ECOWAS COMMISSION
COMMISSION DE LA CEDEAO
COMISSÃO DA CEDEAO

CEREMONY FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE ECOWAS GOLDEN JUBILEE

Lagos. May 28, 2026

DRAFT SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION

H.E. DR. OMAR ALIEU TOURAY

ECOWAS Commission

May 2025

- **Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS,**
- **Your Excellencies, Invited Heads of State and Government,**
- **Former Heads of State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,**
- **Honourable Ministers,**
- **Members of the Parliament**
- **Heads of Institutions of ECOWAS,**
- **Excellency, the Vice-President of the Commission,**
- **Honourable Commissioners,**
- **Excellences Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of International organizations,**
- **Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Fifty years ago, our founding fathers succeeded in overcoming numerous obstacles - colonial, ideological, linguistic and historical - to establish the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS). On exactly this day, the 28th of May 1975, and in this great city of Lagos, the founding Treaty of ECOWAS was signed by the Heads of State and Government. From that moment to this very day, our journey has been defined by resilience, unity, and purpose. Today, we have gathered here to celebrate five decades of regional solidarity, of standing side-by-side through times of hope and hardship, and of building the most integrated Regional Economic Community on the African continent. Today, ECOWAS represents more than an Institution—it is a symbol of the enduring aspirations of over 400 million citizens.

It is therefore my singular honour and privilege to welcome you, Excellencies, distinguished guests, to the Golden Jubilee Anniversary of ECOWAS. On behalf of the Management and Staff of the Community Institutions, I would like to extend our appreciation to His Excellency General Yakubu Gowon, the

only surviving founding father of ECOWAS for gracing this occasion. 50 years ago, on this, **General Gowon** was joined by:

- **HE General Gnassingbé Eyadema** of Togo,
- **HE Lt Mathieu Kerekou** of Dahomey (now Benin),
- **HE Sir Dawda Jawara** of the Gambia,
- **HE Mr Luis Cabral** of Guinea Bissau,
- **HE Mr Felix Houphouet-Boigny** of Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire),
- **HE Dr William R. Tolbert** of Liberia,
- **HE Major Baba Diarra** of Mali,
- **HE Moktar Ould Daddah** of Mauritania,
- **HE Lt. Col. R. J. A. Felli** of Ghana,
- **HE Dr Lansana Beavogui** of Guinea,
- **HE Lt. Col. Seyni Kountché** of Niger,
- **HE Mr Abdou Diop** of Senegal
- **HE Siaka Stevens** of Sierra Leone, and
- **HE General A. Sangoule Lamizani** of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) to give birth to ECOWAS.

It is the vision of these founding fathers that we continue to live to this day. In 1977, Cape Verde joined the Organisation.

Our profound appreciations also go to the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS here present, and to our dear and amiable Chair of ECOWAS Authority, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Bola Ahmed Tinubu, to the Government and People of Nigeria for the excellent facilities put at our disposal to commemorate this day.

To our dear guests, friends and partners, we say a big thank you for honouring our invitation and for coming to Lagos to rejoice with us. Our journey as a community has been successful, thanks to the support of our development partners. We sincerely appreciate your support and encouragement.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ECOWAS project is built on the desire of our member states to forge a path of cooperation, integration, and shared progress for our people. In these five decades, our Community has made remarkable strides:

We have facilitated free movement of our citizens across the region, allowing our people to travel, trade, and reside in any part of the Community. We have advanced intra-regional trade, allowing traders and big companies alike to exploit the benefits of an enlarged market. We have implemented a Common External Tariff, thereby easing international trade with other parts of the world. We are developing critical regional infrastructure, physically integrating our markets and communities to boost economic growth and social relations. We have built a regional electricity market, improving access to energy for households and businesses across the Community. **Our regional bank, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) had mobilised and committed $4.5 billion in investment across the region the end of 2024. The funds were made available to various public sector and private sector development projects in our community.**

We have stood together in the face of epidemics and pandemics, insecurity and natural disasters, offering humanitarian support and strengthening healthcare and food systems. We have invested in our most valuable resource—our people—by promoting gender equality, youth empowerment, and human capital development. We have upheld democracy, dispatched election observation missions, and deployed our Standby Force in defence of peace and regional stability.

From the days of ECOMOG, when ECOWAS successfully put an end to violent conflicts in the region, to this day of our focus on promoting youth entrepreneurships and digital economy through support to start-ups and investments in infrastructure, we have demonstrated to the world that the African Solutions work. Fired by a strong solidarity among our member states, we are constantly looking out for each other as we solidify our Community.

