



December 9th 2025

Statement on the Situation in Benin

The crisis unfolding in Benin today is not an isolated issue or a simple domestic misunderstanding. It is part of a larger struggle over whether the people of West Africa will be allowed to determine their own political destiny, or whether a small circle of powerful elites, backed by foreign interests and protected by regional bodies, will continue to shape that destiny for them. Benin, once described as one of Africa's most stable democracies, has been pushed into deep political uncertainty under the rule of President Patrice Talon. Instead of standing with the people of Benin, ECOWAS appears to be aligning itself with a leader whose record is undeniably anti, democratic.

For several years now, citizens, civil society organisations, and independent journalists have documented the dismantling of democratic norms under Talon's administration. Media reports have highlighted the exclusion of opposition parties from the 2019 parliamentary elections due to new electoral rules designed in a way that favoured the president's allies. In April 2019, Al Jazeera reported that only two pro-government parties were allowed to contest elections; an unprecedented development in a country long recognised for political pluralism. These elections were followed by protests across the country, during which security forces opened fire on demonstrators. Al Jazeera's coverage quoted witnesses describing live ammunition being used to disperse unarmed protesters.

Local media in Benin, including **La Nouvelle Tribune** and **Banouto Media**, have repeatedly warned about the shrinking civic space. They documented the arrests of opposition leaders, journalists facing intimidation, and the increasing use of legal and financial tools to silence critics. La Nouvelle Tribune itself was, at one point, suspended by the government, an act widely condemned by press freedom organisations. Meanwhile, **L'Investigateur** reported on how the Constitutional Court, once respected across the region for its independence, has been turned into a political instrument used to validate executive overreach rather than safeguard the constitution.

These are not isolated incidents, they form a clear pattern. Under Patrice Talon, Benin has experienced some of the most rapid democratic backsliding in West Africa. Opposition figures such as Sébastien Ajavon and Reckya Madougou were forced into exile or imprisonment under widely criticised judicial procedures. Civil society leaders have repeatedly warned that the country's

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political landscape has been rigged to ensure Talon's dominance. The United Nations, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and numerous human rights groups have echoed these concerns.

Given this record, we find it deeply troubling that ECOWAS would take a stance that appears to reinforce Talon's authority rather than challenge his violations of democratic norms. West Africans have not forgotten how ECOWAS often behaves: when presidents manipulate constitutions, crush dissent, and centralise power, the bloc is silent. But when citizens rise up or express dissatisfaction, ECOWAS suddenly finds the energy to intervene, almost always in ways that protect sitting governments rather than defend democratic rights.

This double standard is dangerous. It creates the perception that ECOWAS is not a community of nations rooted in the will of the people, but a club of presidents who protect one another regardless of their abuses. If ECOWAS chooses to intervene in Benin now, in a way that strengthens Talon's hand, then it is choosing to side with authoritarianism over democracy, with elite interests over the rights of ordinary Beninese.

The Socialist Movement of Ghana believes firmly that intervention, whether political, economic, or military, must never be used to shield anti-democratic leaders. It must reflect the needs and demands of the people, not the convenience of those in power and the people of Benin have been very clear in their demands. They want the reopening of political space. They want an end to the exclusion of opposition parties. They want the release of political prisoners. They want truly competitive elections. They want the restoration of independent institutions. They want justice for the victims of state violence. As **Banouto Media** reported, families of those killed during election, related protests still await accountability and national healing. These demands are not radical. They are basic requirements for any society that calls itself democratic.

ECOWAS cannot claim to defend democracy while simultaneously appearing to validate the actions of a government that has, according to media and multiple civil society groups, repeatedly undermined democratic practice. If the bloc continues on this path, it will only worsen the crisis of legitimacy it already faces across West Africa. People from Dakar to Accra to Lagos are increasingly asking: does ECOWAS serve the people or does it serve presidents? A regional organisation that cannot answer this honestly is one that stands on shaky ground.

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What is happening in Benin is not just a national issue. It is a regional warning sign. Across the continent, we see two competing visions of Africa. One vision belongs to the elites, leaders who privatise state resources, suppress opposition, sell national assets to foreign interests, and centralise political power. This is the world in which Patrice Talon has comfortably placed himself. The other vision belongs to the people, workers, farmers, youth, and market women, who insist on dignity, participation, and justice. The Socialist Movement of Ghana stands firmly with this second vision, which is also the vision of the ordinary people of Benin.

We call on ECOWAS to withdraw any support that strengthens Talon's anti-democratic rule. If ECOWAS wants stability in Benin, it must support democratic reforms rather than authoritarian consolidation. It must listen to civil society groups, journalists, student movements, labour organisations, and local communities, not just to the government in Cotonou. It must demand transparent reforms, protection of political freedoms, and genuine dialogue rooted in the will of the people. Anything less would be a betrayal of ECOWAS' own stated principles, and a betrayal of the people of Benin, who continue to resist repression with courage and dignity.

We, the Socialist Movement of Ghana, stand in unwavering solidarity with the people of Benin. We reject any intervention by ECOWAS that strengthens an anti-democratic presidency. West Africa's future must be built on the power of its people, not on the authority of presidents who fear the democratic voice of their own citizens.

The people of Benin are calling for justice. It is time for the region to stand with them, not against them.

Kwesi Pratt Jnr

General Secretary