Introduction

ECONEC held a videoconference which lasted 03 hours 50 minutes on 15th April 2020 to discuss with sixteen participants, including seven electoral commissions, on the “Impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on the upcoming elections in the ECOWAS region.”

The main objective of the meeting was to bring together the Presidents of the Electoral Commissions preparing for elections, representatives of the ECOWAS Directorate of Political Affairs and the Electoral Assistance Division, and electoral experts from the region for an open discussion in order to anticipate on the new challenges related to the health crisis in the region.

Mr. Francis Oke, Head of the ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division and Permanent Secretary of ECONEC moderated the meeting. He started by presenting the agenda, which was unanimously adopted.

The session commenced with the introductory remarks from the ECOWAS Director of Political Affairs, Dr. Aderemi Ajibewa, who thanked the Presidents of the Electoral Commissions in attendance, ECONEC and OSIWA for this meeting which is timely for all countries preparing to conduct crucial elections in West Africa.

Dr. Ajibewa highlighted that it is important to take into account the legal framework of each country concerned and the provisions that provide for emergency, war or natural disaster making it impossible to organize elections at the right date. He also recommended to review the chronograms of Member States in order to identify the activities affected by the pandemic and to reflect on possible readjustments, by adopting a consensual or inclusive approach with innovative solutions.
He stated that the pandemic is causing great concern at the regional level and welcomed this initiative as an opportunity to discuss its impact on the upcoming elections. He cited the examples of Niger, which has already suspended some training sessions provided for in its electoral calendar, and Ghana, which is concerned about meeting the deadline for the delivery of kits to be used for the establishment of a new electoral register.

He recalled that the meeting provides the opportunity for the ECOWAS Commission to listen to practitioners in order to understand the challenges and see how and in what form it may assist the Member States concerned.

Mrs. Ayisha Osori, Executive Director of OSIWA on her part, congratulated all the participants and ECONEC for this collaboration. She underscored the importance of this meeting and of listening to the election administrators of the sub-region who, in her view, need to exchange and prepare in order to avoid being caught off guard. She lastly indicated that it is crucial to ensure full involvement of all stakeholders in the electoral process and to consider appropriate measures in this context as the pandemic may last for a very long time.

I- Overall situation of the evolution of the pandemic

Mr. Raouf Salami, Programme Officer at ECONEC made a presentation on the overall situation of the pandemic. He shared some statistics with the participants, particularly at the global level with 2,002,736 confirmed cases of coronavirus contamination and 126,786 deaths as of 15th April 2020. Regarding West Africa, especially in Member States holding elections in 2020, the following table displayed on the screen during the meeting gives an overview of the evolution of the pandemic between 5th and 12th April 2020:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COVID-19 PANDEMIC UPDATE</th>
<th>ECOWAS REGION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05 April 2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL CONFIRMED CASES</td>
<td>22 345 262 214 121 184 232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL DEATHS</td>
<td>0 17 3 5 0 10 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 April 2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL CONFIRMED CASES</td>
<td>35 497 574 566 250 529 323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL DEATHS</td>
<td>1 27 5 8 0 12 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Salami noted that the number of confirmed cases in several countries in the region had more than doubled in the space of a week and that Member States were likely to find themselves rapidly faced with an influx of 1,000 to 1,500 patients to be cared for in

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isolation centres. In that regard, he affirmed that the threat was real. He recalled that several countries in the sub region had taken strict measures, including total containment. He indicated that to contain this pandemic, more stringent measures would have to be imposed within the sub-region.

II- Status of preparedness and current or probable impacts of the pandemic on the activities of the electoral agenda of the Commissions:

The moderator then urged the representatives of the electoral commissions to take stock of the preparations so far and to highlight the current or probable impacts on the activities of their electoral agenda. The member Commissions concerned are the INEC of Burkina Faso, the IEC of Cote d'Ivoire, the INEC of Guinea, the Electoral Commission of Ghana, the INEC of Niger and the ANEC of Benin.

