

Testimony
of
Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson
Bureau of African Affairs
U.S. Department of State
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“Countering Narcotics Threats in West Africa”

Chairman Feinstein, Co-Chairman Grassley, and distinguished members of the Caucus, thank you for inviting me to testify at this important hearing on countering narcotics threats in West Africa, alongside my colleagues from the Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). We are united in our understanding of the serious threat that drugs and drug trafficking are to Africa and to United States interests. Our partnership and coordination are essential to any success in deterring this threat.

West Africa Under Attack

West Africa is one of the most fragile regions in the world. In this region, 15 of 17 countries have experienced coups. Countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d’Ivoire have suffered from military and civilian conflicts. In recent years, there has been progress, and many countries in the region are enjoying the

fruits of greater democratization, economic development, and improved security. But these gains are fragile and are increasingly at risk from the threat posed by international drug trafficking and the criminal networks behind the trade.

The smuggling of illegal drugs through Africa, most notably cocaine and heroin, is increasingly alarming. Global demand for cocaine has shifted. The European cocaine market has grown four-fold in recent years. In 2007, an estimated 40 metric tons of cocaine with a wholesale value (in West Africa) of \$1.8 billion transited West Africa, comprising some 27 percent of Europe's annual demand. The value of trafficking flows exceeds the gross national income of some West African countries. For example, the Gross National Income (GNI) for Guinea Bissau was \$400 million. Before 2005, seizures from all of Africa rarely totaled more than one ton a year. In June 2010, a single seizure in The Gambia alone was two tons of cocaine. More recently, Cape Verde police seized about 1.5 tons of pure cocaine in a single case.

West Africa is appealing to traffickers for a host of reasons. Weak institutions, political instability and corruption create additional openings for illicit drug trade. For instance, staggering levels of poverty promote a susceptibility to corruption: on average, 50 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day. The trafficking of illegal drugs is a lucrative occupation in a society where money is scarce and jobs are hard to come by. Geography is another factor due to the

relatively short distance between South America and Africa. Dakar, Senegal, is 700 miles closer to Recife, Brazil, than it is to Paris, France. West Africa's borders also are mostly unguarded and porous. The region boasts more than 2,600 miles of coastline. In perspective, our Pacific coast (minus Alaska) and Atlantic coast each are less than 2,100 miles long. West Africa's area and population are slightly less than that of our contiguous 48 states.

Foreign drug traffickers usually prefer fragile countries with weak law enforcement and judicial systems. They thrive in areas where they can operate with impunity – either because legal systems don't work, or because they can be easily corrupted. Many West African states have weak controls of their financial systems, weak judicial systems, and a pervasive susceptibility to corruption. The creation of resilient institutions takes time and the lack of governance attracts transnational criminal networks. In some countries, we can rely on local cooperation to prosecute and expel foreign traffickers, especially if such action displaces outsiders from the trade. However, such cooperation is compromised when the foreign traffickers are able to cultivate complex, symbiotic networks with the local officials and with local law enforcement authorities. The flow of drugs through West Africa risks undermining the state by weakening its institutions, its local communities, and its social fabric.

Drug Trafficking Harms United States Interests

Drug trafficking threatens good governance, a principal focus of U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance in West Africa. Trafficking normally is facilitated by corrupting public officials from law enforcement, the judiciary and to the highest levels of government. Second, drug money could be used to finance or destabilize elections.

Being a transit state is also detrimental to a country's development and economic growth. Governments compromised by drug trafficking have less to invest in health or education, because those resources have been diverted to address the insecurity resulting from trafficking-related violence. Investors are less inclined to do business in transit countries: unstable environments are risky and operating in high-crime areas entails higher business costs.

Our U.S. policy priority to strengthen public health in Africa also comes under attack from drug trafficking because of the risks associated with counterfeit drugs and the development of a local user base. Local drug consumption appears to be growing rapidly in the region, with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimating upwards of 2.5 million drug users in West and Central Africa. Of the 35 tons of cocaine thought to have reached West Africa in 2009, about 21 tons continued on to Europe — with the remainder consumed or stored locally. Aside from the illicit drugs smuggled through West Africa, according to a

2009 UNODC report, 50-60 percent of all medications used in West Africa may be substandard or counterfeit. This increases health risks in a region where there is high demand for anti-infective and anti-malarial drugs, and promotes the development of drug-resistant strains which are a hazard to the entire world.

Finally, our U.S. policy priority to prevent, mitigate, and resolve armed conflict is only complicated by drug trafficking and its effects. UNODC has noted that,

“The relationship between diamond smuggling and the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia has been well documented, but, at their peak, profits accruing from this activity amounted to some tens of millions of dollars per year. The potential destabilizing influence of the cocaine traffic, where the value of a single consignment can exceed that sum, is very real.”

