

ECOFEPA pushes for more women political representation in West Africa

In commemoration of International Women's Day, the ECOWAS Female Parliamentarians Association (ECOFEPA) has renewed its call for increased elective and appointive positions for women across West Africa.

Speaking at the end of the 2025 first extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Parliament in Lagos, ECOFEPA's President, Veronica Sesay stressed the urgent need for gender inclusivity in governance, emphasizing that women are key drivers of progress in the region. "We are still lagging behind, and it is not easy unless we push our way in. Women are powerful instruments for development, and our voices must be heard. We must be recognized as equal partners in shaping the future of West Africa," Sesay said. Highlighting progress in her home country, Sierra Leone, where 30% of elective positions are now occupied by women, she urged other West African nations to adopt similar measures. She credited Sierra Leone's success to an amendment in the Electoral Act, which mandates political parties to ensure at least 30% female representation in elections. ECOFEPA also approved a new constitution to strengthen its funding and unveiled a 2025 Action Plan focused on youth and women empowerment. The association vowed to remain active throughout the year, driving initiatives that promote gender equity and political inclusion.

ECOWAS Parliament Demands Stronger Electoral Reforms to Safeguard Democracy

Lawmakers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Parliament have renewed calls for electoral reforms to strengthen democracy across the region. Speaking at the 1st Extraordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament in Lagos, parliamentarians from Gambia, Liberia, and Nigeria stressed the need for transparency, adherence to democratic principles, and a collective approach to governance. The Fourth Deputy Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament, Hon. Billay Tunkara from Gambia, highlighted the role of the regional body in ensuring that electoral protocols signed by member states are effectively implemented. "This is the dream of the ECOWAS Parliament. We advocate for electoral reform, best practices, and good governance," Tunkara said. He emphasized that ECOWAS heads of state have committed to democratic principles through treaties and conventions, adding that the Parliament's role is to oversee and ensure adherence.

"The protocol on good governance promotes democracy, transparency, and the rule of law. Our advocacy branch must continue reminding leaders that they have signed up for this and should uphold it," he stated. Senator Edwin Snowe of Liberia expressed concerns over the selective recognition of electoral successes in the region. Reacting to YIAGA Africa's report that scored Ghana and Senegal high for electoral integrity, he argued that Liberia also deserved commendation. "Liberia set a brilliant mark. What happened in Liberia was unprecedented, especially considering the challenges in Sierra Leone," he noted. However, he acknowledged that no electoral system is perfect, citing the United States as an example. "Even in America, Donald Trump never congratulated Joe Biden after losing. If that is the global standard, then Africa is performing even better," Snowe remarked, urging regional leaders to take pride in democratic progress despite challenges.

He also criticized constitutional manipulations in some ECOWAS nations, referencing Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, where leaders extended their rule through constitutional amendments. Hon. Agbodike Paschal from Nigeria proposed the establishment of an ECOWAS-wide association of political parties to enhance democratic practices. He argued that such an organization would foster accountability and electoral transparency. "We should make it a law that brings together political parties across ECOWAS. This will strengthen democracy and ensure adherence to democratic principles," he said. Agbodike lamented the political instability caused by military coups, which led to the withdrawal of some nations from ECOWAS. He described military takeovers as a setback to regional development. According to him, a unified political party structure would serve as an oversight mechanism, ensuring that elections are free, fair, and credible across the region. "Where democracy fails, it is often due to flawed elections. Nigeria, as the giant of ECOWAS, must support initiatives that safeguard democracy across the region," he added. The Nigerian lawmaker linked regional security challenges to poor governance, stressing the need for democratic stability to curb violence and insecurity. "We are suffering from severe insecurity due to bad governance. Armed groups are active along our borders, engaging in criminal activities," he warned. Agbodike reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening democracy within the ECOWAS framework.

"As a lawmaker, I am privileged to contribute meaningfully to the growth of ECOWAS and the success we all seek," he concluded. The Lagos session underscored the urgency of electoral reforms in West Africa. With increasing concerns over constitutional amendments, election irregularities, and governance failures, ECOWAS lawmakers remain steadfast in pushing for a transparent and democratic electoral process across the region.