ZISMUN

Zurich International School MUN

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to ZISMUN 2026 and to the African Union committee. It is our pleasure to introduce the topic "Curbing Cross-Border Arms Smuggling through a Continental Arms Control Treaty in the African Union." This issue lies at the heart of many of the security, development, and governance challenges facing the African continent today and demands careful, informed, and cooperative debate.

The illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons across African borders has played a significant role in prolonging armed conflicts, empowering terrorist and insurgent groups, enabling organized crime, and undermining state authority. From the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, from the Great Lakes region to parts of Southern Africa, cross border arms smuggling has exacerbated instability and slowed post conflict recovery. Despite existing regional and international frameworks, weak enforcement, porous borders, corruption, and uneven national capacities continue to allow illicit weapons to flow freely.

As delegates of the African Union, you are tasked with considering whether a continental arms control resolution, designed specifically for Africa's political, geographic, and security realities, could strengthen cooperation, harmonize national legislation, and enhance collective security without undermining state sovereignty. You will need to balance the diverse perspectives of AU member states, ranging from conflict affected countries seeking stronger controls to manufacturing, transit, and post conflict states with differing priorities and capacities.

We expect delegates to arrive well researched, with a strong understanding of their assigned country's position, alliances amongst countries, and existing African and international treaties and agreements. Constructive diplomacy, realistic policy proposals, and a willingness to compromise will be essential. Your ultimate goal is not simply to identify the problem, but to design solutions that are practical, inclusive, and implementable at the continental level.

We look forward to thoughtful debate and innovative resolutions.

Sincerely,
Your Chairs,
Sabrina & Reeta

Diplomatic Strategies to End the Militarization of Political Power in West Africa

General Overview of the Situation:

West Africa including Niger, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Gabon over the last 25 years have faced militarized coups by their respective governments. Several of these have security implications on the civilians within the respective countries leaving millions in countries run by military juntas. These coups cannot be viewed as a trend in west africa, rather a much more pressing international concern. It shapes the political relationships of African states amongst themselves, but also their relationships with global nations. For instance the legacy of neocolonialism of France still leaves traces of its impact in its former colonies such as Mali. This causes concern among the diplomatic solutions possible in the African Union and the General Assembly within the United Nations. For many West African countries democracy is relatively new. Oftentimes, the implementation of republican democracies such as within Niger in 2009 President Mamadou Tandja extended term limits beyond that of the original implementation. This causes instability and centralized executive systems designed for colonial control rather than democracy within governments leading to vulnerability showcased in the subsequent coups which ensue as a result of poorly managed governance. The diverse ethnic groups which originate from these communities further drive conflict due to differences in cultural and ethnic backgrounds. With a corrupt foundation many West African states have weak capacity which reduces the civilian leadership and allows authoritarian regimes to step in unwarranted. Prolonged conflict further destroys the foundation of democracy, making it even more difficult to reinstate democratic governance. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a key role in sanctioning coups and works towards setting democratic frameworks. Despite this, repeated offenses of military coups in West Africa threaten ECOWAS' credibility and challenges enforcement.

Key Definitions:

Civilian Government:

A government run by elected leaders, not by soldiers.

Militarization:

When a military has too much control over the government or society.

Coup d'etat:

When the military takes power by force instead of through elections.

Diplomacy:

Solving disputes between countries by mediated talks in the place of physical conflict.

Mediation:

When a neutral party helps others solve a dispute.

West Africa:

A section of the African Continent including countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Mali and Senegal.

African Union:

Organization of African countries that works for peace and cooperation on the continent.

ECOWAS:

Economic Community of West African States is a group of West African working together on trade and peace.

Colonialism:

When one country economically and politically controls another country for power and/or resources.

Authoritarianism:

A system of government where the power is held by a small group and people have limited political freedom.

Militant Group:

An armed group using violence and/or conflict to achieve political goals.

Multilateralism:

Countries working together through international organizations.

UCG:

Unconstitutional Change of Government is when power is taken without legal or democratic processes.

