

ECOWAS parliamentarian calls for direct election of members

Sen. Osita Izunaso, a member of the 6th ECOWAS Parliament has solicited the election of its members directly by their constituents, instead of being nominated by their countries as obtains today. Izunaso, the First Rapporteur of the parliament's Joint Committee on Public Accounts, made the call in an interview with newsmen in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Izunaso (APC-Imo West), is a fourth term senator, and longest serving lawmaker from the South-East and South-South geopolitical zones in the Nigerian Senate. Speaking on the sideline of the parliament's joint committee on administration, budget, finance, public account, macroeconomic policy and economic research meeting, he suggested the amendment of the Supplementary Act for that purpose.

"The direct election of members to the ECOWAS Parliament is long overdue. We must borrow a leaf from the European Parliament, where members are elected directly by their constituents. I think we have to work out a framework for the direct election of members to the ECOWAS Parliament. That will go a long way in solving most of the problems of the parliament, and I strongly believe in it. I spoke about it when I was making my contributions and I believe that is the best way to go. The modalities have to be worked out, and it is one of the issues we are going to agree on in this conference. The committee that is in charge will be given that responsibility to work out a framework on how to hold direct elections to ECOWAS Parliament. When that happens, I'm sure more powers will be given to the Parliament," he said.

Izunaso noted that, through direct elections, the people's representatives to the parliament would be elected directly, whether they have been parliamentarians or not. According to him, it has to be open for people who want to contest to do so because it is not only parliamentarians who have repository of knowledge.

The lawmaker said there were non-parliamentarians, who have more knowledge, who may even make better contributions if they were elected into the Parliament.

"The benefit of electing ECOWAS parliamentarians directly is that it will give them more authority, they will have more powers, they will have more checks and balances." This is as enshrined in the principles of Separation of Powers, because when you hold direct elections, you give more powers to the legislature. "So, it will more beneficial to the ECOWAS sub-region than it is today," the senator said.

Izunaso also called for the amendment of the Supplementary Act to give total legislative authority to the ECOWAS



Hon. Osita Izunaso

Parliament, stressing that there were a lot of gaps that needed to be closed. He said that a situation where the ECOWAS Parliament does not have legislative powers as regards budgeting, it would not augur well for the community. "So, we are proposing that the Supplementary Act be amended to give more powers to the ECOWAS Parliament, in terms of budgeting and also auditing. "This is because if you have a parliament that does not exercise legislative duties, then there's a gap, something is missing somewhere," he said. The parliamentarian also proposed that the amendments should include mandating that some key appointments in the ECOWAS parliament be subjected to parliamentary confirmation. He suggested that the appointment of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, the commissioners, and other top management staff should be subjected to parliamentary confirmation. On the threat of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to exit ECOWAS, the lawmaker said that their exit would bring about the dual challenges of funding and exclusion. "So, it's not only about the need for more funding, but it's more of inclusivity; If we say we are ECOWAS, every part of ECOWAS should be together. "We're not happy that any one of our member countries would want to pull out, because the more we are, the merrier, so we want them back. "But I believe that the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of Government are working towards resolving the issues," Izunaso added.

NILDS, AWALCO Unite to Address Regional Challenges and Promote Democracy

The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) and the Association of West African Legislative Correspondents (AWALCO) have established a contact committee to explore workable partnerships. This development came after a delegation from AWALCO visited NILDS in Abuja, Nigeria. According to the Director-General of NILDS, Prof. Abubakar Olarenwaju Sulaiman, the institute is committed to deepening democracy and strengthening legislative institutions in West Africa. He emphasized the importance of collaboration between NILDS and AWALCO in promoting legislative activities and capacity building for parliamentarians. The President of AWALCO, Innocent Odoh, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to partner with NILDS, citing the institute's expertise and experience in legislative activities. He highlighted the need for collaboration in addressing challenges facing West Africa, such as climate change, poverty, and insecurity. The partnership aims to leverage NILDS' resources and expertise to enhance the capacity of parliamentarians in West Africa, promote legislative activities, and address regional challenges. Both organizations agreed to work together to organize seminars, workshops, and conferences for their members. That's a great development! The establishment of a contact committee between NILDS and AWALCO is a significant step towards strengthening legislative institutions and deepening democracy in West Africa. By collaborating, both organizations can pool their resources and expertise to build the capacity of parliamentarians, promote legislative activities, and address pressing regional challenges such as climate change, poverty, and



Mr. Innocent Odoh presents a gift to the DG, NILDS, Prof. Abubakar Olarenwaju Sulaiman during the courtesy visit

insecurity. The partnership will likely lead to various initiatives, including seminars, workshops, and conferences, which will provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, skill building, and networking among parliamentarians and legislative correspondents.

