

## DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

*Youths are the foundation of a society. Their energy, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and the security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.*

**President Olusegun Obasanjo, Abuja February 2001**

### **Background**

West African population is predominantly young. In most West African countries about three quarters of the population is constituted by young people. This group thus represents a vital component of the region's human resource capacity, capable of exerting profound impact on the socio-economic political and security needs. At the same time, poverty profile shows that the incidence of youth unemployment is close to 60 percent in a number of West African countries.

But these figures capture only part of the problem not to mention the worst situation many youth faced in the past in situation of conflict as child soldiers. In the current environment dominated by countries facing unstable situations and/or emerging from conflict, this vulnerable group with peculiar but often un-met needs and aspirations faces problems. The challenges and temptations range from dangerous to illegal, and criminal, and young people require appropriate role models to prevent them from involvement in such activities.

UNOWA sees the prevailing situation of youth unemployment as a security issue which should not, and cannot, be allowed to continue, as the region can only afford to neglect the growth and development of its youth at its own peril. The establishment of YEN Unit advocated by UNOWA is a case in point of the Office's commitment to draw attention to the need to concretely address the problems of the youth and empower them.

There is a pressing and immediate need to engage the desperate youths living mainly in the capital and big towns as a way of injecting hope in them, building their confidence and saving the region from another outbreak of violence which will reverse the tremendous gains achieved so far. Sports and recreation has proven to greatly facilitate and enhance both physical and mental growth and development of the youth.

In line with the recommendations of its recent working paper on “*Security Environment and Consolidation of Peace in West Africa*”, UNOWA wishes to engage celebrities from the world of sports such as the renowned soccer club FC Barcelona, which has already entered into a partnership with UNICEF, using Soccer Stars who are sensible to the plight of young West Africans as role model figures.

It is in this context that UNOWA seeks to extend an invitation to FC Barcelona soccer star Lilian Thuram of France, to undertake a mission in the region with the SRSG for West Africa, aimed at:

- ❖ increasing awareness of youth situation in the region
- ❖ encouraging West Africa youth to stand for life free from violence
- ❖ congratulating them for their strong will for peace
- ❖ inculcating the value of sports and soccer as alternatives to aimlessness, idleness, drug abuse and crimes and also as fora not only for the search, identification and encouragement of talent amongst the youth but also for instilling values such as team spirit among peers.

The projected timeframe is from 20 to 30 June, in which the SRSG for West Africa and Pascal Boniface, the author of the working paper mentioned above on “*Security Environment and Consolidation of Peace in West Africa*” will accompany Lilian Thuram to meet with youth in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea Bissau.

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