



FIFTH LEGISLATURE

2020 SECOND ORDINARY SESSION

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE, 13TH – 19TH JANUARY 2021

OPENING REMARKS BY H.E. SIDIE MOHAMED TUNIS
RT. HONORABLE SPEAKER OF THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT

13TH JANUARY 2021

**Your Excellency the President of the ECOWAS Commission,
Your Excellency the President of the ECOWAS Court of Justice,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors accredited to ECOWAS and the Federal
Republic of Nigeria,
Representatives of International and Inter-African Organizations
Members of the Bureau of the ECOWAS Parliament
Commissioners of ECOWAS,
Members of the ECOWAS Parliament,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. It gives me great pleasure to convene the 2nd ordinary session of the year 2020 but holding in 2021. Let me seize this moment to wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year. It is obvious that we have reflected on the past year, its challenges, and hurdles. In similar manner, we are grateful to our creator for the blessings of life and the opportunities we were accorded to have a meaningful impact on the lives of our people. I am hopeful that the New Year will provide windows of opportunity to do more, achieve more and record bountiful successes.

2. Permit me to extend warm welcome and sincere appreciation to the distinguished personalities who have joined us on the occasion of the opening of this Session. Your presence at these ceremonies always reminds us of the bonds that exist between our institutions and our collective resolve to work together in

unison for the good of the people we serve. I wish to thank in particular, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, His Excellency Jean Claude Kassi Brou, and acknowledge the presence of the President of the ECOWAS Court of Justice, Honorable Ambassadors and Representative of Institutions here present. I thank you for joining us!

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

3. It is our shared desire to hold our plenary sessions again as provided for by the Supplementary Act. Much as we had hoped to meet in person, our singular most important and powerful enemy, COVID-19, has again denied us the pleasantries that goes meeting together. The Pandemic still lingers and is having devastating social and economic consequences on our citizens. States across our region and the world are recording more cases and unfortunately, new strains of the virus are being discovered, making it difficult to bring the pandemic under control. Regulations and restrictions previously imposed and relaxed are being reinforced. If the current trend continues, we are likely to see the imposition of more stringent measures aimed at curtailing the spread of the virus.

4. While we celebrate the development of vaccines, I still wish to call on our citizens to avoid complacency and continue to observe all the existing health protocols. These protocols, which include the constant washing of hands under running water, wearing of face mask, maintaining social distance and respiratory hygiene, have proven very effective in curbing the spread of the disease and we must continue to practice them at all times.

5. Nevertheless the crisis, I am convinced, we will emerge stronger and more united. The challenges brought upon us by COVID- 19 must become an opportunity for change: a change that leaves no one behind; a change that makes our region a model of solidarity and sustainability.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

6. I wish to recall that though the pandemic greatly imparted our operations last year and still continues to have its toll on our programs, Parliament, however, acted with determination and swiftly implemented the necessary steps to continue its work under the current circumstances. Parliament can be proud to note that it exercised its prerogatives and continues to maintain democratic accountability throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

7. With your support, Dear Colleagues, and those of the committed and hardworking staff, we recorded great successes during the last quarter of 2020 which were very essential to the execution of Parliament’s programs for the year. I shall present to you a summary of our undertakings for 2020 at some point in my address. Before I do so, let me avail myself of the noble task to lay before you the important cardinal issues that will form the basis of our discussions during this Session and will characterize our conduct of business.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

8. This session, otherwise known as the “Budget Session”, provides the opportunity, in accordance with provisions of the Supplementary Act, for

Parliament to consider the Community's Budget. Specifically, the Parliament is expected to ensure that the estimates are directed towards programs that address the needs of the people. Here, I make specific reference to Article 17.2a, which states that "after the consideration of the Budget by the Administration and Finance Committee (AFC), the report of the AFC on the Budget shall be presented to Parliament during the Parliamentary Budget Session." In fulfillment of this statutory responsibility, we are expected to render opinion, including where necessary, proposals for the amendment to the draft Community Budget.

