



Introduction

This report focuses on West Africa, a collection of 16 nations that is home to around 325 million people. All these countries score poorly on human development indexes, and they are some of the poorest in the world. The region is also politically unstable – just under one third of the States have experienced a coup d'état in the last four years.

Organized crime in West Africa became an international security concern in the mid-2000s, due to the detection of large cocaine shipments transiting the region on their way to Europe. Subsequent assessments conducted by UNODC revealed that a number of transnational organized crime problems pose a threat to stability and development in the region, including oil bunkering, arms trafficking, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, toxic waste dumping, fraudulent medicine, cigarette smuggling, and the looting of natural resources.

The States of the region are currently facing significant challenges. Over the past few years, they have demonstrated their political commitment to make the fight against drug trafficking and transnational organized crime a priority. In collaboration with UN partners, several initiatives for promoting cooperation within the region have been developed, and a comprehensive regional approach was adopted.

Since 2008, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been engaged in a Regional Action Plan with the support of UNODC and UNOWA in order to address the growing problem of illicit drug trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse in West Africa in an integrated manner. Heads of State and Government of the region have renewed their commitment to the Regional Action Plan in June 2012. Besides promoting prevention

and the fight against these issues, this Plan requires regional cooperation in the areas of law enforcement, criminal justice, health, and data collection and sharing.

Since the 2010 Dakar Initiative, the Senegalese Ministry of the Interior has been committed to the drafting of a document in order to harmonize existing national legal instruments at a sub-regional level to fight drug trafficking in a coordinated and more efficient manner. The Bamako Declaration on Impunity, Justice and Human Rights, adopted in December 2011, identifies practical recommendations to fight organized crime, illicit trafficking, terrorism and piracy. It reasserts the importance of improving the legal framework of West African States in accordance with regional and international instruments aimed at facilitating international cooperation on these matters.

Although these political initiatives represent important steps, it has been difficult to evaluate any concrete results. Fighting organized crime remains a precondition to the consolidation of peace, security and political stability. Ensuring that criminal actors are identified, investigated, prosecuted and sentenced is also key to strengthening the credibility of national institutions and governments to their people and to external actors. It is critical to address the problems of continuing corruption, which undermine good governance.

In light of these challenges, the United Nations plays an important role in raising awareness among public authorities, the local population and the international community. The UNODC Regional Programme for West Africa 2010-2014 supports the implementation of the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan 2008-2011. Key initiatives under the Regional Programme include the West Africa Coast Initia-

tive (WACI), the Airport Communication Project (AIRCOP) and the Global Container Control Programme (CCP). UNODC also supports the strengthening of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CFT) systems; supports Governments in strengthening their forensic capacity; provides specialized technical assistance to ECOWAS Member States on the criminal justice aspects of counter-terrorism and was instrumental in the launch of the Judicial Regional Platform for the Sahel in 2010. UNODC supports in the implementation of the UN Protocols against Trafficking in Persons and Firearms and Smuggling of Migrants, mainly through capacity building. Assistance is also being extended in the areas of drug use and HIV prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. In the area of research and analysis, UNODC has undertaken several studies and assessments, which form the basis for programmatic interventions.

No State can successfully fight transnational organized crime on its own. Coordinated action, collaboration and cooperation are essential to reducing the effects of this type of criminality in West Africa. In this context, research is needed to guide programming and policy efforts.

Since the publication of the last UNODC threat assessment report on West Africa (2009), and despite the political commitment of the States of the region, there are indications that the crime situation in West Africa as a whole has diversified. The criminal organizations involved are now not only able to traffic tons of drugs – notably cocaine and, to a lesser extent, heroin – but also manufacture methamphetamines. The region appears to be experiencing an increase in drug consumption. Drug use, particularly cannabis, as well as cocaine, heroin, and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), has become an issue for public health and public safety. More recently, maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea drew international attention, as did the flow of weapons into the region following the conflict in Libya.

This report focuses on:

- Cocaine
- Methamphetamine
- Migrant smuggling
- Firearms
- Fraudulent medicines
- Maritime piracy

The purpose of this report is primarily descriptive: to assess the progression and emergence of transnational organized crime affecting the region. This report is not intended to be fully comprehensive – the omission of flows discussed in the past¹ does not imply that they have been resolved, only that other issues have arisen that are currently commanding greater international attention.