

Africa loses \$89bn annually to illicit financial flows -*Tax experts*

Experts from the West African Tax Administration Forum (WATAF) and Tax Justice Network Africa (TJNA) say African countries lose about 89 billion dollars annually to illicit financial flows (IFF). Speaking during an interactive session with ECOWAS parliamentarians at the recently concluded 2026 First Ordinary Session in Abuja, they said the losses stemmed from harmful tax practices affecting their economies. The session also featured presentations on “Operationalizing ECOWAS Tax Directives for Domestic Resource Mobilization and Regional Tax Harmonization,” among others. They said the harmful tax practices included tax evasion, tax avoidance, and tax mis-invoicing, among others, adding that Africa’s persistent domestic resource mobilization gap was about 194 billion dollars annually.

"Africa has a prevalent problem of illicit financial flows, and at least 65 per cent of these could be categorized as commercially-driven. "The main practices that could lead to IFFs are; tax evasion, tax avoidance, tax misinvoicing and other harmful tax practices. "These harmful tax practices hemorrhage the available resources that can be used for development of the continent, and Africa loses up to eighty-nine billion dollars annually," they said, quoting a 2020 report.

According to them, advancing tax harmonization within the ECOWAS sub-region presents a strategic opportunity for WATAF to strengthen regional integration, enhance domestic resource mobilization, and support sustainable development. "Tax harmonization is the fiscal backbone of ECOWAS integration. Without it, the region will continue to lose revenue through loopholes, smuggling, opacity, and profit shifting," they said. However, they emphasized that the effectiveness of such efforts would depend on strong political commitment, effective implementation at national level, and active parliamentary oversight. Dr Nita Belemaobgo, Research Manager, WATAF, while highlighting the session's expected outcomes, said the organization's objective was to support ECOWAS' transition on tax directives aimed at harmonizing fiscal policies across member states. "Regional cooperation and evidence-based tools can



regional MPs to make laws toward ensuring that local citizens in African countries benefitted from domestic resource mobilization and management. Speaking on the theme, “Addressing Tax-Related Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) through Legislative Frameworks and Transparency,” she said: “It’s possible to introduce legislations for domestic beneficiation to gain more resources and revenues, apart from gaining from just taxes.” The experts appealed to MPs to look at the IFF issues holistically, stressing that addressing them was central to improving both domestic and regional resource mobilization. Solomon Adoga of TJNA urged the parliamentarians to make enabling laws for the mining sector by “strengthening extractive legislation, scrutinizing new mining agreements and monitoring tax incentives through cost-benefit analysis.” “It’s important that Africa protects its taxing rights. We must look at where we are losing revenue as Africans. We don’t need to be reliant on other countries outside of Africa,” he said. The experts further urged ECOWAS to extend harmonization across the broader region to reduce tax distortions, limit harmful tax competition, and strengthen regional economic integration.

According to them, the challenges of IFF can be tackled even in the absence of a single currency, noting that member states could still have different currencies and at the same time fight IFFs.

"There must be local beneficiation in our countries, Africa has been deprived of taxing rights. Multinational companies are not paying their fair share of taxation," they noted. They, therefore, tasked MPs on prioritizing global tax reforms, information sharing, tax transparency, and urged member states to emulate Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast's vibrant advocacy for fair tax rights allocations. "Effective implementation of tax harmonization would require political commitment, institutional coordination, digital modernization, sustained regional cooperation, monitoring and evaluation by national transition committees," WATAF's Jonas Igwe added.

ECOWAS Lawmakers demand urgent probe into Xenophobic attacks, warn region failing Its citizens

The ECOWAS Parliament has ordered a full investigation into rising cases of xenophobic violence against West African nationals, warning that the region risks losing credibility if it cannot guarantee the safety of its citizens across borders. The directive followed a motion raised by Third Deputy Speaker Alexander Kwamena Afenyo-Markin during plenary at the Parliament's first ordinary session of 2026 in Abuja. Describing the situation as a matter of "direct and profound importance," he called for urgent accountability over a surge in violent attacks, particularly in South Africa, as well as deadly incidents affecting ECOWAS citizens in parts of the Sahel. Afenyo-Markin cited the February 14 ambush in northern Burkina Faso, where suspected militants killed 18 Ghanaian traders, as well as a recent offensive in Mali that disrupted a key trade corridor between Ghana and Mali. He warned that such incidents not only threaten lives but also undermine regional trade and integration. He further condemned widespread xenophobic attacks reported in cities such as Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria, where African migrants, including Nigerians and

