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PRESS RELEASE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2017 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE WANEP Affirms Respect, Safety and Dignity for All

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) joins the global community to commemorate the 2017 International Day of Peace on September 21, 2017. This year's theme; "Respect, Safety and Dignity for All" re-emphasizes WANEP's vision of a West Africa characterized by peaceful communities where the dignity of the human person is paramount and where the people can meet their basic human needs and decide their own direction. Peace Day provides a globally shared date for all humanity to commit to Peace above all differences and to contribute to building a Culture of Peace.

Unfortunately, building peace has become a daunting task going by recent catastrophic global events, particularly the climate change that has impacted on human security with grave consequences. At the international level, the world is still reeling from the aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Jose and Maria in the United States and the Caribbean which have left a wave of destruction in their wake. The West African region has not been spared either from the consequences of climate change and natural disasters. Devastating floods and mudslides caused over a 1,000 deaths in Sierra Leone and destroyed infrastructures and properties.

WANEP is concerned that these new threats have further exacerbated existing security threats especially in the West African region which is still grappling with the after effects of the Ebola epidemic and other pandemics, internecine wars, persistent ethnic/religious/communal clashes and political violence. A United Nations report states that Boko Haram operations in the Sahel region of Liptako-Gourma and Nigeria alone resulted to an estimated 1.2 million people fleeing their homes to neighboring countries of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Niger thus worsening the refugee crisis in the region. Of further concern is the lingering political crisis in Togo, which has already resulted in gross human rights abuses and a breakdown of law and order with grave consequences on the economy of the country.

WANEP notes that these latest catastrophes have serious implications on ongoing efforts to promote global peace and stability. WANEP recognizes that the attainment of sustenance peace in the face of increasing human security threats is a herculean task that requires the collective commitment of well-meaning stakeholders. As the world marks another day of peace, WANEP applauds the numerous peace actors that continue to risk their lives to change the violent narratives of our communities, countries, continents and our world while recognizing the many fallen heroes who unfortunately lost their lives in the process.

As the world celebrates the International Day of Peace, WANEP reiterates that more concerted efforts by individuals, regional and continental bodies, States and non-state actors and all relevant stakeholders, are needed to tackle the growing threats to human peace and security and reaffirms its conviction that a culture of non-violence is imperative for sustainable peace in the region. WANEP remains committed within the mandate of its work to the philosophy of non-violence through its peace education program which is in tandem with the ECOWAS' Peace Education policy. It is aimed at equipping individuals and communities with the necessary skills to transform their communities into a haven of peace. The Peace Education program of WANEP promotes peace education curriculum at secondary, tertiary and policy levels and is borne out of the firm belief that when peace is properly inculcated in the minds of children, youth and adults, they will ultimately become agents of change. As Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Indian independence movement and pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non-violence once said; "Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man".

This year's Peace Day theme re-echoes the TOGETHER global campaign that promotes respect, safety and dignity for everyone forced to flee their homes in search of a better life. The campaign brings together the United Nations Systems and member countries, the private sector, civil society, academic institutions and individual citizens in a global partnership in support of diversity, non-discrimination, protection and acceptance of refugees and migrants. In this regards, WANEP expresses concern for the increasing number of refugees across the world and re-affirms its commitment to the campaign to address the plight of refugees.

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