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FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ
ISSUED AT THE 2023 MARITIME SECURITY CONFERENCE ON THE THEME:
'MARITIME SECURITY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA:
FOSTERING A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO A COMPLEX PROBLEM',
HELD IN ACCRA, GHANA
ON 31ST AUGUST AND 1ST SEPTEMBER 2023

1. Preamble

The Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC), and the Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa (SIGLA) of Stellenbosch University, held the 2023 Maritime Security Conference on the theme: 'Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Fostering a Comprehensive Approach to a Complex Problem', on 31st August and 1st September 2023, in Accra, Ghana, which was funded by the Danish Peace and Stabilisation Fund.

The 2023 Maritime Security Conference convened distinguished participants from the fields of academia, industry, civil society, and national, regional, and international agencies mandated with the governance and security of the seas.

2. Development of the Communiqué

The final communiqué is based on presentations, observations, discussions, and conclusions of the 2023 Maritime Security Conference on the following:

- the status of implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and its Architecture with respect to national, regional and international collaboration and cooperation for maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea and recommendations for its 10th anniversary review;
- the centrality of joint, institutional, and individual sustainable capacity building of the military, law enforcement, the judiciary, and civil society particularly the media, to the effective implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and its Architecture;
- the urgency of addressing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the Gulf of Guinea due to immense depletion of fish stocks and marine ecological balance, and in turn, to major sources of food, livelihood, social and environmental security;
- technological advancements and the growing density of subsea infrastructure as the lifeblood of modern societies and economies that sit alongside cybersecurity threats that could derail these advancements and strategies to curtail as well as bolster resilience against such threats; and
- women's agency in maritime related socio-economic and state security, their special protection needs and the importance of harmonising the Women, Peace and Security Agenda with maritime



security frameworks to ensure a holistic and comprehensive approach to securing life and livelihoods at sea and in coastal communities.

These topics were discussed during plenary sessions under the following broad sub-themes:

- The Yaoundé Code of Conduct;
- The State of Capacity Building in Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea:
 - Introduction to Capacity Building in the Gulf of Guinea;
 - Capacity Building: Current and Upcoming Matters on What Has Been Done, Best Practices and New Sectors;
- Environmental and Economic Impacts of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea:
 - Environmental and Socio-Economic Impacts of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea;
 - Fisheries Management Strategies: Balancing Conservation and Economic Need;
 - Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing: Monitoring and Compliance Issues;
- Upcoming on the Agenda: Cyber Security and Underwater Infrastructure
 - Subsea Infrastructure: Turning Attention to Africa's Subsea Cable Networks;
 - Cybersecurity Regulation, Legislation, and Critical Infrastructure Protection in Africa;
 - Cybersecurity and Threats to the Maritime Sector; and
- Women, Peace and Security:
 - Women's Leadership and Participation in Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea;
 - Experiences of Women in Maritime Security – the Story of the Ghana Navy
 - Engendering Maritime Laws in the Gulf of Guinea.

3. The Communiqué

Participants made the following observations and recommendations during the Conference:

3.1. The Context

1. The Gulf of Guinea remains a significant maritime space for international, regional and national social, economic, geopolitical, and ecological security. Thus, any threat to its safety and security is transnational and therefore, any strategy to counter these threats requires cooperation and collaboration within states and across regions and continents from its diverse stakeholders in state, regional and international maritime governance and security agencies, industry, coastal communities, and civil society.
2. The Yaoundé Code of Conduct was a ground-breaking framework in terms of regional collaboration and cooperation for maritime security and safety in the Gulf of Guinea and



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beyond, when it was signed by 25 Member States 10 years ago. The Yaoundé Code of Conduct and its Architecture have been attributed to the sharp fall in incidences of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the last two years and a foundation for legislative reform, development and harmonisation, bilateral and regional cooperation and coordination, information sharing, regional and bilateral joint exercises and international support to the Gulf of Guinea maritime security strategies. Furthermore, these process have had a positive effect in ending sea blindness in, appreciation of the Blue Economy, and the extension of the notion of stakeholders vis-à-vis maritime security, for example, to immigration and customs institutions. However, the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and its Architecture have not achieved the goals expected within 10 years due to implementation challenges as a result of lack of trust with respect to information-sharing and collaboration at national and regional levels, shortfalls in the human and material resources and in the capacity of institutions and individuals, unpredictable funding streams, insufficient political will, and so on. There has been insufficient implementation at the national level of the measures mentioned in the Yaoundé Code of Conduct along with an overemphasis on regional efforts vis-à-vis national ones.