Ghanaians, have faced killings, displacement and destruction of businesses. While acknowledging remarks by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa denouncing xenophobia, he stressed that stronger enforcement actions are needed to bring perpetrators to justice. The lawmaker also criticized ECOWAS for failing to fully implement its 1979 free movement protocol, noting that citizens continue to face harassment at borders despite regional agreements. According to him, the gap between policy and reality has weakened confidence in the bloc's commitment to integration. To tackle the crisis, the Parliament has tasked its Committee on Political Affairs to investigate the incidents and recommend concrete measures. Proposals on the table include establishing a dedicated body to monitor the safety of ECOWAS citizens abroad, strengthening border governance, and engaging South African authorities and continental human rights institutions. "The safety of our people must never be compromised," Afenyo-Markin said, urging swift and coordinated action to restore trust and protect citizens across the region.

Gambia Speaker Urges Bold Action on Security, Trade and Unity ...say ECOWAS citizens want results, not rhetoric

Speaker of The Gambia's National Assembly, Rt. Hon. Fabakary Tombong Jatta, has warned that West Africa faces a defining moment, calling on regional lawmakers to move beyond words and deliver real change on security, economic integration and democratic stability. Delivering a keynote address at the opening ceremony of the just concluded ECOWAS Parliament's 2026 legislative session in Abuja, Jatta said the region must confront rising threats with unity and resolve. "We convene at a time of profound consequence for our region. Across the Sahel, the persistent threat of terrorism and violent extremism continues to test not only the capacity of our states but the resilience of our collective will. "Entire communities are being displaced, livelihoods disrupted, and generations of young people are growing up in conditions of uncertainty. This is not a crisis confined to geography; it is a shared regional challenge that demands a unified, strategic, and sustained response," he said. Jatta, who described his return to the

ECOWAS Parliament as deeply personal, said the institution remains central to shaping West Africa's collective future. He also raised concerns about growing strains within the region's democratic systems, warning that political instability could undermine the ECOWAS vision.

"This Parliament is not merely an institution; it is a crucible where the idea of West Africa as a shared political, economic, and cultural community is continuously forged and refined.

"Simultaneously, we are witnessing shifts within our democratic landscape that call for sober reflection. The strains on constitutional order in parts of our Community, and the signals of disengagement from regional commitments, pose a direct challenge to the cohesion and credibility of the ECOWAS project. "We must confront these developments with clarity and courage. Regional integration cannot be sustained by treaties alone – it must be underpinned by trust, dialogue, and a collective commitment to shared values," Jatta stated.

On the economic front, he acknowledged the promise of the African Continental Free Trade Area but said West Africa must address persistent barriers holding back growth. “Non-tariff barriers persist, intra-regional trade remains below its full potential, and our economies are still overly exposed to external shocks. “The vision of a fully integrated West African market must therefore move from aspiration to accelerated implementation,” he said. Jatta also highlighted climate change as an escalating threat, linking environmental challenges directly to security and economic stability. “From the advancing desert in the north to the erosion of our coastlines in the south, environmental pressures are intensifying

flexibility, and proximity to the people. “You must therefore remain the channel through which dialogue persists, even in moments of political divergence.” “The removal of non-tariff barriers, the facilitation of cross-border trade, and the harmonization of regulatory frameworks are not abstract goals, they are practical necessities for unlocking the entrepreneurial potential of our people. “Let us envision an ECOWAS where a trader in Banjul, a farmer in Ouagadougou, and a young innovator in Lagos operate within a truly integrated economic space, where opportunity is defined not by borders, but by potential.” Jatta further urged the bloc to act collectively on climate resilience, advocating coordinated policies and stronger representation on the



competition over resources, exacerbating conflicts, and threatening the livelihoods of millions. “Climate change is no longer an environmental issue – it is a security, economic, and humanitarian imperative.”