With the same spirit of solidarity and collective self-reliance, we are confronting the gravest challenges we face today—terrorism, climate change, unconstitutional changes of government, poverty, and economic disparities. With our strong collective will, I have no doubt that we shall overcome these challenges. As I have often said, our strength lies in our unity, in our shared identity, and in the spirit of solidarity that defines our Union.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 50th Anniversary is not only a moment for celebration, but it is also a moment for introspection and recommitment. The Declaration of Reaffirmation of Commitment to the Aspiration of our Founding Fathers by the Heads of State and Government is a testament of the enduring legacy of ECOWAS. The diverse conferences, dialogues, and conversations being organized by the intellectual community, the youth, private sector and citizens are in line with the vision of transforming the organization from the ECOWAS of States to ECOWAS of the People. The voices of the people of the region matter and they contribute to shaping the affairs of the region today. We have continued to create spaces for our citizens to participate in the integration process, including the planned establishment of the Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) - West Africa, which will serve as a statutory advisory body for the ECOWAS decision-making organs. As a democratic space, the ECOWAS region gives special attention to the concerns of the citizens and their aspirations. We therefore welcome the suggestions being

made by the civil society for improving governance, security and economic integration of our Community.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we mark the Golden Jubilee, let us be reminded of the current international context which impacts on our community, namely the persistence of violent extremism and terrorism, the re-emergence of geopolitical competitions and rivalries, the mounting economic difficulties as a result of the uncertainties in the global political and economic order, and the increasing cost of living across the globe. These challenges remind us of the need to work even closer, strengthen our unity and cooperate as a region. I am happy to say that even with our brothers who left our organization, namely Mali, Burkin Faso and Niger, we have an understanding on the need to continue to work together as members of the West African family. This is the case today with Mauritania, with which we work closely on diverse development projects. As we progress on our journey towards integration, there will be setbacks. But our eyes will continue to focus on the end state as we seek to overcome the challenges and further invest ourselves in the pursuit of building a peaceful and prosperous community for all.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me turn to the strong partnerships that ECOWAS enjoys with its partners. We have enjoyed great collaboration with the African Union and the various entities of the United Nations. We have had great working relations with these sister organisations, particularly with successive Chairpersons and management of the African Union Commission and the Special Representatives of Secretary General and heads of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). Our development partners have also demonstrated unwavering faith in us and have continued to support our integration project, from our multilateral partners, particularly the European

Union, African Development Bank, World Bank, to our bilateral partners with countries such as Germany, China, Spain, United States, France, Sweden, and others. Annually we sign diverse technical and financial cooperation agreements which assist us in the delivery of our mandate. We are therefore grateful to you for your support.

To our leaders, the Heads of State and Government, Ministers and national experts, we say thank you for your guidance and support to the Community Institutions. Our journey has been marked by your unwavering commitment and attention to the affairs of the Community.

I would like to acknowledge the role played by my predecessors, former Executive Secretaries and Presidents of the Commission, some of which are here with us today.

1. The 1st Executive Secretary, ***HE Dr Aboubakar Diaby-Ouattara*** from Cote d'Ivoire (1975 to 1985)
2. ***HE Alhaji Momodu Munu*** from Sierra Leone (1985 to 1988)
3. ***HE Dr Abass Bundu***, from Sierra Leone (1989 to 1993)
4. ***HE Edouad E. Benjamin*** from Guinea (1993 to 1997)
5. ***HE Lansana Kouyate*** from Guinea (1997 to 2002)
6. ***HE Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas*** from Ghana (2002 to 2006 as Executive Secretary) and from 2007 to 2010 as the first President of ECOWAS Commission)
7. ***HE Amb, Victor James Gbeho*** from Ghana (2010 to 2012
8. ***HE Kadré Désiré Ouedraogo*** from Burkina Faso (2012 to 2016)
9. ***HE Marcel de Souza*** from Benin (2016 to 2018) **and**
10. ***HE Jean-Claude Kassi Brou*** (2018 to 2022)

I would like to thank you for making it and for your continued support and guidance to the ECOWAS institutions. You have remained a life partner of our integration agenda. Thank you.

As we look to the next 50 years, let us recommit to an ECOWAS of the People—where peace, prosperity, and justice are not just ideals, but lived realities. This Golden Jubilee does not mark an end. It represents a new beginning. The renewal of a promise of unity, integration and shared prosperity for another fifty years. It is beautiful and wonderful to be together, because only together, we can create the conditions for a bright future for our region.

Happy 50th Anniversary to us all.
Long live ECOWAS!
Long live West African solidarity!
Long live the spirit of African unity and progress!

Thank you.

Merci.

Obrigado.