

Remarks
Chargé d’Affaires Sandra Clark

Distinguished Visitor/Media Day/Exercise Western Accord

Thiès
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(As prepared)

Good morning [ECOWAS general],
General Moore,
General Williams,
General Hummer, and
General Sow [attendees will need to be confirmed].

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking all the parties that have made this extraordinary exercise possible:

- Our Senegalese hosts, who have once again provided the exercise site and extensive logistical support, as well as their famous Senegalese *teranga*. Senegal's central role here is yet another example of its strong leadership in the region and of its military's impressive reputation.
- The Economic Community of West African States, which has been an equal partner from the very beginning of this year's exercise, and whose representatives and command structure have so professionally led its execution.
- And of course, the more than 800 soldiers, marines, gendarmes, and law-enforcement officials whose hard work and dedication have been on display during this year's exercise.

I would also like to greet the United States Africa Command and U.S. Army Africa, who have sponsored Western Accord since it began in 2012. Thank you for all of your hard work on this exercise. It has been a privilege to meet with you today.

It has been my pleasure to see some of the training sites that have been used during Western Accord 2014. I was also delighted to visit with some of the soldiers taking part in the exercise. They have been living under difficult conditions and undergoing stressful and realistic training almost continuously for the past two weeks.

I must say that what I've seen has been impressive. First, I would like to emphasize the scale. Western Accord is, far and away, the largest exercise of its kind in West Africa. It has brought together men and women from Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Ghana, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo, and the United States, as well members of the ECOWAS staff. Just to successfully gather together this number of troops, along with their tents, kitchens, medical stations, trucks, weapons, ammunition, and communications gear is in itself an accomplishment. It is also a credit to the multinational team that has carefully planned the exercise for more than a year.

More than just the logistics, though, I have been impressed by the soldiers, marines, and gendarmes themselves. They come from 10 different countries. But all of them have displayed the same professionalism, dedication to the mission, and sense of purpose. Despite differences in nationality and language, the men and women taking part in this exercise nonetheless share a bond in their dedication to their profession and in their service to their countries. This, I find truly inspiring. By facing common challenges and sharing in common successes, that bond is deepened. The participants are reminded of just how much they and the countries they represent have in common with each other.

Finally, I have been most impressed by the goal of the exercise itself. Since its beginning in 2012, Western Accord has sought to improve the capacity of all participating nations to plan for and carry out Peace Support Operations here in West Africa. As a brief glance around our region can tell you, there are few missions more important than this one right now. In West Africa alone, peacekeeping operations are currently underway in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Mali. I have no doubt that the lessons learned and relationships forged here over the past two weeks will be applied in these and future operations to help forge a lasting peace in countries torn apart by conflict. I want to thank ECOWAS for working with AFRICOM to make this exercise a success. ECOWAS has been an equal partner with AFRICOM from the very beginning. ECOWAS leaders helped plan the exercise. ECOWAS countries contributed substantial finances to it as well. In Western Accord 2014, we have a concrete example of how strong regional leadership can contribute to enhancing regional stability.

In closing, I would like to renew my thanks to the men and women of all the participating nations, ECOWAS, and our Senegalese hosts. Your tireless efforts have made this exercise a success. And more importantly, your sense of dedication has helped to advance an interest that all of our countries -- and families -- share: a peaceful, secure, and prosperous West Africa.