3. Capacity building is critical to the achievement of the objectives of the of Yaoundé Code of Conduct, its Architecture and the regional integrated maritime strategy, as capacity building is needed for deterrence, prevention, apprehension, and prosecution processes as well as collaboration and cooperation to implement such processes. Yet, there are challenges of limited capacities of institutions and individuals in the Gulf of Guinea Member States to implement these frameworks, motivations of donor support to capacity building in this region, corruption, targets of capacity building—state interests, citizens interests or the interests of the political elite, sustainability of capacity building strategies when donor support has ended, and the lack of ownership by beneficiary Member States.
4. Trends in IUU fishing is difficult to assess due to inadequate monitoring systems in the Gulf of Guinea vis-à-vis the volume of the challenge and its perpetration at different levels of fishing; for example, artisanal, industrial, and semi-industrial. However, it is estimated to cost the West African region losses of over US\$2.3 billion a year and approximately 300,000 jobs a year (as per 2017 estimates) and to have depleted biologically sustainable fish stocks by 64.6 percent (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019). Furthermore, it depletes fish stock prompting food security and in turn, potential political instability, illegal activities for alternative economic gain and conflict due to scarce resources and loss in livelihoods. IUU fishing also causes eco-marine imbalances and environmental degradation; therein threatening sustainability of marine produce and ecosystems. It manifests in different forms from the use of illegal fishing gear, under or false reporting of



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catch, fishing of protected or endangered species, labour malpractice, among others. It can also facilitate other transnational maritime organised crimes.

5. Although “sea blindness” is said to have reduced or have been eradicated through the Yaoundé Code of Conduct processes, this does not appear to be the case with invisible subsea infrastructure. Though this infrastructure is critical to data, telecommunications and energy and operations in Africa in general, and in the maritime space in particular, are becoming increasingly digitised, it seems that the urgency and the high cost to economies, livelihoods and lives as not been appreciated at all or at a common level in various African states reflected by their ununiformed cybersecurity legislation and structures.
6. One issue that has persisted over the 10 years is gender disparity in the maritime space. Only two percent of seafarers are women, and their agency is often overlooked. Although women’s participation is critical in the value chain of the fisheries industry and in turn to the socio-economic security of coastal communities, as well as, being witnesses to, potential state informants and allies against, and possible perpetrators of maritime crimes, their agency, knowledge and concerns are often overlooked or downplayed. Furthermore, while there is a global framework for increasing women’s participation in matters of peace and security at all levels, this is yet to integrated within the maritime security space and vice versa. However, women also have agency and has the capacity to change the victimisation that dominates the international narrative in relation to gender.

3.2. Recommendations

1. Maritime security cannot be addressed in a vacuum from other security issues in a state, region, continent or globally, and from good governance and socio-economic challenges on land and other root causes of maritime insecurity. For example, recent coup d’états in West and Central Africa and related regional and continental fallouts invariably affect the individual state and regional and international coordinated responses to crimes at sea. The interconnectedness between landlocked states, the challenges and crime and security dynamics need to be acknowledged and integrated into the overarching strategies and responses.
2. The tenants of Yaoundé Code of Conduct should be legally binding, possibly through its evolution into a protocol, these should be integrated into national legislation, and in general, maritime legislative frameworks at all levels, should be harmonised. Furthermore, protocols for ensuring the repatriation of proceeds from criminal activities at sea such as the one being considered by the Economic Community of West African States, should be encouraged, developed and signed by Member States.



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3. Though the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and its Architecture will be reviewed from September 2023 to May 2024, it should undergo regular evaluation and reviews at practitioner and technical level of varying expertise, and at policy or governmental level. Its review should include the following: examination of recommendations and observations from its third-year review; realistic measurable goals especially at national level; specification of roles for each regional economic community in the Gulf of Guinea as well as the Gulf of Guinea Commission; further punitive measures for criminals at sea; an overview of piracy infrastructure towards building a resilient counter-piracy infrastructure; and pay attention to challenges in editing of translated versions of the original documents.
4. Inter-agency and inter-national information sharing, cooperation, coordination and collaboration remain critical to the implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, its Architecture, and related strategies. These issues should be addressed first at the national level and then build up to the regional and then, international levels. Commitment at the national level is paramount for any further cooperation. For instance, Maritime Operations Centres at national level should include all stakeholders in maritime security not only the navy and the coastguard but also representatives of fisheries commissions, marine resources, marine environment, trade and so on. Furthermore, in order to identify and apprehend maritime criminals, national police would need to populate their databases with data on these criminals and share them with agencies such as Interpol, which in turn, would provide access to this information to other regional and national police databases. The development and sharing of such databases and those specifically for pirates could aid in apprehending cross-border criminals and their leaders. However, the increased surveillance and sharing of data and information also raises a range of right based and right to privacy issues, that need to be taken into consideration, especially when a number of the states do not share the same governance and democratic values. The recent surge of military coups has stressed these issues.
5. Collaboration and coordination should not be hindered by zonal maritime divisions created through the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and its Architecture as these also provide for bi-lateral cooperation and the security needs of certain states within one zone could be affected by maritime spaces within another zone.
6. Cooperation on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea should be seamless between signatory states and ideally also with and between international partners.
7. Capacity building should be needs based of each Gulf of Guinea Member State and should be developed by assessing the situation on the ground of Member States; not preconceived by any partner or donor institution, organisation or country.