Sovereignty:

A state's right to govern itself without outside interference

Historical Situation:

Historically, many west african states gained their independence in the late 1950s and 1960s with weak civilian institutions and limited experience with democratic governance. These newly independent governments inherited colonial military structures which were designed to hold control over civilians rather than stand as oversight. In the Cold War, these military regimes in west africa were oftentimes backed by superpowers such as the United States, the USSR, Cuba and France. These financial and material backings often strengthened

the political role of armed forces within these newly formed nations. Military coups began to arise in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and Mali within the 1960s and 1980s which set a tone for military intervention within the political sphere of these emerging countries. The militias justified these coups with accusations of corruption, economic mismanagement or national security which framed themselves as a heroic corrector of the failing government. Military takeover and longlasting rule weakened the existing political structures, judicial system and direct democracies making civilian governments even more fragile. Some stability within the 1980s and 1990s worked to adjust structures so that state capacity was lower which increased public dissatisfaction and indirectly raised the risk of military takeover. The 1990s saw a shift towards more democracy with several countries returning to civilian rule and stable constitutions. Regional organizations such as ECOWAS began formally opposing military coups through democracy and governance protocols. Despite these shifts, the resurgence of cups since 2020 have been at alarming rates and indicate the unresolved historical weakness of civil-military relationships. Ongoing security threats particularly in SAHel have reinforced the military's influential role in the governance and mix security leadership with political authority. These historical patterns explain how diplomatic strategies in west Africa must not focus on preventing coups, but also in long term civilian institution building and regional trends towards democratic frameworks.

Current Situation:

Since 2020, West Africa has experienced a rise in military coups particularly in the Sahel region. Countries including Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger are currently governed by military led transitional authorities following insurgencies. Military governments often justify their rule by citing the failure of civilian governments through use of propaganda and force. Often the address of insecurity and economic hardship are the leading causes associated with coup justification. Public trust in democracy has declined in several states due to the persistence of poverty, unemployment, weak delivery, and mortality rates. The growing influence of armed forces in the government respects a broader degradation of democracy. External security partnerships and arms support have contributed to the strengthening of military institutions relative to civilian ones.

National militaries in coup-affected states are the dominant political actors often suspending the constitution and eroding the people's parliaments. The African Union acts as the primary continental body promoting constitutional order and democratic governance. ECOWAS is another key contributor to the organization and growth of sanctions, mediation techniques and diplomatic pressure. Civilians, particularly the urban youth play a key role in shaping the legitimacy of government through protests and public support as well as resistance. External actors such as previous colonial superpowers play a supporting role in controlling and financially backing emerging security partners and influencing military capacity. International organizations such as the UN further support diplomatic mediation techniques and the transitional electoral efforts.

Ongoing crises are prevalent such as that with the Sahel region which continues to

face armed insurgencies, subsequently increasing reliance on military-led security responses. Political transitional authorities in several states remain uncertain or delayed through raising concerns about prolonged military rule. Some military-led governments have restricted political freedoms including in the media, civil society and opposition parties which change the way that people function in their communities. Regional tensions have increased as some states resist external pressure to return to a civilian government. In addition economic sanctions from the international community intended to restore democracy have backfired in many cases and worsened humanitarian conditions and complicated diplomatic efforts. The AU formally condemns coups and unconstitutional changes of government. So far the AU upended coup-led states from participation in AU activities in line with its government's tone. Through its peace and security council, the AU supports long lasting dialogue-based transition and encourages timelines for elections to speed up the transitional process. The AU furthermore works closely with regional blocs, particularly ECOWAS to closely coordinate diplomatic responses to crises in the region. Mainly the goal of AU led efforts is to emphasize preventative diplomacy, civilian oversight of military and institutional reforms for democratic structural governmental frameworks.

Key Treaties/Agreements:

There are several past and current policies the AU has implemented in order to curb this issue. The AU Constitutive Act establishes the AU's commitment to democratic governance and rejects the concept of unconstitutional changes of government. The Lomé Declaration (2000) sets clear rules condemning military coups and outlines collective AU responses. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance provides a clear legal framework for promoting civilian rule, free elections and a constitutional order. The AU Peace and Security Council is mandated to respond to political crises and theorize diplomatic missions. Furthermore the council imposes sanctions when necessary. The AU also suspends member states that experience unconstitutional changes to their government and remain so until civilian rule is restored.

Regionally, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) aimed at explicitly prohibiting military takeovers and mandated constitutional rule. ECOWAS further employs economic sanctions, border closures, and suspensions of membership as tools to pressure military regimes. The Mediation and Security Council coordinates diplomatic negotiations and transnational roadmaps towards stable governance. The ECOWAS increasingly prioritizes dialogue and national tensions though enforcement has been inconsistent. Some military led states have resisted ECOWAS authority, posing a challenge to the effectiveness of regional enforcement.

The UN Charter has limited impact in the regions, supporting sovereignty while promoting peace, democracy and human rights, however implementation is rarely taken. UN political missions in West Africa support electoral processes, mediation and government structure reform. The UN works to strengthen international partnerships and

emphasize civil-miltary reform and rule-of-law enforcement.