In West Africa, drug-trafficking negatively impacts the ability of many nations to provide effective security and to mitigate internal and cross-border conflict.

United States Government Efforts to Stop the Drug Flow and Obstacles

Illegal drug trafficking in West Africa has reached epidemic proportions and the problem could get much worse before it gets better, especially in countries like Guinea-Bissau. There are very few among the Bissau-Guinean elite who have not been implicated in narco-trafficking. U.S. Government efforts to improve the

justice sector's capacity to combat drug trafficking have resulted in a marked improvement by the relatively competent and credible Judicial Police in arresting and detaining narco-traffickers and seizing significant quantities of narcotics. Regrettably, repeated military and civilian intervention has compelled authorities to turn over evidence and release the suspects. Furthermore, the April 12 coup executed by both military and civilian officials led to a termination of U.S. bilateral assistance on April 26th.

Consequently, beyond working to restore civilian authority and constitutional rule of law in Guinea-Bissau, we have a few keys in our efforts to combat this scourge. The first is to consult with and work alongside our international partners in applying targeted sanctions (e.g., travel bans and asset freezes) on the worst or most vulnerable offenders. Second, we will have to continue to pursue security sector reform in Guinea-Bissau, to remove corrupt elements from its military, strengthen law enforcement, and instill respect for civilian government. Related to this goal are credible elections and the development of honest, efficient civilian government and non-government institutions. Third, we must pursue a policy of "containment" by helping Guinea-Bissau's neighbors improve the capacity of their customs, border, and port authorities. As the region's commercial and aviation hub, Dakar, Senegal, is the primary destination for the majority of cocaine imported to Guinea-Bissau bound

for re-sale outside Africa. We intend to collaborate closely with the newly-elected Sall Administration and others who share our commitment by cutting off the flow of illicit narcotics across the region.

Partnerships are an important part of our strategy to interrupt these drug flows. In Nigeria, heroin and cocaine transit the country on their way to markets in Europe, and to a lesser degree, the United States. In 2008, we donated modern drug scanning equipment for Nigeria's use in four international airports. Now, Nigerian law enforcement officials arrest a steady stream of drug couriers at the main airport in Lagos, and the Nigerian Drug and Law Enforcement Agency successfully uses our training and drug detecting kits at other Nigerian points of entry, including land borders.

The Department of State recognizes the serious threats posed by drug-trafficking in West Africa. With our interagency colleagues, we have collaborated to develop the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative (WACSI). While my colleague, Assistant Secretary Brownfield, will further elaborate on WACSI (pronounced WOX-SEE) in his remarks, I want to emphasize two aspects of the initiative that I consider to be particularly important: the emphasis on supporting the development of the local capacity of our African partners, as well as regional ownership of the strategy to address drug-trafficking in West Africa.

Our African partners recognize the danger and have at least started laying a policy foundation to address the problem. In October 2008, Ministers of Justice and Interior from Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) met in Cape Verde and adopted a “Regional Action Plan to Address the Growing Problem of Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa.” Two months later, ECOWAS’ Heads of State and ECOWAS leadership met in Nigeria and released a “Political Declaration on the Prevention of Drugs Abuse, Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in West Africa.” They proclaimed their strong commitment to fight illicit drug trafficking, diversion of chemical precursors and other related crimes, to prevent drug abuse and provide treatment and support for those who abuse drugs and those dependent on drugs.

While ECOWAS and its member states demonstrated early leadership on this regional issue, most of the real substantive work still remains to be done. ECOWAS, its member states, and we, their international partners all need to do more collectively. The more synchronized and coordinated our efforts are, the more effective our collective engagement can be. We continue to strive towards African ownership, to execute in a comprehensive approach, and to promote sustainable solutions.

Finally, there is much that the United States can learn and do in concert with our European and Latin American partners, and with international organizations in order to fight increasing narco-trafficking in the region. Increasing our own knowledge of, and ability to track, trans-Atlantic contraband and developing African regional capacity through a reliable, willing partner (such as Cape Verde) could be a productive and cost-effective approach. Our European partners are focused largely on interdiction, which is logical as the majority of the cocaine flows to Europe. We are primarily working to build the law enforcement and judicial capacity of West African governments to effectively counter the Drug Trafficking Organizations. This complements the European focus and fits well with U.S. security, governance, and development objectives in West Africa.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues, listening to your insights, and consulting with you further as we address this serious issue. Thank you for your invitation, and for your consideration and support.