He specifically commended efforts to introduce direct universal suffrage for the Parliament, describing it as a step towards strengthening democratic legitimacy.

Jatta therefore urged lawmakers to embrace parliamentary diplomacy as a critical tool for maintaining dialogue, even when political tensions arise among member states. “It represents a bold step toward deepening democratic legitimacy and strengthening the direct bond between this Parliament and the citizens of West Africa,” he added. “Where executive diplomacy may be constrained by matters of sovereignty and protocol, parliamentary diplomacy offers continuity,

global stage. “By harmonizing environmental legislation, advocating for regional adaptation financing, and speaking with one voice on the global stage, ECOWAS can transform vulnerability into collective strength. “The expectations of over 400 million citizens of West Africa rest firmly upon this institution. They are not looking to us for rhetoric alone. They are looking for results, for safer communities, stronger economies, and governance that reflects their dignity and aspirations,” Jatta said. “The ECOWAS project must endure as more than an institutional framework, it must remain a living covenant of peace, solidarity, and shared prosperity,” he said. “Let us therefore recommit ourselves to the ideals that gave birth to this Community. Let us work tirelessly to restore and strengthen unity. And let us demonstrate, through our actions, that an 'ECOWAS of the People' is not merely a vision, but a tangible and achievable reality”, he added.

ECOParl: Democracy Must Deliver or Risk Collapse - Speaker Abbas

...call for stronger regional mechanisms to safeguard democracy

Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Tajudeen Abbas, has warned that democratic governance across West Africa is under mounting strain and must begin to produce tangible results for citizens or risk further instability. The Speaker Abbas who stated this in his address at the opening of the recently concluded 2026 First Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja said the region was facing a defining moment, with declining voter participation, waning public trust, and a resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government exposing deep institutional weaknesses. "This session brings together parliamentary leaders and representatives from across our sub-region at a time when the choices before us are both consequential and immediate. "The concern is no longer limited to the

systems is being tested. "The issue is not whether democracy remains the preferred system of governance. Evidence across the region continues to show that citizens reject military rule. The issue is whether democratic systems are delivering sufficiently to sustain that preference. This places a premium on performance. Electoral legitimacy must be matched by governance outcomes. "Security, economic stability, and fairness in public administration are no longer aspirational goals. They are the basis on which citizens evaluate the state's credibility. Where these are absent, the space for disruption expands. Within this context, the role of the ECOWAS Parliament becomes increasingly important. It must function not only as a deliberative body, but as a platform for aligning democratic practice with the expectations of citizens across member states," Abbas warned.



conduct of elections. It extends to whether democratic governance is producing outcomes that citizens can recognize and trust," he said.

He pointed to growing disillusionment among voters, noting that while citizens across West Africa continue to reject military rule, their patience with democratic

He stressed that the ECOWAS Parliament must evolve beyond its current advisory role to meet the demands of the moment, calling for stronger legislative authority, improved oversight powers, and a more direct role in regional decision-making. "It is important to acknowledge that this question of relevance is not new. Over the years, there have been sustained efforts within the Community to strengthen the mandate of the Parliament, including proposals to move it from an advisory body towards one with enhanced legislative authority, greater oversight capacity, and a more direct role in regional decision-making.

"Discussions around direct elections into the Parliament, expanded budgetary scrutiny, and clearer mechanisms for enforcing Community protocols have reflected a shared recognition that the institution must evolve in line with the demands placed upon it. These efforts have not yet been fully realised. "However, the current moment makes their

urgency clearer. A Parliament with limited influence cannot adequately respond to a region facing democratic reversals, security pressures, and economic uncertainty. "Strengthening the powers, relevance, and operational capacity of this institution is therefore not a procedural ambition. It is a strategic necessity for regional stability. A more empowered Parliament would enhance accountability within the Community, deepen citizen representation at the regional level, and provide a stronger democratic anchor in times of stress", he stated.

