

ECOWAS Parliament Takes Fight Against Irregular Migration, Human Trafficking to West African Communities

In a move to shift the fight against irregular migration from policy discussions to community action, the ECOWAS Parliament has officially launched a regional parliamentary-citizen engagement campaign in The Gambia to mobilize communities against irregular migration, human trafficking and modern slavery across West Africa. The initiative marks the beginning of a two-country outreach programme in The Gambia and Senegal aimed at bringing lawmakers closer to citizens, raising public awareness on the dangers of unsafe migration and generating grassroots input to shape stronger regional policies and interventions. It also underscores the Parliament's growing emphasis on citizen participation in addressing migration-related challenges affecting the sub-region. The opening ceremony, held in Banjul on Monday, signaled the commencement of the engagement, which will run in The Gambia from July 6 to 10 before moving to Dakar, Senegal, from July 13 to 17. Organized by The Gambia's Delegation to the ECOWAS Parliament with the support of the Parliament's

General Secretariat, the programme brings together lawmakers, ECOWAS officials, government institutions, development partners, youth organizations, returnees, community leaders and the media. Speaking at the ceremony, Head of The Gambia's Delegation to the ECOWAS Parliament and Fourth Deputy Speaker, Billay G. Tunkara, said the initiative reflects the Parliament's resolve to move beyond legislative debates and engage directly with communities on issues that affect their daily lives. According to him, the engagement complements the Gambian Government's efforts to tackle irregular migration, trafficking in persons and other socio-economic challenges confronting young people, adding that community participation is critical to developing sustainable solutions. The ECOWAS Resident Representative in The Gambia, Miatta Lily French, described irregular migration and human trafficking as transnational challenges requiring stronger collaboration among ECOWAS member states. She stressed the need for sustained public awareness campaigns, preventive

measures and coordinated regional action to protect vulnerable groups from exploitation. Representing the ECOWAS Parliament, Director of Parliamentary Affairs, Dr. Kabeer Garba, commended The Gambian delegation for initiating the engagement, noting that interactions with citizens would provide lawmakers with first-hand insights into the realities driving irregular migration across the region. He said recommendations from the consultations would strengthen parliamentary advocacy and contribute to the development of more effective regional policies to combat irregular migration, trafficking in persons and modern slavery. Presentations



during the opening session painted a worrying picture of migration trends across West Africa. The Gambia Immigration Department disclosed that migrant interceptions, voluntary returns from North Africa and deportations from Europe increased during the first half of 2026. It noted that The Gambia remains a country of origin, transit and destination along the Atlantic migration route, with women and children increasingly featuring in

mixed migration flows. The National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons also warned of emerging forms of exploitation, including child labour, forced labour, sexual exploitation and online scam operations linked to irregular migration. The agency called for greater investment in prevention, victim protection, investigations and cross-border cooperation. Similarly, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that The Gambia is increasingly being used as a transit point along the West African Atlantic Route, citing overcrowded boats, changing coastal departure points and the growing involvement of women and children in dangerous migration journeys. The parliamentary-citizen engagement is expected to generate practical recommendations that will strengthen ECOWAS' regional response to irregular migration and human trafficking while promoting safer migration pathways and enhancing the protection of vulnerable populations across West Africa.