accept an interim transitional governing arrangement that would be inclusive of participatory and harmonized leadership from all these elements of Malian society, including the military, which would be tasked with organizing free and fair elections and a return

to democracy in a pre-determined short period of time.

This recommendation was the subject of intense debate by all of us who are today seated in this room. There were some of us, including myself, who maintained that the transitional leadership should not include the military, as this would be tantamount to a tacit admission that a coup d'etat had taken place, and that this was now being accepted and supported by ECOWAS, against some of our core democratic principals.

At that time, I personally voiced my objection to such an arrangement, and warned that it would set a dangerous precedent. I did not accept the compromise, and I warned that it would bring trouble. And even though the recommendation was approved by consensus, as is customary in this forum, I continued to maintain my view that we as ECOWAS should never accept or support any coup d'etat or change of government by undemocratic means, in keeping with our own protocols. It is very important that our words, as enshrined in these protocols, should be our bond. Any

thing less than that will cast doubts on our integrity and sincerity.

Nevertheless, all things being considered, foremost of which was an intention to avoid war, maintain peace, and transition to democracy in the shortest possible time, an arrangement for leadership was approved by ECOWAS which included two positions of civil leadership, that of President and Prime Minister. These arrangements are fixed and cannot be unilaterally changed or cancelled by the military. This is not only an affront to ECOWAS, but it is a challenge and major obstacle to the transition to democracy.

This arrangement of convenience was accepted for the sake of peace for the people of Mali. With such an arrangement in place, one cannot sack or remove the civilian leadership that was an integral part of the arrangements. It will lead to confusion, as we can see today, and sets a precedent that will

encourage others to do it elsewhere. As we can see, this has encouraged the military leader in Mali to do it again, because he did it and got away with it the first time.

EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I would now like to appeal to the President of the Authority of Heads of State and Governments, with all due respect, to faithfully respect, preserve, and protect the rule of law in ECOWAS during his incumbency as our leader, as he has sworn to do, and continues to do, under his leadership in his own country. We all monitored the election in Ghana, and we all observed and admired the fact that, in spite of disputes and disagreements, all differences were settled by the rule of law. This is how it should be. So, Mr. President, we similarly would like you to lead ECOWAS in a way that will bring us peace and prosperity, and not violence and war. We are tired with war in this region. If we want to work for peace, we must be able to live in peace.

ECOWAS must respect its own conventions, and not compromise the principles on which it stands, for the sake of convenience, or for appeasement of those who through their military might would hijack the democratic processes that we all believe in and cherish.

I came here today to have the opportunity to say again: I do not support what is happening in Mali. I love Mali, I love Malians, and all I want is peace and prosperity for the good people of Mali. I therefore cannot and will never support insurrection that denies them their democratic freedoms and rights. I am against it, and I will say it today: these sentiments are not against the people of Mali, because if this were so, the Liberian army would not be in Mali, helping to restore peace to the Malian people.

In this regard, I would like to thank the United Nations for working with us and assisting our army to be effective in their efforts to restore peace to Mali.

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As I have said previously, the military in Mali must not be permitted to unilaterally change the composition of a government that has been approved by this body. My proposal is that the civilian leaders should be restored to their positions as has been approved by ECOWAS under these negotiated arrangements. The civilian President and civilian Prime Minister must be immediately reinstated.

The solution brokered successfully by our Mediator, His Excellency Former President Goodluck Jonathan, was based on his findings and conclusions that the Malian people wanted an integrated interim leadership, consisting of both military and civilians, that would lead them to free and fair democratic elections next year. So for the peace of Mali, the ECOWAS-approved solution must immediately return to status quo ante.

This was an arrangement that received the consensus of the ECOWAS leadership that is now sitting in this room, and we should accept nothing less than that. For the sake of the people of Mali, this is the only decision that we should take today, if we want to maintain the credibility and respect for ECOWAS and its ethical and moral standing in the world.

And we must never again be tempted to compromise on our core principle of zero tolerance for undemocratic changes of governments.

Last year, it was Mali. Today, it is Mali again. Tomorrow, it could be any one of us.

I thank you.