

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE



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COMMUNICATION

by

**Mr John AZUMAH
Secretary General of the ECOWAS Parliament**

on

“Direct election of Members into ECOWAS Parliament”

**Nusa Dua Session
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EXCELLENCIES, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

1. It is a great privilege to be standing before you today to present the future of the ECOWAS region, and it is an even greater honour to do so as the Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament. The IPU is the embodiment of the principles of democracy, cooperation and unity. This Assembly's record in impactful work in areas of sustainable development, gender equality, youth empowerment and building strong parliaments, has supported many young democracies and helped sustain others that have had a head start, especially in Africa.
2. I am very pleased to be speaking to you, today about the Direct Elections of Members into the ECOWAS Parliament. Let me further state that this is the key agenda of the 5th Legislature, which I have the privilege to head. Electing Members by Direct Universal Suffrage, is aimed at ensuring that the people of our region are indiscriminately given the ability to participate and be fully represented. The role of an elected parliament in facilitating the participation of the people in regional governance, amongst others, by voting and being voted for, must not be overlooked.
3. For the past twenty years the ECOWAS Community has been working towards achieving the Direct Elections of Members into the ECOWAS Parliament. This journey began with the Enhancement of the Powers of the Parliament. The competence of the ECOWAS Parliament had remained the same since its conceptualization in 1993, despite the Community's drift towards supranationality. Existing Community Protocols and regulatory framework did provide any role of consequence to the Parliament. The Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS at its 50th Session which held in Abuja, Nigeria, on 17th December 2016, unanimously adopted and enacted the "Supplementary Act A/SA.1/12/16 relating to the Enhancement of the Powers of the Parliament".
4. The motive of the Parliament for the enhancement of its powers was not to seize power, but the desire to fulfil the aspirations of Community citizens for greater participation and representation in regional affairs. It was rooted in the need for a Community mechanism, which forges greater ties with its citizens in order to

sustain inspiration and legitimacy for actions taken. The initial proposal included election of Members by indirect elections. The cost implications and complexity of selecting a handful of Members of Parliament, 115 from a population of 350 million people, was an arduous task. The indirect election, which was being practiced in EALA and Canada, was accordingly adopted. An intensive advocacy mechanism was put in place and for the first time, the subject of enhancement was deliberated by the Authority of Heads of State and Government. The principle of enhancement was accepted but the exact powers to be granted Parliament was not clearly agreed, this led to the directive by the Authority for further reflection.

5. In order to achieve the adoption of the 2016 Supplementary Act, concessions were made, which meant that many of the traditional characteristic of a Parliament were excluded during the exercise. While Parliament was granted powers of oversight, consideration of Budget and mandatory referral/assent among others, the election of Members by Direct Universal Suffrage, the power to initiate legislation and the Parliamentary Ombudsman were expunged from the initial proposal.
6. The four previous legislatures of the ECOWAS Parliament have earnestly pursued the quest for direct elections, adopting numerous work plans to advance the cause and deepen the understanding of the best framework to achieve the desired results. This Fifth Legislature of the Parliament, deemed it necessary to set up a Committee to further study Direct Election. So far, it has carried out sensitization visits to some Member States and equally met Heads of States and Government, Ministers of Justice and other key stakeholders at the national level. The Committee has identified three salient aspects which, with the right proposals put forward, may lead to success. They are as follows:
 - an Electoral Code for the election of the ECOWAS Parliament by direct universal suffrage;
 - Modalities for the conduct and financing of the elections; and
 - Code of conduct for candidates during the elections campaign.
7. The Parliament will continue to work towards achieving the election of its membership by Direct Universal Suffrage and hopes to do so before the end of the

5th Legislature. More importantly, now that we are living through the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a great need for policies that promote social justice and equality, as well as policies that eliminate high social mistrust and high anxiety. Inequality, has been a great hindrance to development in our subregion, creating instability and insecurity. What we hope to do at the ECOWAS Parliament is to equip the people of our region with the ability to, not only choose their destiny, but to be a part of the processes of creating it.

8. Despite the operational challenges and financing, we plan to continuously collaborate with key institutional stakeholders, such as the Authority of Heads of State, Council of Ministers, ECOWAS Commission and the Court of Justice, on the mission of Parliament to elect its members by Direct Universal Suffrage. Thematic meetings on specific areas such as financing, an electoral code, code of conduct and qualifications for elections, have been programmed and as well as a Road Map for community wide advocacy. From the efforts and interactions of the past two years, I am convinced that we will lay a strong precedence which will continue to steer the subregion to its ultimate objective of becoming an ECOWAS of people. We are working tirelessly to have more options so that we can make better decisions. Our approach is focused on understanding and knowing the needs of people so as to know our real options.
9. I would like to thank you all for listening and the IPU for giving me this platform to share with you the future of our subregion. As challenging as our future may present itself at the moment, I am confident that the “strength in our purpose” will take us to our destination.

Thank you.