In the past, early post-independence governance relied heavily on military backed stability which subsequently led to prolonged periods of military rule rather than civilian rule. During the Cold War, several foreign powers often supported military regimes for diplomatically strategic reasons, rather than to strengthen the governments. In the 1990s, democratic transitions led to increased adoption of constitutional frameworks limiting military power. The regional organizations established gradually shifted from non-interference to collective intervention strategies against coups. Currently, sanctions have had varying degrees of success. Some harm civilians more than the military elites but others have seen moderate degrees of success. Diplomatic pressure alone struggles to ensure timely transitions to civilian rule. Weak coordination between continental and regional bodies limits enforcement capacity. Military governments increasingly frame sovereignty as a reason to reject the external pressure to be diplomatic.

Key Country Positions:

South Africa:

South Africa strongly opposes military coups and supports constitutional civilian rule. The delegation supports AU peace and Security Council decisions, sanctions as well as mediation efforts. The Delegation promotes diplomatic engagement, inclusive political transitions and demands respect for democratic governance. Domestic inequality within South Africa and governance pressures limit leverage in foreign policy. The delegation has broad support among other democratic AU members but limited influence over military-led regimes.

Kenya:

The delegation favors preventative diplomacy and institutional reform over punitive measures alone. The delegation supports election monitoring and conflict mediation missions. Furthermore the delegation emphasizes early warning systems in order to strengthen civilian institutions and infrastructure. The delegation has electoral tensions and security concerns within its own country which limits its credibility within the AU. The support for the delegation is moderate, often seen as a bridge builder rather than a stand up leader in the democratic world.

Nigeria:

The delegation is strongly opposed to coups as a valid change of government and prioritizes regional stability. Nigeria holds an active leadership role in ECOWAS implementing sanctions and mediating diplomatic talks. Within the AU the delegation has supported firmly in regional enforcement against constitutional change. Despite this, insecurity, corruption and economic pressures weaken the capacity of the delegation to take leadership. The delegation has significant regional influence but faces resistance from military regimes.

Egypt:

The delegation supports stability prioritized approaches where sometimes the prioritization of security over democratic pressure. The delegation engages in bilateral security and in cooperation with other African states. The delegation emphasizes sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of nations. The internal military-dominated government in Egypt reduces credibility on anti-militarization. The reception within the AU is varied. Some support from security-focused states is visible but skepticism exists among pro-democratic member states.

Ethiopia:

The delegation supports constitutional order however emphasizes the sovereignty of nations. The delegation participates in the AU peace processes and mediation frameworks. Within the AU the delegation calls for African-led solutions and dialogue-based conflict resolution. Internally, ongoing conflicts and political fragmentation impact influence in pro-democratic discussions. The delegation had moderate support however constrained by the ongoing political instability within Ethiopia.

Morocco:

The delegate supports political stability and the gradual reform of governance rather than coercive economic sanction. The delegation engages in AU diplomatic initiatives and capacity building programs. Furthermore, Morocco promotes development-focused approaches in order to reduce political instability. Internally, the regional geopolitical climate priorities limit the ability to focus on West Africa. Support in the AU is generally accepted a s Morocco serves as a neutral diplomatic actor.

Algeria:

The nation strongly favors non-interference and sovereignty. The delegates support mediation but oppose military intervention and harsh sanctions. The AU pushes for dialogue and negotiated political settlements. The internal civil-military power balance at home affects the policy stance. Support from sovereignty- focused states and further resistance comes from interventionist blocs.

Rwanda:

The delegation strongly maintains an anti-coup principle and prioritizes state authority and order. The policies implemented support AU security mechanisms and peacekeeping operations. In the AU Rwanda prioritizes discipline, governance efficiency and strong governmental institutions. The internal authoritarian governance model raises concerns over democratic legitimacy within the AU. The reception within the AU is well respected for Rwanda's efficiency, however criticized by democracy focused states.

Possible Solutions:

Policy and Governance reforms:

Civil-military oversight laws where civilian control over armed forces is through constitutions and legislative bodies. This solution addresses weak post colonial civil-miiltary relations. A limitation of this solution is the resistance from military elites and the risk of weak parliaments as a result. Key active members of this solution would be the AU, national governments and legislatures.

Implementing Clear transition timelines after coups: the mandate is required to be realistic and time bound in order to create an effective electoral roadmap. This solution would prevent indefinite military rule from being in place of civilian government. One barrier would be delays which are justified by the insecure boundaries of the governments. Key actors include the AU PSC, ECOWAS and transitional authorities.