The Speaker also underscored the importance of national legislatures, describing them as the frontline institutions through which citizens experience governance. Highlighting Nigeria's approach, Tajudeen said the House of Representatives had focused on improving legislative productivity, tightening oversight, and increasing public engagement. He added that parliamentary friendship groups were being used to deepen cooperation with other legislatures across the region. "National parliaments are central to this effort. They are the institutions through which laws are made, executive action is scrutinized, and public resources are allocated. Their effectiveness determines, in practical terms, how citizens experience governance. Where parliaments are active and responsive, democratic systems are strengthened. Where they are passive, institutional balance is weakened.

"In Nigeria, the National Assembly has sought to respond to these responsibilities with a clearer sense of purpose. Under my leadership, the House of Representatives has prioritized legislative productivity, oversight discipline and public engagement. "Mechanisms have been introduced to expand transparency and access, while legislative interventions have been aligned with national priorities in areas such as economic reform, security and social protection. A specific area of focus has been the strengthening of Parliamentary Friendship Groups. "These platforms facilitate structured engagement with legislatures in other countries, enabling the exchange of experiences, coordination of positions, and the development of shared approaches to common challenges", he stated. Turning to Nigeria's economic

reforms, he defended recent policy decisions, including the removal of fuel subsidies and the unification of exchange rates, describing them as necessary steps taken within a democratic framework. He argued that Nigeria's experience demonstrates that difficult reforms can be implemented without undermining constitutional order — a point he said was crucial in a region where military interventions have re-emerged. "These measures have required adjustment, but they reflect a deliberate approach to reform within a democratic framework. Early indicators suggest that these changes are beginning to yield results. "Fiscal inflows to states have increased, enabling greater investment in infrastructure and social services. Efforts to strengthen revenue administration and reduce leakages are ongoing. "In the security sector, coordinated operations have been intensified across multiple regions. While challenges remain, the direction of policy is clear and anchored in constitutional order. The significance of this approach extends beyond Nigeria. It demonstrates that democratic systems can undertake difficult reforms without recourse to extra-constitutional measures.

"This is a critical point in a sub-region where the temptation to substitute constitutional processes with military intervention has re-emerged. Experience shows that such interventions do not resolve underlying governance challenges", Abbas stressed. He also urged West African legislatures to take a more active role on the global stage, drawing lessons from other regional parliamentary bodies that have expanded their influence. Speaker Abbas outlined three priorities for the region: delivering measurable outcomes through democratic systems, ensuring accountability in political leadership, and translating regional agreements into concrete action. "Parliaments will be central to restoring public confidence in democracy across the sub-region. "This session of the ECOWAS Parliament provides an opportunity to reinforce that direction. It is an opportunity to align our collective efforts with our citizens' expectations and strengthen the foundations of democratic governance across West Africa", he stated.

Speaker ECOParl calls for deeper integration, bold reforms amid mounting pressures

Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament, Rt. Hon. Memounatou Ibrahima, has warned that peace across West Africa cannot be taken for granted, urging leaders to confront rising insecurity, democratic fragility and economic strain with urgency and unity. Speaking at the opening of the First Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament for 2026 in Abuja on Monday the 7th of May, Ibrahima said the region must remain steadfast in defending democratic values while responding to growing internal and external pressures.

She reaffirmed democracy as the bedrock of the regional bloc, even as she acknowledged emerging threats. "Developments within our region reaffirm the view that democracy remains the unshakeable foundation of our Community," Ibrahim stated. At the same time, she urged caution and responsibility, particularly in politically fragile states. "Beyond this conviction, Honourable colleagues, we must remain vigilant. In this regard, I call on the authorities of Guinea-Bissau to demonstrate responsibility by restoring constitutional order in that



