

## **REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON WHISTLE-BLOWER, WITNESS PROTECTION ENDS IN MONROVIA**

A three-day Regional Workshop on Whistle-blower and Witness Protection organized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in partnership with the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) and the Network of National Anti-Corruption Institutions in West Africa (NACIWA) has ended in Monrovia.

The workshop which was held from September 19-21, 2016 brought together more 60 participants from fourteen countries in West Africa including heads of Anti-Corruption bodies, Police Chiefs, Parliamentarians with oversight on corruption issues and representatives from international organizations involved with Whistleblower and Witness Protection activities. The West African countries included Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Togo.

The workshop was aimed at increasing the knowledge of participants about the systems to protect whistleblowers and witnesses, to share experiences and lessons learned from other countries within the region and beyond on whistleblower and witness protection as well as identify practical priority actions for West African countries in relations to whistleblower and witness protection. It discussed specific challenges in protecting reporting persons and witnesses and raising awareness about concepts and measures used in other countries, their strength and limitations.

The regional workshop came against the background that, despite increased awareness about the need to enact whistleblower and witness protection legislation and other measures, there is still a lack of technical knowledge on how to device such legislation, good practices and issues to be considered in devising such legislation. Moreover, most countries have some form of general protection provided in their anti-corruption laws, but these provisions remain very vague and usually don't provide sufficient protection for whistle-blowers and witnesses.

The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Liberia, Counselor Frederick Cherue delivered the keynote address at the formal opening of the workshop on Monday, September 19. Counselor Cherue expressed the government's commitment to the fight against corruption and noted that it was based on this commitment that several integrity institutions were established. He named some of these institutions as the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, General Auditing Commission and the Financial Intelligence Unit.

He added that government was making frantic efforts to enact laws which squarely and adequately address the issues of corruption and provide for the protection of whistle-blowers and witnesses which will enable them provide true and accurate information. He then proposed

that there be serious and mandatory protocols for the West African region on the protection of witnesses and whistle-blowers, which protocols he said must be able to inform the enactment or domestic statutes.

Earlier, the Head of Governance and Democracy of ECOWAS, Eyesan Okorodudu said the positive evolution and development of democracy and good governance in the region and the commensurate need to make transparency and accountability grow side-by-side with democracy and good governance have been challenged due to or as a result of the activities of corrupt persons in both the civic public and the private sector.

Mr. Ekorodudu pointed out that it was because of these challenges that the ECOWAS Commission set-up the Network of National Anti-Corruption Institutions in West Africa (NACIWA) and ECOWAS Civil Society Organization Platform on Transparency and Accountability in Governance (ECSOPTAG), to act as vehicles for promoting and upholding the esteemed trinity values of accountability, transparency and integrity in the management of socio-economic and political affairs of the states.

The President of NACIWA, Mr. Issoufou Boureima who also spoke at the opening ceremony expressed the Network's commitment to the pursuit of its objectives and implementing an action plan resulting from a strategy developed in 2015. He however stressed the need for citizens' participation in the fight against corruption as a key element to accompany Anti-Corruption agencies in their mission.

Also speaking at the opening ceremony, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General for Peace Consolidation and UN Resident Coordinator in Liberia, Mr. Yagoub El Hillo said corruption was a major challenge facing all nations and noted that the regional workshop on Whistle-blower and Witness Protection was an essential component in the fight against corruption.

Welcoming participants earlier, the Executive Chairperson of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, host of the Regional Workshop, Counselor James N. Verdier, Jr., said the workshop came at a time when the sub region is plagued with multiple, but very similar experiences relating to weak or non-existent legislation; or lack of sustained programs or policy; devoted to protecting patriotic citizens and residents who expose acts of corruption and those willing to provide credible testimonies in order to successfully convict public officials who stand accused of squandering and diverting public resources for their personal and private benefits.

The LACC boss intimated that several attempts have been made to establish critical instruments to strengthen the anti-graft campaign in Liberia, but noted that little has been done to have them pass by the National Legislature.