PRESS RELEASE

GIABA/EGDC ROUND TABLE AND REGIONAL WOMEN'S MOBILIZATION WORKSHOP ON TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME WRAPS UP

The Round Table and Regional Women's Mobilization Workshop on Transnational Economic and Financial Crime, jointly organized by the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) and the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (EGDC) ended in Lomé, Republic of Togo, on 14th December 2023.

Addressing the socio-political and security situation in the sub-region, the gender dimension of insecurity as well as the new threats to the stability of the region, the Resident Representative of ECOWAS in Togo, H.E. Barros Bacar BANJAI, informed the participants of the tools established by the Community Institution to involve women in the process of seeking peace, preventing and combating economic and financial crimes. This collaborative initiative between the two structures, according to him, was designed to map out a concrete framework for the mainstreaming of gender and women in policies, laws, strategies and programs on transnational organized economic and financial crime in West Africa. "*(…) Their involvement and central role in the management (…) of the situation are crucial elements to be considered in the quest for solutions to fight against all these scourges raging in our region*," he added.

GIABA has been deploying these efforts and this synergy of actions with this segment of the populace since 2017 through these fora to review the consequences of transnational organized economic and financial crimes as part of the ECOWAS regional integration process. These meetings successively led to the pooling of resources and collaboration, strengthening cooperation between the Community institution and Agencies, with a view to aligning their objectives with the mandate of achieving the ECOWAS Vision 2050.

The Director General of GIABA, Mr. Edwin W. Harris Jr. expressed the hope that the discussions would contribute to the knowledge, understanding, adoption and implementation by the Community of relevant measures to resolve issues relating to gender and transnational organized crime. He finally enjoined the participants to develop " *(…) concrete recommended actions which will pave the way for review and implementation by Member States with a view to mainstreaming gender perspectives in the fight against transnational organized economic and financial crimes in West Africa* .

Certainly, the role and growing influence of women in the corridors of economic and financial crime in West Africa constitute a threat to the stability and development of the region. But they also provide great opportunities to combat this threat in a holistic and sustainable manner. " *It is therefore essential that women are placed at the hub of the fight to dismantle the network of transnational organized economic and financial crime and violent extremism that is slowly*

engulfing the ECOWAS region," according to Ms. Sandra Oulate Fattoh, Director of the EGDC, who also lauded the collaboration between GIABA and the EGDC to ensure transparency, accountability, shared responsibility and take full ownership of the process.

Recognizing that Togo is not immune to criminal acts, the representative of the Minister of Social Action, Women's Promotion and Literacy addressed the government's anticipatory approach to neutralize the emergence of risks or vulnerability factors of transnational organized crime. He mentioned the national strategies developed and his country's membership in various regional initiatives, considered as sufficient factors or reasons to pool efforts in order to render the fight more effective. Mr. Ferdinand Koffi Gani urged participants to explore the best possible avenues for significantly strengthening the provisions put in place by Member States to fight effectively and sustainably against transnational organized financial and economic crime. Finally, on behalf of his country, he " *(…) reassured participants of Togo's commitment to strengthening its instruments and frameworks put in place to promote the participation of women in decision-making bodies (…)* "

The participants proffered the following recommendations, among other things:

1. Promote success stories, including by sharing and publishing information on collaboration and successful AML/CFT cases in Member States.
2. Strengthen coordination and cooperation between ECOWAS institutions and gender-based civil society organizations to improve awareness-raising on AML/CFT.
3. Provide additional training to gender-based and grassroots civil society organizations working on the outskirts of cities. This would enhance the fight against transnational organized crime and better understanding of AML/CFT.
4. Implement measures to prevent criminals from abusing the financial system.
5. Take the necessary measures to arrest, prosecute and convict all perpetrators in proportion to the offence, and confiscate the proceeds and instrumentalities of crime.
6. Ensure the active and equitable participation of women
7. Ensure the active and equitable participation of women in the decision-making process on transnational organized crime
8. Enhance sensitization and educational activities on the perverse effects of transnational organized crime and illicit financial flows.
9. Improve interministerial collaboration in the fight against illicit financial flows and transnational organized crime.
10. Intensify the organization of capacity building of key stakeholders to respond to the risks and threats of illicit financial flows and TOC.
11. Regional and international organizations should strengthen cooperation among competent authorities in Member States in the fight against transnational organized crime and illicit financial flows.