

Country Reports Don't always reflect the aspiration of ECOWAS Citizens

...Hon. Fatoumata Njai

A honourable member of the Gambia and ECOWAS Parliament, Hon Fatoumata Njai has raised an alarm over the country reports being presented at plenary. According to her, the reports do not reflect the true situation of things in the region. She highlighted an example of her country report, in the Gambia, stating that at the moment, there is Acute Kidney Infection leading to the death of some 70 children but this was not stated in their country report. "We come to the Community Parliament read and adopt reports that do not reflect the plight of our citizens" "So are we here enjoying at the expense of our citizens or we should rather go to the grounds and see what is happening rather than sitting here talking about reports that do not have true reflections of the situation on the ground?" – she said

Madam Njai made the observations at the closing ceremony of the 2023 first Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja Nigeria. This was when the joint Committees of Political Affairs, Peace, Security & APRM / Legal Affairs and Human Rights report was being presented for adoption at the plenary. Hon Njai told the plenary that she does not see her colleagues speaking in the interest of their citizens on the floor. Again, she supports the idea of sending fact-finding missions to member states when there are issues to be addressed. But was quick to point out that, when they go for these

missions, they seat with the ruling government and tell them what they want them to know instead of going to the citizens to verify what is on the ground.

According to her the Authority of Heads of States has become a fifteen (15) member club that only seeks to protect the interest of ruling governments and to entrench themselves in power at the expense of ordinary community citizens. Speaking on the rising political situation in Senegal, she said Governments and the sub-regional bloc are ignoring early warning signs that may lead to another coup. She argued that currently, three member states that have experience coups – Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso are in transition to constitutional rule, but the way things are going, as a sub-regional bloc, we might have more.

Additionally, she pointed out that her home Country just came out of a local-level election and the amount of disrespect that government officials with the security have inflicted on civilians if they had reacted there would have been chaos. She called on the Authority of Heads of States to do more to protect the interest of the citizens and not just entrench themselves in the interest of the ruling governments.



20 Million Children in Sub-Sahara Africa are exposed to Child Labour

The Founder of the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation and the 2014 Noble Peace Laureate, Kailash Satyarthi, said a joint report launched by ILO and UNICEF in 2021 that 20 million children in Sub-Sahara Africa are exposed to child labour, child trafficking among others.

Mr Satyarthi who spoke at the 2023 First Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja on the topic; Eradication of Child Labour: Taking stock and sustaining the commitment of the ECOWAS Parliament.

According to him, "It is shocking and shameful that the world made a commitment to end child labour (Goal 8 of the SDGs) in 2025 but, in the first five years after the promise, the number of children labour had grown in the world. Every day, ten thousand children in Africa enter into child labour," he lamented.

He said that the rich countries have allocated 12 trillion dollars for Global Agenda Action on COVID-19. He said most of them were thinking that the money will benefit low income countries but according to him, out of the 12 trillion dollars, only 0.2% has been allocated to Sub-Sahara Africa.

"The report also suggested that only 53 billion dollars can save many children from all the miseries of child labour. If you focus only on your next elections, who will take care of your next generation," he rhetorically asked. The global child labour advocate commended the actions taken by ECOWAS in facing the challenges millions of children are going through in the region.

Agatha Kolawole, the National Programme Officer of FMM West Africa Project, who is also the Focal Officer of Child Labour and Trafficking in Persons in Abuja, said there are 16 million females and nine million males in forced labour, of which 4.3 million are children. She added that since 2016, child labour has risen from 8.4 million to 160 million. She said child labour is highly prevalent in the semi-formal and informal sectors with few cases in the former sector.

She said, "The agricultural sector alone accounts for 85% of all child labour in the world and 61.4 million children are in Africa. Children in the youngest age bracket constitute the largest group in child labour and hazardous work which endanger their health, safety and moral development." Ms Kolawole mentioned the rising incidents and impact of terrorism, climate change, migration, emergencies and humanitarian

crisis in West Africa which are rapidly changing the child labour context. She said that child labour in the context of emergencies and humanitarian crisis including the current COVID-19 health pandemic has presented a new dynamic and also challenges and opportunities for combating child labour in Africa. She therefore called on ECOWAS countries to harmonise national laws and policies, integrate child labour in national development strategies, implement and enforce laws including minimum age of work.

Adding his voice, the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Martin Chungong, suggested that the issue of children's rights in general, and more especially the issue of child trafficking and child labour must be included in national priority actions. He added that child trafficking and child labour especially in West Africa, continue to undermine social structures. He maintained that taking children away from their families compromises economic development and threaten the future of children. "The IPU has accompanied your efforts to combat child labour. Indeed, the last time I addressed this assembly, it was



during a conference we jointly organized with the ECOWAS Parliament on child labour. The strategy that you have developed and implemented since then has certainly enabled you to bring this issue to the fore, as the follow-up workshops in 2016 and 2018 demonstrated," he said.

The IPU Secretary General thanked the ECOWAS Commission for its substantial efforts to the fight against trafficking and child labour, thus renewing their wish for ECOWAS to increase its collaboration with parliamentarians in order to enable them contribute better to the fight against the scourges. "I can assure you of the readiness of the IPU to support in your efforts to combat these scourges, which can irreparably damage the future of the children who fall victim to them. Indeed, children should not be in cocoa plantation, they should not be breaking stones in quarries, they should not be engaged in life threatening activities, they should be in school preparing for a brighter future which should be the legitimate aspiration of every child," he concluded.