9. Let us be reminded in our consideration of the budget that we are now responding to the worst global pandemic in a century. We live in an era of great uncertainty and increasing risk. Overcoming these challenges in the interests of our fellow citizens should be our major priority. It is also not enough that the budget surmounts the immediate threats brought upon us by COVID-19, it should also advance efforts to make progress on other fronts and priorities which our region continues to value: democracy, rule of law, peace and conflict resolution, the fight against terrorism, poverty reduction and climate change. These are our core missions, and we must seek to deliver on them.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

10. It is pertinent for me to report that in November of 2020, the Bureau of Parliament, acting upon Article 25.B/3f/vii of the Supplementary Act Relating to the Enhancement of the Powers of the ECOWAS Parliament, met in Cotonou,

Republic of Benin to consider and adopt the 2021 Budget of the ECOWAS Parliament, which was formulated in accordance with the ECOWAS Financial Regulations and Accounting Guidelines and Procedure. The budget, as adopted by the Bureau, sought to strengthen economic and social development, reinforce security and support democratic values in the ECOWAS sub-region as directed by the Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government held on 23rd April 2020. It also focuses on high impact programs and projects that have long-lasting effect that meets priority needs of the ECOWAS Member States and represents an increase of **UA 785,404 or 4.00%** from the approved Revised Budget **UA 19,649,080** for **2020**.

11. Another important highlight of our session is the presentation of the Strategic Plan of the 5th Legislature (2020-2024) of the ECOWAS Parliament, which has been drafted by the Administration of the Parliament under the supervision of our outstanding Secretary General. This document, which is guided by the provisions of the Community Strategic Framework (CSF 2016 - 2020) and the current ECOWAS Vision 2020, identifies program areas, with themes and priorities that would systematically assist the Parliament in executing its mandate, as defined by the Supplementary Act. I shall be constituting an Ad-hoc Committee to consider this robust plan within the weeks following this session and report to the plenary during our next session for its consideration and adoption.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

12. As I mentioned earlier, the final quarter of 2020 was a very engaging period for the Parliament. We conducted three Joint Committee meetings:

a. Meeting of the Joint Committees on: Administration, Finance, and Budget; Macroeconomic Policies, Economic Research; Public Accounts; Trade, Custom & Free Movement;

b. Meeting of the Joint Committees on: Agriculture, Environment & Natural Resources; Industry and Private Sector; Health; Energy and Mines; Social Affairs, Gender & Women Empowerment;

c. Meeting of the Joint Committees on: Education, Science and Technology; Telecommunication and Information Technology; Political Affairs, Peace, Security and Infrastructure;

d. Meeting of the Ad-hoc Committee on the study for the Direct Elections of Members into the ECOWAS Parliament.

13. We shall in the course of this Session consider and adopt the reports emanating from those meetings and reports from other activities carried out during the period under review.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

14. In our engagements for the year 2021 and beyond, we must take into account the fundamental purpose for which we were established. The Supplementary Act lays the foundation of what is expected of us in the next three years and beyond. As such, the onus is upon all of us to ensure that it is implemented for the creation of a society that we envisage to build. We must also be driven by the urge to ensure representation of the entire population in the decision-making processes of the Community; ensure Peace, Security, Good Governance, Gender Equity and Human Rights; Strengthen the Institutional Role and Powers of the ECOWAS Parliament; and Promote Relations with Community Institutions, National Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Bodies and Partner Organisations. Those are the pillars upon which we shall position ourselves to consider and adopt the Draft Programme of Activity of the 5th Legislature of the ECOWAS Parliament, as well as consider and adopt the Activity Program for the 2021 Legislative Year within the course of this session.

15. I, therefore, wish to emphasize that we need no further explanations to remind us of the importance of this Session. My clarion call to us all is that we commit totality to the enormous task at hand and work diligently to exhaust the work program for this session within the limited time we have available to us.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

16. In 2020, our region recorded the holding of General Elections in five of our States, namely: Guinea, Cote D' Ivoire, Ghana, Burkinafaso, and the Republic of Niger. In each of these States, Parliament participated in the ECOWAS Elections Observation Missions. I am happy to report that all the missions were successful. I want to reiterate our previous call to all political actors to support the democratic process and act fervently within the confines of the law, even as cases arising from discontent are being adjudicated in some States. We shall continue to monitor, as closely as possible, all post electoral issues until they are legally and reasonably concluded.