This collaboration has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of legislative institutions in West Africa, ultimately contributing to the region's development and prosperity. It's encouraging to see organizations like NILDS and AWALCO working together towards a common goal of promoting democracy and good governance in the region.



ECOWAS Plastic Consumption to hit 12,000 Kilo tons by 2026



A World Bank Group and the Black Forest – supporters of West African regional action on plastics management and circular economy – made the projection at the delocalised meeting of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources/Energy, Mining/Infrastructure of the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Winneba, Ghana. The sub-region generated 6.9 million tons of plastic waste in 2018 alone, 80 per cent of which was left unmanaged and concentrated along coastal areas.

The group's representative, Darko Akomeah Kwadwo, said that the situation required stringent regulations and improved waste management and recycling systems, particularly for high-risk coastal areas. The theme of the joint meeting was, 'Plastic Waste Management: Challenges and Prospects in Implementing Community Policy', and one of the panel discussions brought together experts in relevant fields to deliberate on the way forward for West Africa. Kwadwo said: "In every West African country, over 80 per cent of plastic waste is not captured by waste management systems." Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana lead in total waste generation across West Africa. Economic growth in Nigeria and Ghana is directly correlated with high plastic waste and imports, highlighting economic influences on plastic consumption." He said developing existing frameworks in some countries into concrete action has remained the greatest challenge confronting the Sub-region in the collective drive to manage plastic waste. Overview of different policies and mechanisms introduced by the group include a single-use plastic ban, taxes on the import, export, and packaging of plastics, deposit and refund systems, subsidies for recycled

plastics, and extended producer responsibility. He also said the group support project aimed at helping to establish a comprehensive framework to manage plastic pollution and promote a circular economy (CE) in West Africa; address the escalating challenge posed by the use of plastic occasioned by rapid regional development as well as support the development of a regional action plan for plastics.

The group also came up with interim recommendations such as the need for harmonised and enforced policies, adoption of circular economy models, investment in waste management infrastructure, engaging the private sector and fostering innovations, enhancing research and capacity building as well as supporting public education campaigns. In his presentation titled, 'Health impact of plastic pollution in West Africa and plastic waste management within the ECOWAS member states, an environmental expert and trainer from Togo, Mr Nadjo N'Ladon, reiterated the perennial warning that the contact of plastic products with food poses health risks due to the presence of additives in the chemical composition of the plastic product. "Wastes such as sachets already contain recycled materials and as such, should not be used for packaging food, especially with hot food which melts the plastic and mixes it with the food. It can result in food poisoning. "Furthermore, the practice of incinerating plastic waste at landfills and concessions is a source of toxic emissions, causing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, cancer, reduced intelligence quotient, causes stunted growth and toxicity to reproductive organs", he said.

LGBTQ is Western Political Manipulation

- ECOWAS Commissioner

The ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs, Prof Fatou Sow Sarr, said gender and LGBTQ is a big lie and is a manipulation for political reasons, adding that gender is a science but sexual orientation is politics of the West. Sarr said this during an interactive session with ECOWAS Commissioners on the implementation of the programmes of their departments at the first ordinary session of ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja. Noting that masculine and feminine roles are societal constructs, Sarr said the issue of gender is a science, and there is a political agenda today in the world with regard to the issues of gender. According to her, in my department, nobody will come and tell me about LGBTQ. No partner will tell me about LGBTQ, I will not bend my back when it comes to partners.

