

Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations -Public Meeting on cross-border issues in West Africa (25 March 2004)

Mr. Minister,

You have honoured the Security Council by your decision to be with us to preside over this Security Council meeting today on West Africa. This is one indication of the contribution which France is making for restoration of peace, stability and economic progress in the important sub-region of Africa. We welcome the participation and the statement of the Secretary General in the debate. Let me also welcome the distinguished Foreign Minister of Ghana Mr. Addo in his capacity as representative of the ECOWAS as well as Mr. Chambas, Executive Secretary of the ECOWAS. We thank them for their views which have enriched our proceedings.

Our discussion today is an important follow-up to the Security Council Mission to West Africa last year. We thank the Secretary General for his report on ways and means to combat sub-regional and cross-border problems in West Africa. Our appreciation is due also to the efforts of Mr. Ould Abdallah, Special Representative of the Secretary General for West Africa.

The Secretary General's report focuses primarily on three issues – small arms, mercenaries and child soldiers. These are important issues indeed. However, as the introductory part of the report notes, these are but a few of the numerous factors of instability in West Africa. We agree with the Secretary General's observation that the relationship of these three factors with the cycle of violence and instability is primarily symptomatic, not causal. If there were no armed conflicts, the demand for and use of small arms, mercenaries and child soldiers would also cease to exist.

The specific recommendations made by the Secretary General provide a useful framework for the Council's efforts to redress the situation through a regional approach. Many of the recommendations related to enhanced cooperation and coordination within the UN system, strengthening of existing structures and institutions at national and sub-regional levels, better implementation of existing conventions and legal instruments, DDR and security sector reforms, and building of confidence and trust between the countries of the region merit close attention by the United Nations, the ECOWAS, the regional governments and international partners in their respective spheres. A number of these recommendations have been reflected in the Presidential Statement that the Council is going to adopt today.

Mr. President,

As others have said, we need more effective use of the peacekeeping missions. They are an important tool in the hands of the Council to help address underlying problems including cross-border issues. Their deployment, renewal of mandate and drawdown should be carefully planned keeping in view the regional context. Pakistan has participated in UNAMSIL and now in UNMIL. We will be contributing troops for Cote d'Ivoire also. The Pakistani contingent in Sierra Leone, comprising a brigade

group, is deployed in the sensitive diamond mining areas in Eastern Sierra Leone. Just across the border, two Pakistani battalions are deployed with UNMIL in a difficult area which has been the scene of militant activity in recent past. In the context of checking cross-border movement of militants, Pakistani troops deployed in Sierra Leone have participated in operations specifically conceived for the purpose such as operation 'Blue Horizon'.

As we set out to support a regional approach for West Africa, we must be cognizant of two overarching requirements: a participatory process, and the capacity to implement. In our view, better and effective implementation can be achieved, especially by individual states, if they are fully engaged in the process including through transparent and open decision-making. The same applies to sub-regional organizations. It would be logical to harmonize policies at all levels in order to derive optimum benefit from cooperation with sub-regional organizations. The Council should also be mindful of the capacities at national level to carry out actions being proposed to the states of the sub-region in context of a regional approach. The possibilities for assistance for such capacity building must be carefully examined.

In our view, it is equally important to identify and address the root causes of conflict. These causes involve, among other things, the exclusion of regional, ethnic or religious groups from participation in political and economic power sharing. Human rights violations are a result of this situation. Underdevelopment, poverty, widespread unemployment, hunger and disease, poor governance and lack of accountability, weak state institutions and lack of state authority further compound the problems. Many of the conflicts are rooted in the struggle for power and scramble for resources. As we seek to eliminate or contain these conflicts, we have to cut off the sources of financing that enable the warring parties to sustain the conflict through acquisition of arms, hiring of mercenaries and use of child soldiers.

Mr. President,

My delegation has stated on earlier occasions that durable solutions to the complex crises in Africa can only be achieved through a comprehensive and composite approach. No approach can be comprehensive without an adequate focus on development. Economic progress and development and not punitive measures should be the preferred course of action. Even in applying sanctions, the approach must be comprehensive and balanced. Firstly, the impact of sanctions, especially economic sanctions against developing countries, has to be compensated through other means to avoid undue suffering caused to innocent people. Secondly, the scope of sanctions, when applied, should address all the causes of the conflict. For example, the linkage between the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the fueling of conflicts in West Africa is well established. The emphasis so far has been on the supply or production side of the illegally exploited natural resources. In our view, it is equally important to focus on the demand or consumption side of this illicit activity. Naming and shaming and sanctions should be applied to all those who are involved. Those who finance these wars by buying and trading the illegally exploited resources of Africa are the merchants of death. Their crime is no less than that of those who finance terrorism. We need to trace the money trail back to the sources of financing of these callous and bloody wars in Africa.

We hope that the future reports from the Secretary General on West Africa will devote attention to these and other important cross cutting issues to complement the recommendations made in the present report with a view to evolving a truly comprehensive strategy for conflict prevention, crisis management and post conflict stabilization in the sub region.

Thank you