1. Burkina Faso

Mr. Ahmed Newton Barry, President of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) of Burkina Faso welcomed and thanked the organizers for the initiative. Taking stock of the situation in his country, he indicated that the major concern in Burkina Faso was the finalisation of the electoral register which was in progress when the government decided on 8th March 2020 to stop the registration of voters due to the risks related to the covid-19 pandemic. He indicated that the registration process would last another 70 days in the field to be completed and an additional 60 days, including 30 days in the lab to remove duplicates and 30 days to complete the litigation phase. Altogether, INEC will need 130 days to finalise the electoral register. In view of the above and given that the elections are scheduled to be held on 22nd November 2020, Mr. Barry presented the following scenarios:

a- Scenario 1: If the pandemic were under control by the end of April and voter registration resumed on 1st May, the electoral register could be finalized in early September for elections to be held on 22nd November 2020, as scheduled.

b- Scenario 2: If the peak of covid-19 were to pass at the end of May and INEC resumed registration activities on 1st June, the process would be finalised in early November. In this case, it would be virtually impossible to hold the elections on 22nd November 2020.

c- Scenario 3: According to Mr. Barry, the worst-case scenario would be if registration did not resume before July. Then it would be highly likely that the elections would not be held in 2020.

Mr. Barry also informed the participants that the government of Burkina Faso had convened a meeting of the political parties of the majority and the opposition for Friday, 17th April 2020, with a view to providing an opportunity for INEC to present these different scenarios to the stakeholders concerned and finding the practical arrangements that would suit the situation that might arise.
2. **Cote d'Ivoire**

Mr. Ibrahime Coulibaly-Kuibiert, President of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of Cote d'Ivoire thanked ECONEC for the initiative, giving them the opportunity to highlight their difficulties. He took the opportunity to convey, on behalf of the IEC of Cote d'Ivoire, his sincere condolences to all the families grieving throughout the world, particularly in the sub-region.

Mr. Coulibaly-Kuibiert began his statement by mentioning that, in conformity with the Ivorian Constitution, the Presidential election is scheduled for 31st October 2020 and the Electoral Code stipulates that the provisional voters’ list must be displayed at least 3 months before the election. He then indicated that the sensitization, registration and display of the voters’ list takes 4 months. As in Burkina Faso, after displaying the list, the registration of complaints, processing and production of electoral documents (voters’ list, registration lists and voters’ cards) must be carried out for another 3 months. Mr. Coulibaly said that overall, it would take them 7 months to finalize these activities before the election of 31st October 2020. However, in view of the current situation related to covid-19, the IEC has decided to reduce this period to 5 instead of 7 months.

Also like Burkina Faso, the IEC has considered different scenarios. The President of the IEC stated that 31st May 2020 should be considered as the deadline, because after this date it would not be feasible to hold the election as scheduled.

The Chairman of the IEC informed the meeting that the Government of Cote d’Ivoire has taken measures and declared a state of health emergency, which prevents the Electoral Commission from undertaking preparatory actions for establishment of the voters’ list. Nevertheless, if the measures were lifted by 30th May 2020, the IEC will proceed with the training in the first ten (10) days of June and data collection from 10th to 23rd June 2020 in order to produce the provisional voters’ list by 27th July.

Mr. Coulibaly also mentioned that Article 47 of the Electoral Code stipulates that in the event of a natural disaster that prevents the normal conduct of an election or prevents the proclamation of the results, the Chairman of the IEC may refer the matter to the Constitutional Council to establish the circumstances preventing the normal conduct of the election. It is therefore up to the Constitutional Council to order the cessation of operations and the IEC should report regularly to the Constitutional Council until the event that disrupts the normal conduct of the election or prevents the proclamation of the results comes to an end. From that moment on, the Constitutional Council shall indicate a period not exceeding 3 months to the Electoral Commission to organize the election or proclaim the results.

Mr. Coulibaly further underlined that the Electoral Commission was still carrying out some activities that were not in contradiction with the measures taken by the government. This includes the deployment of non-sensitive material to the local commissions. However, the training of electoral agents and local commissioners cannot be undertaken now because one of the measures taken by the government is the prohibition of meetings of more than fifty (50) persons in public places which are moreover closed.

