



# SYNERGY

Official Newsletter of the Governance Commission

Vol.3 No. 11

[www.governancecommissionlr.org](http://www.governancecommissionlr.org)

November 2016



Participants at Cape Verde Regional Conference on Transfer of Executive Power



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## Cape Verde Hosts Regional Conference on Transfer of Executive Power

As you may know by now, Cape Verde recently hosted a sub-regional Conference geared toward assuring the smooth democratic transfer of "Executive power" in Africa. A number of countries, over the years (particularly since the last forty years) have held national democratic elections which international observers and researchers described as not being truly democratic in that the processes fell far short of being free, credible, fair, just and therefore in several instances resulted into post-elections violence, untold deaths, and destruction of properties.

Like is being discussed in Liberia and many other countries around the world, the Cape Verde Conference held under the theme "West Africa Regional Conference on Democratic Transfers of Executive Power: Sharing of best practices and Development of Regional Standards" focused on two key issues:



- a. sharing experiences and Practical examples on good practices relating to political transitions and
- b. The need to develop legal frameworks and essential activities to help enhance governance during the transition period to ensure smooth handover of executive power after elections.

Participants and experts at the Conference included representatives from West Africa's five English speaking member countries: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria; Burkina Faso, Senegal, Central African Republic, and Cape Verde. Three former African Leaders also graced the Conference – Dr. Amos Sawyer of Liberia and Chairman of the Governance Commission, Madam Catherine Samba Panza – former President of the Central African Republic, and Former Cape Verdean President, Pedro Pires.

The West African Regional Conference on Democratic Transfers of Executive Power was held in Praia, Cape Verde (November 21 – 22, 2016). Speaking at the Conference, the Chairman of the Governance Commission's Board of Commissioners Dr. Amos Sawyer emphasized the importance of establishing an appropriate mechanism to ensure effective democratic transfer of executive power after successful elections in African Countries.

Dr. Sawyer noted that as African democracies mature such that power alternates between political parties, the practical challenges of organizing the transfer of power from one executive to another becomes critical in ensuring that the incoming government gets off to a new beginning. He maintained that to ensure the smooth transfer of power, appropriate laws, procedures, and practices have to be established so as to ensure that the outgoing and incoming executives and staff are able to work out a timely, organized and transparent handover of Executive Authority. Dr. Sawyer spoke on the topic "Transfer of powers in a Transitioning democracy".

There are a number of issues which, if not adequately handled before, during and/or after elections that could lead to post-election violence. These include but not limited to the outgoing or incoming national leadership's nomination of controversial officials, disunity as a result of vicious political campaigns, and challenges of managing ethnicity, religious intolerance and post-elections disputes and conflicts that occur during the period of the transition. Managing voters' expectations as the new Government transitions from campaigning to governing, and the sobering reality of scarce resources versus campaign promises also pose challenges for the incoming government. This situation is made worse in the absence of legal frameworks and a process that ensures the smooth and democratic transfer of executive power in individual West African countries. At the level of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), there is no known mechanism to give member states guidance during such democratic transitions. Consequently, elections, the sudden realization of transferring of executive power, and the attendant transitions sometimes serve as potential conflict triggers.

Examples of complete opposite picture were shared by some Conferees also from within the sub-region including places like Ghana, Senegal, and Cape Verde among others. Sponsors of Conference - the Government of Cape Verde and the National Democratic Institute, noting such exemplary achievements therefore felt the need to build upon these shared examples of credible elections and smooth transitions of executive power with other countries within not just West Africa but others as well.

Also at the Conference were Cape Verdean Minister of the Presidency, Fernando Elisio Leboucher Freire de Andrade, NDI's Senior Associate and Regional Director for Central and West Africa, Chris Fomunyoh, Jodi White, former Chief of Staff of past Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell, and Scott Hubli, NDI's Director of Governance Programs. Others were officials and civil society actors from several countries of West and Central Africa. Liberia's delegation included GC's Executive Director Stephen Manley and Program Manager Reverend Matthew Kollie, and Senior Policy Advisor of the Vice President's Office Anthony Kessely.

2016 witnessed a number of national democratic Presidential and national elections in Africa and other parts of the world. The holding of free, fair, credible elections are integral to any democratic process and seen as one of the most popular exercise for the change of Government. However the transfer of power is not always that easy. Therefore national, sub-regional and regional efforts are being made to ensure the smooth transfer of power across the globe as a means to preventing wars, military coup d'etat and conflict associated with unpopular change of government or power.

Other topics addressed at the Conference included:

1. Ethics and Public Integrity during the Transition Period
2. Crisis Management and National Security during Periods of Transition
3. A panel discussion on the Rights and Responsibilities of the Outgoing Administration.