“Faced with the multiplication of flashpoints, no region is immune. The message must be clear: peace cannot be decreed — it must be patiently built through dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect. The ECOWAS Parliament must echo this imperative to our Member States and partners,” she said. Looking ahead, she pointed to the upcoming ECOWAS Future Summit in Lomé as a critical opportunity to reshape the bloc's direction. She emphasized the Parliament's central role in that process, describing it as a key platform for democratic legitimacy and accountability. “This summit aims to accelerate the implementation of Vision 2050 in light of current challenges. It will provide an opportunity to reposition our Community by defining how regional integration — at the heart of our ambition — can be achieved, strengthened and adapted to new realities. “We must contribute meaningfully to this broader reflection on the future of our regional integration process. Our

sister country,” she said. Speaker Ibrahim also condemned recent violence in the region, expressing solidarity with affected nations. She painted a broader picture of a world in turmoil, warning that global conflicts are compounding economic hardship across West Africa. “The Parliament places high value on stability and peace within our West African sub-region. Accordingly, it condemns the terrorist attacks carried out on 25 April 2026 in several localities in the Republic of Mali and expresses its solidarity with the Malian people. “We are meeting at a time when the international environment is marked by tensions and violent conflicts in the Middle East, in Europe, and on our own continent. “These crises, with their troubling energy implications, are also driving inflationary pressures, particularly on foodstuffs and agricultural inputs, thereby seriously affecting our already fragile economies,” she said. She further highlighted the region's exposure to terrorism, piracy, cross-border crime and climate change, describing them as persistent threats requiring coordinated action. Against this backdrop, Ibrahim stressed that lasting peace demands deliberate effort and cooperation.

session must therefore produce bold resolutions and informed opinions commensurate with the challenges before us,” she said. Highlighting recent parliamentary activities, Ibrahim said engagements across the region had focused on employment, social protection, and fiscal oversight, including discussions on digital skills, the plight of street children, and budget implementation. Ibrahim outlined key priorities for the session, including reviewing community legislation, assessing implementation of regional programmes, and engaging with civil society and development partners. She also highlighted upcoming discussions on artificial intelligence, tax policy harmonization, and women's economic empowerment, particularly in trade and export opportunities. “The task before us is immense, but our determination is unwavering. “Let us make this session a decisive turning point in our efforts to strengthen our democracies and fulfil the promise of effective, visible regional integration for our peoples.” Declaring the session open, Ibrahim called for unity and bold action,” she said.

ECOWAS Parliamentarians interrogate 6-pillar strategy on future of regional integration

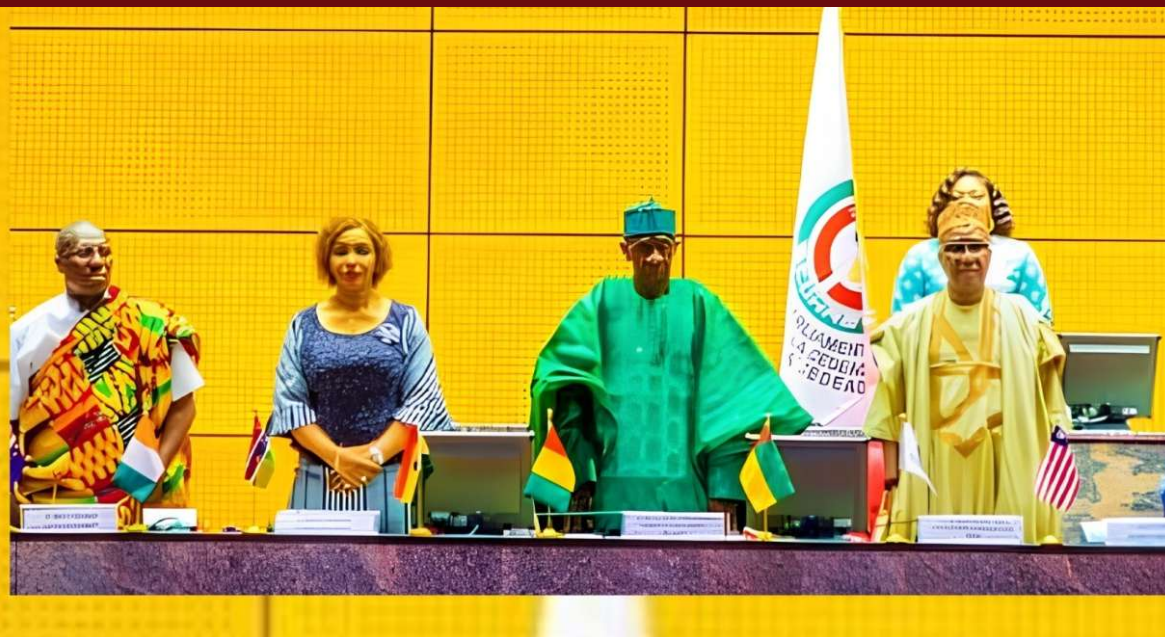
Members of the ECOWAS Parliament have interrogated the nitty-gritty of the new 'ECOWAS Compact of the Future of Regional Integration,' following its unveiling by Amb. Abdel-Fatau Musah, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security. Musah had announced the strategy while making a presentation at the just concluded First 2026 Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja. He said that