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3. **Guinea**

Mr. Bakary Mansaré, Vice-President of the INEC of Guinea, like his predecessors, thanked ECONEC and OSIWA for the initiative. He then recalled that on 22nd March 2020, INEC Guinea organized legislative elections coupled with a referendum. As at 3rd March 2020, the preparations for these elections were proceeding normally but as soon as the first cases of covid-19 in Guinea were announced, there were some rearrangements in the conduct of electoral activities. INEC had to take decisions and directives in consultation with the Constitutional Court. Mr. Mansaré mentioned that the impact of the covid-19 pandemic revealed the unprecedented nature of the ongoing electoral process and made it possible to modify certain working methods.

He also said that 25 electoral districts had been identified outside the country by the INEC, but that finally at a plenary session, after examining the decisions of the administrative authorities of the foreign countries concerned, the INEC had found it impossible to hold the election in those 25 constituencies in which Guineans living abroad were registered. The matter was referred to the Constitutional Court, which then ordered a halt to the electoral activities in the 25 foreign constituencies.

He then explained that in the case of Guinea, the revision of the voters' lists, the printing of the final voters' lists and the distribution of voters' cards had already been undertaken. A directive has been issued to inform voters that the voter cards used during the legislative and referendum elections will also be used for the upcoming presidential election.

Furthermore, in the interests of the country, targeted measures have been taken in conjunction with the local administrative authorities, the political parties involved in the electoral process and the National Health Security Agency. These preventive measures included:

- The spraying of polling centres and stations before and after the vote;
- The social distance of one (01) meter between voters;
- The provision in each polling station of a soap and water point and bottles of hydro-alcoholic disinfectant gel;
- The constant cleaning of tables and booths by the assessors wearing gloves on a regular basis;
- Mandatory handwashing for voters before and after the vote;
- The obligation for voters to leave the premises immediately after voting;
- Limited access to a maximum of 20 people at a time in the rooms where results were centralized;
- Mandatory wearing of masks for election officials.

Mr. Mansaré recalled that the media had raised awareness of these preventive measures in order to reassure voters.

Currently, the state of health emergency restricts travel and the INEC is waiting for the measures in place to be lifted by 15th May 2020 in order to produce its report on the legislative elections and referenda. The INEC will then organize a workshop to review these elections, which will be supplemented by a draft timetable for the presidential election.

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He informed the meeting that the country was moving towards the next presidential election in a context of political disagreements arising from the holding of the legislative and referendum elections, as well as challenges related to the revision of the voters' list and the exclusion of a number of voters following the ECOWAS technical mission for the audit of the register.

He concluded by indicating that the new constitution was promulgated and will have implications on the electoral code. He also indicated that an inclusive political meeting is necessary to ensure that the forthcoming presidential election is held in a peaceful atmosphere.

4. Ghana

On behalf of the Electoral Commission of Ghana, Mr. Samuel Teteh, Vice-President in charge of operations, thanked and congratulated the organizers of the meeting.

He informed the participants that the official date for the general elections in Ghana is 7th December 2020 and indicated that after consulting with the Ministry of Health and the Ghana National Medical Service on the possible impact of the pandemic on the ongoing electoral process, the Ghana Electoral Commission postponed the commencement of the new electoral registration though it maintained some election preparations. The registration process is scheduled to start in June and is expected to be completed by mid-July 2020. He indicated that the Electoral Commission divided the polling stations into clusters, each composed of five (05) polling stations and 8 days will be required for the registration of voters in a cluster. Therefore, it will take a total of 40 days to complete this exercise. Then the Election Commission will need 5 days for the review of the voters’ lists and then the display of the provisional lists would take place from 15th to 28th September 2020. Then between 12th and 15th October 2020, the EC will proceed with the verification of the authenticity of the entries on the electoral lists. The submission of candidatures is scheduled from 5th to 9th October 2020 and the advance voting will be held on 1st December 2020.

Mr. Samuel Teteh also announced that regarding training, the commission intends to train leaders who in turn will train actors at the grassroots. It will therefore be a training of trainers. However, according to a presidential directive aimed at containing and combating the covid-19, public gatherings of more than 20 people are currently banned in Ghana. To circumvent the measure, the Commission decided to train in batches of twenty (20) and repeat the training as many times as necessary.

In addition, the electoral commission decided to acquire personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks, hydro alcoholic solutions, soap, thermo flashes, and gloves to be used during training and voting. Another measure that is envisaged to be taken is social distancing during all activities.

