

National Democratic Institute (NDI)
FOREIGN LEGISLATORS EXCHANGE PROGRAM
Institute for Representative Governance (IRG)

**“Combating Violent Extremism and Reducing State Fragility
Through Democratic Engagement”**
A Program for Visiting Members of Parliament from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

ACTIVITY REPORT

Combating Violent Extremism and Reducing State Fragility Through Democratic Engagement: A Parliamentary Exchange for Members of Parliament from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

From November 13 to 17, 2017, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in collaboration with the Institute for Representative Government (IRG) organized a legislative exchange program for six members of the National Assemblies of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger in Washington, D.C. As part of this exchange program, members of parliament (MPs) from the Sahel region of Africa were invited to discuss with their U.S. counterparts how parliaments can play an active role in combating violent extremism and strengthening peace and security in the region and globally. This program sought to equip MPs with tools and policy information for responding effectively to rising security threats of violent extremism. Each country delegation consisted of two MPs, with one MP representing the majority party and the other MP representing a minority party to maintain political balance in the delegation. The delegation included two women MPs engaged in combating violent extremism and enhancing citizen security, areas where women are underrepresented. Members of the delegation were accompanied by two language interpreters provided by the State Department and NDI coordinators for the duration of the program. The delegation consisted of:

- **Hon. Ataoueguè Joël Aouè**, Burkina Faso, Union for Progress and Change (UPC)
- **Hon. Hélène Marie-Laurence Ilboudo/ Marchal**, Burkina Faso, People’s Movement for Progress (MPP)
- **Hon. Belco Ba**, Mali, Malian Union for the African Democratic Rally (UM-RDA)
- **Hon. Bréhima Béridogo**, Mali, Party for National Renewal (PARENA)
- **Hon. Mahamadou Manla Chétima**, Niger, Party for Democracy and Socialism-Tarayya (PNDS-Tarayya)
- **Hon. Kadi Zakari Hamidou Saidou**, Niger, Democratic Movement for an African Federation (MODEN/FA-Lumana)

The program commenced with an opening session at the headquarters of NDI, in which senior leaders from NDI, including **Sophia Moestrup, Deputy Director for Central and West Africa** and **K. Scott Hubli, Director of Governance Programs**, as well as **Shannon Hill, Program Officer in the Professional Fellows Division at the U.S. Department of State** welcomed the delegates to the United States, discussed the major themes of the upcoming program, and reviewed the week's schedule. In turn, the delegates shared their objectives for the exchange program. During the program, the delegates had the opportunity to meet and exchange with U.S. government officials, leading policy researchers, Congressional staffers at the federal and state levels, and civil society representatives. In their meetings, the delegates and their counterparts explored the mechanisms and ways to address the security threats facing the Sahel region which have become regional and international in nature.

One of the most valuable aspects of the legislative exchange missions organized by NDI are the opportunities for delegates to share experiences with their fellow legislative peers, not only with current office holders, but also with former Congressional representatives, who can more candidly share insights and speak on their experiences without the constraints of holding public office. With this vision, the program included opportunities for informal engagement with the delegates Congressional counterparts. A lunch discussion brought together the delegates and five leading former members of Congress, including: the **Honorable Michael Andrews**, the **Honorable Michael Kopetski**, the **Honorable Thomas Petri**, the **Honorable James Slattery**, and the **Honorable Frank Wolf**. The informal meeting allowed the delegates and the Congressional members to exchange perspectives, and provided a special opportunity for the IRG board members to hear firsthand about the current political challenges and priority issues facing the members of the delegation.

The delegates took part in high-level meetings with U.S. government representatives focused on the priority foreign policy issues of their countries. These meetings included a visit to the U.S. Department of State with representatives from **Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations** and **Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism**, as well as country desk officers from the **Bureau of African Affairs**, and a visit to the Eisenhower Executive Office Building with representatives from **National Security Council (NSC)**, including **Tess McEnery, Director for Democracy and Governance** and **Michael Wilson, Director for Counterterrorism** who spoke about the White House's security priorities and approach to counterterrorism in the Sahel region. In addition, the delegation met with security and defense experts at **National Defense University** who provided insights from their research on a wide array of topics related to defense and security in Africa and the world, such as the root causes of violent extremism and the intersection of gender and security.

NDI hosted a welcome dinner for the delegates, where they had the opportunity to informally discuss international efforts to counter violent extremism and U.S. policy toward Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The delegates were joined by **Ken Wollack, President of NDI**, as well as distinguished guests from the diplomatic missions of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger in the United States, including **Ambassador Hassana Alidou, Ambassador of the Republic of Niger to the United States** and **Ambassador Seydou Kabore, Ambassador of Burkina Faso to the United States and Mexico**.

During the program, the delegates visited the U.S. Capitol Building as well as House and Senate office buildings for meetings with leading foreign policy and defense staff members in the offices of **Sen. Tim Kaine, Sen. Patrick Leahy, Sen. Chris Coons**, and **Rep. Steve Russell** to discuss each country's foreign policy concerns. The group also met with professional staff at **the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee**, and **the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee** who spoke about the foreign policy priorities of the current U.S. Congress and the forces shaping these priorities, and listened to the challenges facing the Sahel region through the perspectives of the delegates.

Humanitarian and international development organizations play an important role in building stability and resiliency in the Sahel region. The visiting delegation met with representatives from **Search for Common Ground** who described their approach and programming in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger which includes preventing violence, disengaging ex-combatants, amplifying community dialogues, and giving space to moderate and young voices, and representatives from **Mercy Corps** who highlighted the organization's important research and projects on conflict mitigation, conflict prevention and prevention of violent extremism. The group discussed the link between governance and violence and the underlying factors behind the susceptibility of certain segments of the population to radicalization and violence.

In addition, the group had the opportunity to meet with regional and subject matter experts at the **U.S. International Development Agency (USAID)**, **the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)**, and **the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP)**, who described their ongoing and planned projects in the three countries, particularly programs that focus on engaging state institutions to counter violent extremism, and shared lessons learned based on their long engagement with local stakeholders in the Sahel region. In exchange, the experts were interested in hearing the delegates' firsthand perspectives and their opinions on the intersection of security, development, and democracy in their respective countries.

The exchange program culminated in a public event organized by NDI in partnership with the **Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)**, titled "Countering Violent Extremism in the Sahel: Perspectives from Members of Parliament from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger." The

event offered an opportunity for the delegates to share their knowledge and experiences on combating violent extremism with a wider audience. The delegates also discussed their country-specific and regional approaches to countering violent extremism and other cross-border security challenges in the Sahel region. The program commenced with opening remarks delivered by **Jennifer G. Cooke, Director of the Africa Program, CSIS**, and was moderated by **Christopher Fomunyoh, Senior Associate and Regional Director for Central and West Africa Programs, NDI**. The event drew over 50 attendees from the government, policy, diplomatic, academic, media, and democracy and governance communities, and engendered a spirited discussion between the speakers and the audience.