While responding to concerns raised by some members of the parliament on the threat by the West to withdraw funding to ECOWAS if sexual orientation was not taken seriously in the region, she explained that contrary to the speculations that 70 per cent of funds to the regional bloc is not from European partners. She noted that it is only 30 per cent that comes from partners, stressing that the remaining 70 per cent is the contributions from members' states. Conceptualizing the term, the ECOWAS Commissioner noted that sexual

orientation is defined by Britannica as the enduring pattern of an individual's emotional, sexual, and/or romantic attraction. Sarr noted that sexual orientation is often divided into three components – attraction, behaviour, and self-identification. She stressed that there are myriad of ways to describe sexual orientation, but the most common include heterosexual, being attracted to the opposite gender; homosexual, being attracted to the same gender; and bisexual, being attracted to more than one gender. But while responding to inquiries from some members of the parliament over the controversies surrounding the Samoa agreement recently signed by Nigeria, she said: "I am a specialist on gender issues and my experience on the topic span over 30 years. We believe that gender is a science. The imposition of sexual orientation is a political agenda the Europeans want to impose on us. We should not allow them to succeed. "As long as I am around as the ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs, nobody will tell me anything about LGBTQ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer". Explaining the concept of gender, Sarr said only the male and female genders were recognised in Africa, stressing that the two were characterized by their assigned roles in society.

Africa's Economic Situation: "Poor Getting Poorer, Rich Getting Richer" - UNDP

A report by the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, says poverty is hindering development in the West African region, affecting millions of people who live below poverty line. The World Bank in 2021 estimated that an additional 29 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were pushed into extreme poverty due to COVID-19. The report which counted large informal economy, weak social protection systems, unfavourable business climate and inability to enforce regulations, hinder activities and formulation of the sector, energy crisis, as some of the attributes aggravating welfare in the region.

UNDP's Senior Economic Adviser, Dr. Tony Muhumuza, who presented the report on the floor of the first ordinary session of the sixth Legislature of the ECOWAS

Parliament in Abuja, said, the poorest 40% only receive 18% of income while the richest 10% take 30% of income.

He said Nigeria as the largest and most populous country in Africa, was severely affected by Covid 19 which contracted the country's GDP by 1.8 % in 2020, raised unemployment rate to 33.3% and pushed an estimated seven million Nigerians into poverty. Debates on poverty and inequality in West Africa followed with parliamentarians baring their minds on the situation and how it affects their Constituents. It is believed that innovation and digital transformation, young people, reliable energy dynamic interests and skill requirements for workforce transition are some of the drivers of change.

IHRC Urges Action on Human Rights Challenges in W/Africa, Cites Political Repression, Gender-Based Violence, and Terrorism”

"We must champion the defense and advancement of human rights within our borders and throughout the wider region," said ECOWAS Parliament representative, James Brown. "Through joint efforts and a steadfast commitment to integrating human rights considerations into our policies and initiatives, we can pave the way for a future that is characterized by peace, justice, and equality for every individual in West Africa."

address human rights issues effectively," said IHRC representative, John Smith. "Collaboration is paramount in ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights within the region." The IHRC has been actively engaged in promoting human rights in West Africa, including initiatives in Nigeria, Ghana, Cabo Verde, and Cote d'Ivoire. The organization has established partnerships with various

The International Human Rights Commission (IHRC) has called for urgent attention to the pressing human rights situation in West Africa, highlighting key challenges and proposing solutions. Addressing parliamentarians at the recently concluded ECOWAS Parliament First Ordinary Session of Year 2024 in Abuja, IHRC listed political repression, gender-based violence, lack of access to essential services, terrorism, and discrimination are among the primary challenges facing the region. "Authoritarian regimes dominate and suppress dissent, violating basic rights and perpetuating instability," said IHRC representative, Jane Doe. "Gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, remains prevalent, and access to quality education and healthcare is limited."

The IHRC also emphasised the impact of terrorism and insecurity on human rights, citing over 1,800 terrorist attacks in West Africa in the first half of 2023, resulting in nearly 4,600 deaths. To address these challenges, the IHRC proposed solutions, including promoting gender equality, enhancing access to justice, building partnerships, and regional and intergovernmental cooperation. "The International Human Rights Commission advocates for regional and intergovernmental cooperation to



stakeholders, including electoral commissions, to strengthen democracy and good governance. "We must champion the defense and advancement of human rights within our borders and throughout the wider region," said ECOWAS Parliament representative, James Brown. "Through joint efforts and a steadfast commitment to integrating human rights considerations into our policies and initiatives, we can pave the way for a future that is characterized by peace, justice, and equality for every individual in West Africa."