Lastly, Mr. Samuel Teteh congratulated the representative of INEC of Guinea for the actions taken and indicated that Ghana will undoubtedly draw inspiration from measures such as the spraying of polling stations before and after the vote.

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5. **Niger**

Mr. Issaka Souna, President of the INEC of Niger expressed sincere thanks to the organizers of the meeting.

He presented the context in which Niger must organize elections in the last quarter of 2020 and early 2021. He mentioned the current challenges Niger is facing, a vast country (1,287,000 km²) which borders several countries with security challenges, including Nigeria, Mali, Libya, Chad and Burkina Faso. The Covid-19 pandemic is thus added to these challenges and makes the situation even more difficult. He informed the meeting that following the reform of August 2017, Niger has set up a permanent INEC and has embarked for the first time in its history on the establishment of a biometric electoral register.

Prior to this initiative, citizens in possession of identity documents in the country represented approximately 30 per cent of the population. In order to address this shortfall, mobile court hearings had been held for six months and made it possible to issue civil status documents to as many citizens as possible. Following the identification of the technical operator, INEC divided the country into two zones and began registration operations in October 2019. While the INEC was finalizing the process in the first zone, INEC teams were attacked in December 2019 by armed terrorists who killed the 15 soldiers who were escorting the convoy.

Mr. Souna also indicated that due to the persistent terrorist threat, the INEC was forced to suspend the registration in seven Districts in the Tillaberi region and one District in the Tahoua region. He informed the meeting that despite the pandemic, the registration continued in the 2nd zone. As elsewhere in the region, the INEC has put in place measures to protect the stakeholders during its activities:

- Handwashing at the entrance of the registration centres;
- Implementation of registration operations, end of operations followed by handwashing before leaving the premises;
- Social distancing (1 to 2 m);
- Masks, gloves, soap and hydro alcoholic gel for the personnel deployed;

Regarding the preparatory activities for voting in the diaspora, the INEC was faced with the obligation to postpone the registration in seven Districts in the Tillaberi region and one District in the Tahoua region. He informed the meeting that despite the pandemic, the registration continued in the 2nd zone. As elsewhere in the region, the INEC has put in place measures to protect the stakeholders during its activities:

Faced with this concern, the INEC sent recently a letter to the Minister in charge of elections to inform him of all these challenges and urge him to invite the various stakeholders in the elections, including the Constitutional Court, to jointly find the required solutions.

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After recalling the timetable of the next regional and communal elections scheduled for 20th November 2020 and the presidential and legislative elections (1st round of the presidential election and the legislative elections on 27th December 2020 and in case of a possible 2nd round of the presidential election on 20th February 2021), Mr. Souna concluded by indicating that if security and health threats persisted, especially the health threat because it has no limits or borders and spreads everywhere, INEC would have serious challenges in complying with the current schedule.

6. Benin

Professor Emmanuel Tiando, President of Benin’s ANEC first extended his friendly greetings to his ECONEC counterparts participating in the meeting and then thanked the organizers of the event.

He specified that Benin’s ANEC does not organize presidential election in 2020 but rather local elections which are scheduled to be held on 17th May 2020, indicating that this date was set since 22nd January 2019. This led to the development of an electoral timetable which was unveiled on 2nd February 2020.

Preparatory activities were in progress when the pandemic broke out in Benin. In this context, the President of the Republic of Benin held a meeting with the Presidents of Institutions to consider the issue of continuing the electoral process despite the Covid-19 pandemic. On that occasion, after analysing the situation and in view of the work already done by ANEC in the context of election preparations and taking into account the state of the evolution of the epidemic in the country, which was not so alarming, the Presidents of Institutions recommended the continuation of the electoral process.

Prof. Tiando recalled that this meeting with the Presidents of the Institutions of the Republic and the Head of State was reported to the political parties involved in the communal elections, and the latter agreed to continue the electoral process. This agreement was drawn up subject to several conditions laid down by the political parties, notably that the electoral process could continue, taking into account the health conditions and, above all, the protection of the population.

