STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. OMAR ALIEU TOURAY
PRESIDENT OF THE ECOWAS COMMISSION
AT THE WEST AFRICA RICE INVESTMENT ROUNDTABLE

Kempinski Hotel Gold Coast City Accra, Ghana
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- Your Excellency, President John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana;
- Honourable Ministers;
- Distinguished Representatives of ECOWAS Member States;
- Representatives of the Government of the Republic of Ghana;
- Representatives of Regional and International Financial Institutions;
- Development Partners;
- Private Sector Leaders and Investors;
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure to address this West Africa Rice Investment Roundtable.

At the outset, I wish to express my profound appreciation to His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana, for his leadership and commitment to agricultural transformation, economic development, and regional integration. I also wish to thank the Government and People of Ghana for accepting to host such an important event and for the warm hospitality extended to all participants.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Roundtable comes at an important moment for our community.

Over the past two decades, ECOWAS has established one of the most comprehensive regional agricultural policy frameworks on the continent through the implementation of ECOWAP, contributing to stronger regional cooperation, increased policy coherence, and improved food and nutrition security across West Africa.

This progress is reflected in ECOWAS consistently being the best-performing region in the African Union CAADP Biennial Review process from 2015 to 2023, demonstrating our collective commitment to strengthening agrifood systems, enhancing resilience, and advancing regional integration.

This commitment was further reinforced in 2014 by transforming the regional rice sector through the ECOWAS Rice Offensive, which was adopted. The Rice Offensive was designed to complement and support the National Rice Development Strategies (NRDS) of Member States, and it aimed at contributing to food security, reducing dependence on rice imports, creating economic opportunities, and enhancing the resilience of the rice ecosystem while closing the significant gap in rice production and regional demand. The rice offensive is one of the flagship initiatives to implement the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) in line with the continental agenda, Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP). Furthermore, in December 2024 in Abuja, Nigeria, ECOWAS Heads of State and Government endorsed the

Regional Rice Roadmap (2025–2035), providing a common framework to guide investments and interventions to achieve greater rice self-sufficiency across West Africa.

To advance this vision, the Commission established the ECOWAS Rice Observatory as a regional coordination platform that brings together governments, the private sector, farmer organizations, research institutions, donors, and development partners around a common agenda for rice sector transformation. Through this platform, with the invaluable support of our technical and financial partners, the Regional Rice Roadmap 2025–2035 was developed and adopted by Member States in 2024, providing a shared strategic framework to accelerate investment, productivity, and competitiveness across the rice value chain. Since then, significant progress has been made in translating this regional vision into national action through the development of National Rice Investment Action Plans and country investment pipelines that identify priority projects and financing opportunities.

As we review and reposition ECOWAP in alignment with the Kampala Declaration, we reaffirm our commitment to a Single Regional Agricultural Policy for West Africa, driven by a shared vision and collective action among ECOWAS and its regional partners, including UEMOA, CILSS, the Mano River Union, the Conseil de l'Entente, and the Liptako-Gourma Authority. The review process of the single regional agriculture policy this time also takes into account nine stakeholder groups (farmers, researchers, private sector, non-state actors, youth, women, funding partners, public experts, and financial institutions), regional and international players, and, more importantly, the West African countries. It is a very inclusive, participatory process that requires time and resources to ensure no one is left behind and to enhance ownership.

Our ambition is clear: to build more competitive, inclusive, and sustainable agrifood systems that strengthen food sovereignty, create economic opportunities, contribute to shared prosperity, and progressively achieve regional rice self-sufficiency by 2035.

It is within this broader transformation agenda that rice is registered as a priority crop for our community. Rice is a vital socio-economic crop in West Africa, having evolved from a marginal commodity into a strategic product critical to food security and rural livelihoods. Its rising consumption, driven by rapid population growth, urbanization, and shifting dietary preferences, has outpaced local production. Although regional output increased significantly by 44% between 2008 and 2024, demand still outstrips supply, forcing West Africa to rely heavily on rice imports. As one of the most important staple foods consumed across West Africa, rice plays a critical role in advancing food security, driving economic growth, creating employment opportunities, strengthening regional trade, and enhancing food sovereignty. Its development, therefore, offers a powerful pathway to accelerate agrifood system transformation and advance regional prosperity. Yet despite our enormous potential, the region continues to rely heavily on imports to satisfy growing demand.

This challenge presents a strategic opportunity.

An opportunity to increase domestic production.
An opportunity to strengthen regional value chains.
An opportunity to attract investment.
And an opportunity to accelerate agrifood systems' transformation across West Africa.

To address this challenge, ECOWAS has prioritized rice within its regional agricultural policy, investing in coordination and implementing the Rice Offensive as a flagship aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in the region. While regional production currently meets only 61% of regional demand, some countries in West Africa have advanced individually. Nonetheless, persistent constraints such as low yields, high input costs, inefficient milling systems, post-harvest losses, weak private sector engagement, **and limited access to finance** must be overcome to truly develop our rice sector.

This Roundtable marks an important milestone in implementing the ECOWAS Rice Agenda and our collective ambition to achieve rice self-sufficiency in West Africa.

This roundtable has been organized to build on what has already been established. ECOWAS Commission, the World Bank, African Development Bank and other technical and financial partners have supported the countries to develop their National Rice Investment Action plans. A lot of effort has been put into those exercises and this two-day event.

This Roundtable must therefore serve as a catalyst for action. It must strengthen investor confidence, reinforce partnerships, accelerate financing for bankable opportunities, and help build a more competitive, resilient, and self-sufficient regional rice economy. This gathering, therefore, marks the next critical phase of this journey - moving beyond strategy and planning towards investment mobilization, stronger partnerships, and concrete actions that will position West Africa as a competitive, resilient, and self-sufficient rice-producing region.

Distinguished Delegates,

I am confident that West Africa possesses the resources, expertise, entrepreneurial spirit, and collective resolve to transform its rice sector into a pillar of food security, economic growth, and regional integration.

The responsibility before us is therefore clear: to match our ambition with action and our commitments with delivery.

On behalf of the ECOWAS Commission, I reaffirm our unwavering commitment to supporting this agenda and to working with all stakeholders to unlock the full potential of the rice value chain for the benefit of our people.

The success of this Roundtable will ultimately be measured not by the quality of our discussions, but by the progress we deliver for our farmers, our businesses, and our communities.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Long Live ECOWAS.
Long Live Regional Integration.
Long Live West Africa.