ECOWAS had proposed a new six-pillar strategic initiative, “Compact of the Future of Regional Integration,” aimed at reshaping the bloc's political and economic direction. Musah described the initiative, unveiled ahead of a planned special summit of regional leaders, as a survival strategy aimed at strengthening integration, and repositioning regional response to mounting political, economic and security challenges. He said the ultimate goal was to transform

ECOWAS from an institution known for issuing declarations into one which delivers concrete public goods, such as security, economic mobility and digital connectivity, to citizens.

“The Compact is designed to operationalize the ECOWAS Vision 2050, and represents a fundamental reset of the regional integration agenda, shifting the bloc from an elite-driven ECOWAS of States to ECOWAS of the Peoples. “This initiative acknowledges that the regional body is at its most fragile point since its establishment in 1975, due largely to governance failures, democratic setbacks and the emergence of alternative alliances such as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), comprising Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger,” he said. Musah said the new strategy was adopted by ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government during a summit in Abuja, where they proposed a Special Summit on the Future of Regional Integration. He added that the draft framework was developed through extensive consultations involving citizens

for “federalizing” ECOWAS like the EU, stressing that it was time for ECOWAS to stop being “the horse that carries others, but one that moves itself forward.” Also contributing, MP Billay Tunkara hailed the initiative's six pillars, saying the proposals contained in it would go a long way to transition the ECOWAS Parliament from an Advisory to a Mandatory body. MP Abiante Awaji-Inombek, on his part, expressed doubts about the prospects of the initiative achieving its stated objectives, noting that, it was not the first time that such a lofty initiative was being unveiled. The lawmaker critiqued the logic of engaging the breakaway Sahel countries, and asked some germane questions. “What has changed in terms of convergence?” “What is to be monitored and evaluated when we don't even know? “If previous targets of the ECOWAS have not been met, how will this Pact succeed?” he queried. MP Memuna Sesay however welcomed the idea of re-engaging the Sahel states, saying that it bordered on security threat to other member states, stressing that “ECOWAS missed its way on the AES”. While expressing appreciation for



across West Africa, civil society groups, the African diaspora, ECOWAS institutions, and leaders. The parliamentarians in their various submissions took turns to ask questions about the details of the new regional initiative. MP Abdul Kargbo, while applauding the timing of the initiative, noted that it came at a crucial time as ECOWAS was currently facing monumental governance failure and other challenges. The lawmaker called for boldness on the part of regional leaders toward addressing, especially military coups which he said, if not adequately addressed, would give incentives for military coups. He said that for ECOWAS to be sovereign and people-centered, it must be able to create jobs for its people to discourage them from making dangerous migration trips to North Africa and Europe. Kargbo also called

the proposed Pact, she underscored the need for protecting the lives and livelihoods of community citizens through the initiative. “This is what we want to see in ECOWAS, reality and visibility,” she emphasized. The lawmaker also urged ECOWAS to learn from the Rwandan genocide experience and the Sierra Leonean war example in addressing the issue of the exited Sahel countries. “The work of the ECOWAS Commission is heavy; I don't envy you. Bring back all states together,” she added. Responding, the commissioner thanked the MPs for their useful contributions and constructive approach to the issues pertaining to the Pact. He assured them that, as has been the case in many other engagements, their concerns would be factored into the final revised document that is to be approved by the Authority of Heads of State. He urged the MPs to work in collaboratively with the ECOWAS Commission and institutions to achieve its objectives. “The Parliament's role is critical and must not just be advisory,” Musah added.