Regarding the health and protection of the population, it was agreed that the following measures would be observed during the vote:

- Social distancing;
- Health protection equipment for voters (masks, handwashing gel and soap);
- Electoral agents will be provided with protective equipment;
- The election campaign will be conducted solely through the media, no rallies or gatherings. The campaign will also be carried out with vehicles equipped with megaphones;
- The High Authority for Audio-visual and Communication will be responsible for supervising this media campaign;
- The State will pay subsidies to political parties for this media campaign;

He concluded by acknowledging that the organisation of an election during a period of pandemic obviously raises many concerns. One of the major concerns being the issue of voter turnout. It is therefore appropriate to explore the initiatives that could be taken.
achieve a sufficiently high turnout despite the current health situation. In order to encourage the population, ANEC intends to carry out an awareness campaign that will convey a message of encouragement to the population that they can go out without fear as all measures have been taken to guarantee their health safety.

Summary

Before commencing the second part of the meeting, Mr. Oke presented a summary of the measures taken or recommended by the electoral commissions as follows:

- **The need for constant meeting in order to ensure an inclusive approach;**
- **The importance of avoiding large gatherings, hence the need to organise training sessions in small groups for the polling agents;**
- **The possibility of continuing the deployment of election materials while complying with the preventive measures;**
- **The need to provide personal protective equipment;**
- **The need to spray polling stations and centres;**
- **The implementation of social distancing measures (1 to 2m);**
- **Limiting access to a maximum of 20 for example into the compilation centres;**
- **The need to have thermo flashes at the entrance of the polling centres, masks, gloves, hydro alcoholic gel;**
- **Handwashing before and after voting, as well as regular cleaning of the tables with a disinfectant.**
- **Conduct of an electoral campaign without public meetings but only through the media and the use of vehicles equipped with megaphones broadcasting the messages of political parties or INEC’s sensitization messages.**
- **Voter turnout: enhance voter sensitization and awareness to ensure that voters come out in large numbers to exercise their right to vote.**

Professor Eyinla Bolade, Senior Technical Adviser representing INEC of Nigeria, highlighted two major concerns. First, the issue of resources in a context where the cost of elections will increase substantially with the introduction of preventive and containment measures such as personal protective equipment, whereas revenues are expected to significantly decline. He said that when Nigeria was preparing its budget for the year 2020, the basis was an oil price of $57 a barrel and today that price has fallen below $30 a barrel. As a result, the budget has been reduced by 20% and all this will undoubtedly have an impact on ECOWAS finances.

Furthermore, he stressed that while it is good to plan, the realities of the global supply chain will have to be taken into account. He cited the example of China, from where most of the products are imported, whose economy has been closed for more than two months. Prof. Bolade expressed his concern about the situation and hopes that the Commission in Ghana for example had all the consumables they would need for the introduction of the

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new facial recognition system which they preferred to the fingerprinting system because the credibility of the electoral process is also at stake.

### III- Needs assessment

This session should enable the ECOWAS Commission and ECONEC to define the nature of the assistance to be provided to the Electoral Commissions concerned.

#### 1. Benin

According to Prof. Emmanuel Tiando, the priority for the time being is to consider how to sensitize the populations so that they can be reassured that going to vote would not involve major risks in view of the provisions that will be taken by ANEC. In this regard, communication is paramount and ECOWAS’ support is highly desirable.

#### 2. Burkina Faso

Mr. Ahmed Newton Barry mentioned that the meeting should enable participants to have a prospective reflection at the level of the sub-region and particularly within ECOWAS. This would contribute to the promotion of democratic principles and elections in conformity with the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol. For Burkina’s INEC, the real issue here is to know if the peak of the pandemic had been reached or when would that be. That would determine the timing of the relief measures taken and thus the possibility of resuming activities.

On the other hand, according to the INEC chairman, the electoral law in Burkina Faso does not provide for emergency cases, hence the importance of consulting with stakeholders and the need to revise the electoral code, particularly regarding the deadline for displaying the electoral register.

#### 3. Cote d’Ivoire

Mr. Ibrahime Coulibaly-Kuibiert stressed the need to hold consultations with the political parties before deciding on the course of action to be taken. He also considered two options: should all activities be maintained as planned in the electoral timetable, with strict compliance with the protective measures? Or should the organization of elections be postponed until the measures are lifted in order to organize elections peacefully?