Funding Structures & Partnerships:

Conditional Governance and funding: the Au would engage themselves with partner funding so that emerging governments can hit democratic benchmarks in order to speed up and efficiently reach targets. This solution would encourage reform without using physical military force. A drawback would be the funding gaps and fatigue of long term donors as the process is strenuous and long. However main actors would include the AU AfDB and international partners for financial backing.

Joint AU-REC stabilization funds: this would include a pool of financial resources for postcrisis recovery in nations with previous longstanding military leadership. The relevance of this solution is tangible as it addresses economic roots of coups rather than patching up the problem. A challenge would be the coordination and strategizing of such stabilization funds. Main contributors include the AU, ECOWAS and member states.

Technology and Innovation:

Early-warning systems: this would include a way to digitally track political instability indicators. This modern technology would enable preventative diplomacy rather than post-operative. A hindrance to the process includes data reliability and security from cyberwarfare. Furthermore there could be gaps in the capacity for current technology. Contributions come from AU, RECs and civil society as well as technological innovators.

Secure election technology: The aim of this solution is to improve transparency and trust in voting systems, targeting the main justification for coups. The reduction of justification of military takeovers reduces the chances of these taking place. The infrastructure of these systems however could be difficult to set up and is at risk of cyber terroism. Actors of this issue include the government, the AU and NGOs for support.

Capacity-Building for Member States:

Judicial and Parliamentary Strengthening: this solution works to train institutions to oversee executives and militaries. This works to prevent power concentration in governments that do not see stability. A limitation is the limited expertise willing to lend oversight and training knowledge. Additionally political interference is not well accepted in West Africa. The AU, UNDP and national institutions would be responsible contributors of this solution

Professional Military Education: the solution promotes non-political military roles through the restructuring of political frameworks. This changes the culture of coups as it lowers the risk of military authority in unstable regions. This might face challenges and resistance from senior officers in military centric communities. The Defense Ministries and AU would be responsible leaders in this solution.

Strengthening AU Institutions:

Including but not limited to APSA, Africa CDC and AU PSC

Expanded AU PSC: the peace and security council aims to deploy faster working diplomatic aid to crisis states. This would work to reduce escalation of political change by means of military force in the regions; this however could be limited by the funding challenges and lack of political consensus. The AU and member states would play a key role in this solution

Better coordination within African Peace and Security Architecture: the alignment of early warning, mediation and sanctions would be strong enough to prevent coups from happening in unstable states. This improves response efficiency of the APSA and works at preventative authoritarianism. The institutional fragmentation of many political institutions is a main factor of contention within this solution with main contributors being the AU and RECs.

Education, Awareness and Community Approaches:

Civic education programs: the teaching of democratic values and rights could draw the respect of civilians and help prevent resistance to militarization which uses anti-democratic propaganda as justified means to stage a coup. The low literacy levels and limited funding could pose challenges to this possible solution. Furthermore the government, NFOs and AU would be main supporters of this solution.

Support for LEDCs and Fragile States:

Targeted development aid: prioritization of jobs, education and service industries helps build up civil society in contrast to the uncertainty and low living standards associated with military rule. This addresses the root cause of coups however is at risk of corruption over what industries are prioritized and insecurity within the government. Main contributors include the AU, AfDB and donors.

Post-conflict recovery frameworks: this aims to stabilize taxes after a crisis, as most are vulnerable to inconsistent political governance. They prevent relapse into military rule and promote stable democratic civilian governance. A limitation includes the long term funding opportunities for these strategies coming from the AU and UN agencies.

Cross-Border Coordination Mechanisms:

Joint AU-ECOWAS mediation team: unified diplomatic pressure from the AU and ECOWAS work regionally to help individually targeted affected political instability and coups. This prevents policy fragmentation and works to unify political agendas. This could be hindered by the political disagreements due to cultural, ethnic and ideological differences in states.

Regional sanctions harmonizationL works to prevent sanction evasion so that it targets military elites effectively rather than hits the civilian economy and devastates the living standards of civilian lives. The solution would however be limited by the economic costs a sanction harbors and AU RECs and member states could be hesitant to commit to long term plans.

Further Readings:

Security Council report: <u>Briefing: Peace Consolidation in West Africa</u>

World Bank Poverty statistics: <u>recommended to study the Delegations carefully</u>

African Union website: <u>OAU/AU Treaties, Protocols and Charters</u>

African Development Bank Papers: <u>The Climate Action Window of the African Development Fund grants over $9 million to strengthen climate resilience in the Sahel's main catchment basins</u>

<u>The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa</u>

African Union: <u>The DDR/SSR</u>

African Policy Research Institute: <u>Military Power Grab in West Africa: Exploiting the Domestic Rot and the Hegemonic Crisis</u>

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