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8. Support for capacity building should be provided with a view to sustainability such as adopting Interpol's training of trainers' strategy so that participants can replicate this training for other officials in their institutions and home country. However, to ensure this occurs, there needs to be a follow-up and engagement of institutions nominating participants for training to advise them on the intentions and expectations of the training programmes and of the trainees trained under these programmes.
9. Beneficiaries of capacity building should be expanded to include civil society, particularly the media, in view of their role in influencing and monitoring public discourse and policy development as well as in educating the public on critical issues within their states, region and the world.
10. Furthermore, ownership of capacity building processes by Gulf of Guinea Member States, institutions and individuals in the military, law enforcement, the judiciary and civil society is critical for its sustainability as donor nations and institutions have a timeline for their support. This ownership could be demonstrated via political will of and financing by Member States and regional economic communities, and feedback of and on persons trained to their institutions and superiors. Still, the quest to enhance ownership should not be devoid of cooperation, collaboration and partnership with other regional, continental, and international agencies and training centres within the context of shared seas and concerns, eliminating duplication of efforts and exchange of intra and inter-continental skills, knowledge, training tools and materials, needs assessments matrices, and best practices for mutual benefit such as witnessed with current and potential support to Gulf of Guinea Member States from the Interpol, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Maritime Interdiction Operational Training Centre (NMIOTC), the European Union, the Government of Denmark, the Government of the United States, the Government of China, and others. NMIOTC, for instance, could create a satellite training centre in the Gulf of Guinea to support capacity building of Member States.
11. In a similar vein, capacity building on maritime security in Gulf of Guinea training centres of excellence should include participants from the entire Gulf of Guinea and not only particular regional economic communities.
12. In order to address political will and increase the adoption of recommendations from conferences such as the 2023 Maritime Security Conference, politicians and policy-makers should be invited to such conference or special policy-level workshops should tailor-made for them to discuss concerns raised and opportunities for enhance maritime security at put forward at these conferences.



13. Efforts to counter IUU fishing should adopt a multi-stakeholder approach with national and regional authorities, civil society, coastal communities, legal fishers, the private sector and the general public through sensitisation, awareness raising, education and consultation on the importance of a sustainable Blue Economy and marine ecosystem at every level of society.
14. Furthermore, any fisheries management strategy should reflect the triple bottom approach in terms of conserving fish stock, protecting economic livelihoods of those on the fisheries value chain and protecting marine ecosystems.
15. Member States in the Gulf of Guinea or just within the West Africa maritime space should encourage joint closed seasons for particular types of fish to deter overfishing in neighbouring states during another's closed season and to boost marine stock. Yet, this collaboration should be done in tandem with the provision of financial support and alternative livelihoods for fisher folk during these seasons. Indeed, conservation of marine ecosystems and produce should be done collaboratively by Gulf of Guinea Member States to be effective.
16. A study should also be undertaken (in Ghana and possibly other states in the region) on the effects of oil drilling on fish, sediment and water around oil rigs.
17. Monitoring of IUU fishing should be enhanced via cross-border collaboration, the use of technology, engagement and training of the right personnel, adoption and enforcement of regulation and international continental and regional legal frameworks with prosecution of perpetrators, sensitisation of stakeholders including consumers to the massive decrease in fish stocks and dangers of IUU fishing, repeal of policies that (in)directly encourage IUU fishing, for instance, subsidies, the sharing of information on incidences of IUU fishing and vessels implicated on official websites and with the Interregional Coordination Centre by fisheries administrations and international ships.
18. Subsea infrastructure for data, energy and telecommunications must be designated as critical infrastructure and thereby, assessed as a significant security vulnerability in states and provided the necessary protection through laws, strategies, architectures, capacity building, multi-stakeholder approaches public-private partnerships (learning from the private sector who own most of this infrastructure and have more experience in their maintenance and protection) national authorities, non-governmental organisations, and industry, and national, regional, continental and international cooperation and information sharing. Still, the responsibility for the repair and protection of this infrastructure and systems for the prosecution of saboteurs would need to be identified.



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19. Gulf of Guinea Member States should recognise the high, unpredictable and immensely damaging risks that breaches in cybersecurity and data theft pose to the Blue Economy and to maritime security as a whole. So, each Member State should ensure that it has robust cybersecurity and data protection related laws in line with international and continental conventions on the same, as well as adequate awareness and capacity of staff and stakeholders engaged in these sectors, regional and international cooperation and national enforcement strategies to build resilience against such threats with multi-stakeholder interventions involving governance structures and policy-makers, civil society and the private sector.
20. Women's procurement needs should be factored into the maritime industry. Working and safety clothing equipment must be tailored for the women physique.
21. Heroines at sea should be celebrated more explicitly and regularly as a good story of success at sea.
22. Women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights.

WHEREUPON, We the under listed, Commandant of KAIPTC, Professor at RDDC, and Vice Dean of the Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University, append our signatures to this Communiqué on the date below;

Issued in Accra on 1st September 2023.

SIGNED:

.....
MAJOR GENERAL RICHARD ADDO GYANE

Commandant, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC)

.....
PROFESSOR THOMAS MANDRUP

Professor, Centre for Stabilisation, Institute for Strategy and War Studies, Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC)



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