17. We also continue to monitor, with keen interest, developments in Mali. You may recall that a Parliamentary Fact-Finding Mission was sent to that country in August of 2020, to ascertain unfolding developments at the time. Unfortunately, the mission could not go on as planned due to uncertainties brought upon the Republic by the staged coup. Nevertheless, it is still very important that we engage all stakeholders in the Malian political realm to work out genuine peace and stability in the West African State. Against this front, I, in consultation with the Bureau, shall reconstitute and dispatch another Fact-Finding Mission to the Republic of Mali in the no distant future. The objective of the Mission is to access the current political situation and advise Parliament on area that needs our intervention.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

18. On 16th November 2020, the ECOWAS Parliament celebrated 20 Years of Existence as a Representative Forum for the exchange of ideas that benefit the peoples of our Community. In my anniversary message to the Community, I assured the citizens of West Africa that the leadership of the 5th Legislature is committed towards ensuring that the ECOWAS Parliament is brought closer to them and that the integration mantra will not just be strengthened but seen to its finality. Today, I renew that pledge. We are determined to further consolidate the gains of the last two decades, and with your support and cooperation, we are sure to succeed.

19. I also wish to report that in the course of 2020, we received, with great emotion, the resignation of Honorable Prince Yormie Johnson of the Liberian Delegation, who served in the position of Fourth Deputy Speaker of the Fourth Legislature. We thanked him for his service to the Parliament and wished him well in his future endeavors. Whilst doing so, we also celebrate the election of new members of Parliament who were earlier sworn in during this session. Becoming a Member of Parliament, especially the ECOWAS Parliament, invariably places an honorable weight on one's head and as such, we welcome our dear new members with the optimism that they will join us in executing the tasks we've been elected to perform with diligence and dedication.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

20. Indeed 2020 was a tough year for our region and the entire world. It is important as a people that we pause and reflect, take time to remember and pay tribute both to those who have lost their lives and to everyone who has contributed to how we have faced and are facing the challenges together. I pause at that point to acknowledge the remarkable and joyful lives of some of those we have lost.

21. I recall the departure to the next life of three great sons of West Africa, His Excellency Former President Amadou Toumani Toure of Mali, His Excellency Former President Jerry John Rawlings of the Republic of Ghana and His Excellency Former President Mamodou Tandja of Niger Republic. We remember them for their contributions in transforming their respective States and their immeasurable support to Democracy in West Africa. I have already conveyed our heartfelt condolences to the respective Governments of the deceased former Presidents on your behalf.

22. We also use this moment to remember our colleagues; Honorable Johnson Andre Kouassi Ablom, serving Member of this Parliament from Togo and Honorable Mabutuh Vlah Nyepan, a former Member of this Parliament from Liberia. They both were dedicated members, who spent a huge part of their political career

serving the people they represented. We pray for the repose of their gentle souls and for the families they have left behind.

Honorable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

23. As I close my speech, I leave you with these words.

Yes, the task we face is daunting, further demanding choices are at hand. Yes, the uncertainty and anxiety about the future of lives and livelihoods is great. We do not know how soon we will be able to meet again in person to share those unique African handshakes and hugs. And yes, we are not ignorant enough to acknowledge that tougher days are ahead. However, I remain optimistic that we will prevail. We will come through this. And from the ashes of the pandemic, together, we will build a stronger, more resilient ECOWAS. In union strong, success is sure; we will overall prevail.

Long Live ECOWAS

Long Live ECOWAS Parliament

PLEASURE IS THEREFORE MINE TO DECLEAR THIS SECOND ORDINARY SESSION OF THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT FOR THE YEAR 2020 OPENED FOR BUSINESS