



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**WEST AFRICA CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS
IN ARMED CONFLICT**

(Dakar, 13 April 2007): From 17 to 19 April, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will hold a regional conference on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in West Africa.

This meeting aims to strengthen the collaboration between international and regional institutions in order to ensure better protection of civilians in armed conflict. This implies closer collaboration between the humanitarian, diplomatic and military stakeholders in situations that involve peacekeeping forces. Participants will include eight international and regional institutions (the Economic Commission of West Africa, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, African Union, European Union, Internationale Organisation de la Francophonie, Lusophonie, and Arab League) as well as organizations of the United Nations system and their partners.

In the last decades, West Africa has seen numerous armed conflicts leading to complex humanitarian situations and severe human rights violations. Displaced persons, especially women, often face sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers, physical insecurity, violation of the humanitarian and civilian character of refugee camps, and intolerance towards refugees and third country nationals.

“Protection means recognizing that fundamental rights are in danger each day, sometimes in subtle ways. Protection also involves boosting individual, collective and global solidarity between those who live in protected areas and those whose rights are alienated,” said Hervé Ludovic de Lys, head of OCHA’s regional office for West Africa.

In addition to the many legal instruments already existing, such as International Humanitarian Law and the international human rights law, the United Nations Security Council has dealt on numerous occasions with questions regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Between 1999 and 2006, the Security Council adopted three resolutions on the protection of civilians. Moreover, the mandates of the United Nations peacekeeping forces now systematically address the protection of civilians. On a regional level, the AU and ECOWAS strive towards strengthening their capacities in this sector.

During the conference in Dakar, participants will discuss protection of civilians before, during and after conflicts. Currently, three instruments can be employed for this task: mediation, peacekeeping and humanitarian prevention.

This conference is the first of a series that will deal with all of the continents. It will take place at the hotel Méridien Président aux Almadies in Dakar. A closing press conference will be held Thursday, 19 April at 12.30pm at the hotel Méridien Président.

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