The 2nd option implies the possibility of amending the electoral code according to the reality of the emergency related to covid-19. This proposal must be submitted to the public in the framework of consultation in order to find solutions by placing the human being at the centre of the discussions.

#### 4. Ghana

Mr. Bossman Assare, Deputy Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Ghana, shared the information that the year 2020 is expected to mark the first diaspora vote in Ghana as there are expatriates registered at various diplomatic representations abroad with

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consular cards. They expect to vote as Ghanaian voters in addition to Ghanaian students under scholarship who are based abroad. The new system of diaspora voting is expected to be introduced but with the outbreak of the covid-19 disease, it is now uncertain whether this vote could be held.

Regarding needs, Mr. Assare requested for the support of ECOWAS and ECONEC through the provision of personal protective equipment (gloves, masks), hydro-alcoholic gel and hand-washing devices.

Mr. Bossman Assare clarified a point mentioned by Prof. Eyinla Bolade of INEC Nigeria, concerning the voter identification system. He indicated that the fingerprint capture system is still used as the primary means of identification. However, in case of failure, the alternative option will be facial recognition, as both systems are valid.

5. Niger

Mr. Issaka Souna from Niger indicated that the electoral process in Niger is dependent on its financing, in addition to the legal and political challenges.

Concerning the economic aspect, national priority had been given to the electoral process due to the introduction of the new biometric electoral register. The security issue had an impact on the electoral process, and now the covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the order of public spending priorities. Elections no longer appear to be of primary importance because protecting the lives of citizens has become the main concern.

As far as the legal aspect is concerned, if the current circumstances persisted, the electoral list would not be ready. Therefore, elections would not be held within the constitutional time limits. In this case, INEC would have to refer the matter to the Constitutional Court as provided by law. The need for a political consensus is obvious, hence the necessity for an inclusive political meeting with a view to finding practical arrangements and solutions to the various challenges.

In response to the increasing costs of elections and by way of proposal, Mr. Souna of INEC Niger believed that time had come to operationalise the system of pooling the equipment of electoral commissions in the ECOWAS region. He also proposed the establishment of an online regional consultation framework to hold regular consultations and exchange good practices on electoral matters.

He also mentioned the need of providing logistical support to the INEC of Niger in view of the numerous challenges mentioned in the first part of the meeting.

At the end of the second part of the meeting, Mr. Raouf Salami, Programme Officer at ECONEC attempted to provide an answer to the question on the peak of the pandemic raised by the INEC Chairman of Burkina Faso. He indicated that, in his opinion, the peak had not yet been reached because confirmed cases were increasing day by day and the Member States had a limited number of testing kits for suspected cases. Drawing a parallel with Europe which had implemented the same protective measures than in Africa, he noted that de-confinement could only envisaged after 3 to 4 months of health crisis. According to him, Africa has the advantage of having a young population and a presumed resistance linked to malaria exposure. It will probably take 4 to 5 months (March/April/May/June/July) to control the pandemic.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the moderator Mr Francis Oke thanked all Chairmen of the electoral commissions and the experts for their active participation in the meeting despite their busy schedules.

Summarizing the needs expressed, he noted that the electoral commissions were seeking for technical, financial, logistical and personal protection equipment support.

He noted that the need to hold periodic consultations to share experiences and good practices as well as the pooling of equipment were in line with the ECONEC objectives.

Mr. Oke urged the Heads of the Electoral Commissions to kindly transmit to the ECONEC Secretariat their respective latest legal provisions on electoral matters to enable ECOWAS and ECONEC to take them into account.

He thanked OSIWA, the ECONEC partner, for facilitating the meeting. He also expressed apologies for the absence of Mrs. Maria do Rosario L. Pereira Gonçalves, the Chair of ECONEC and the NEC of Cabo Verde, who could not attend the meeting due to technical challenges.

He thanked the interpreter for a wonderful job done, as well as the staff of the ECONEC Secretariat.

Lastly, he informed the meeting that a detailed report will be shared with all participants to add in their inputs and proposed the holding of a similar meeting at the end of May which will provide the opportunity to follow up on the conclusions of the meeting.