

**AFRICAN UNION**

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Tel: 251-1-517700/513822; Fax: 251-1-519321 P. O. Box 3243 Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA Cables:  
OAU, ADDIS ABABA

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## **Brainstorming Session on**

**“Building an African Union for the Twenty-First Century”**

**25-28 October 2003**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Involving Civil Society in the Building of the African Union**

## **INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The purpose of the Constitutive Act of the African Union is to establish a “people-friendly African community” predicated on popular participation and partnership with all segments of civil society, in particular, women, youth and the private sector, in order to strengthen solidarity and cohesion among our peoples”. This vision has two critical elements. One is to mobilize the energies of all relevant social and economic forces through its various organs and programmes in the formulation, refinement and implementation of policies. Two, is to stress the element of popular participation as a condition for development.
2. The challenge now is to seek effective ways and means of translating this vision into a strategic plan of action. Fortunately this challenge does not come in a vacuum. Within the last few years, the OAU-AU has evolved concrete modalities and mechanisms of collaboration between the organization and African CSOs. The task now is to review this process with a view to finding appropriate ways and means of refining and improving the structures along with models for enhancement. Developmental strategies must also take into account the organizational structures created through the transitional process, with a view to ensuring coherence and streamlining capabilities and instruments for the realization of the community objectives noted above.

## **II. HISTORY AND PROCESS**

3. In providing for an enhanced role for the effective involvement of the civil society in the affairs of the continental organization the Constitutive Act formalized a process that has been developing within the various policy organs of the OAU over the years on the need for greater involvement of civil society in the affairs of the continental body.

4. The process was inspired by fundamental changes in the global political landscape in the aftermath of the cold war. The late 1980s/early 1990s was a time of African civil society renaissance. Civil Society played an important role in the acceptance by governments that the rule of law, governmental accountability, peace and security are key to the social, economic and political development of Africa. Indeed the importance of civil society in making Africa a more humane continent became apparent everywhere and its growth became visible as an important part of advances on the continent. It was in large measure thanks to grassroots pressure that Africa has witnessed an opening up of its political processes, from the local level all the way through to the continental body – from its role in initiating the wave of democratization that swept over the continent starting with Benin, to the liberation of South Africa, and the transformation of regional and continental organizations.
  
5. Consequently, OAU decisions, declarations and resolutions in the 1980s and 1990s have tended to underline the requirements of popular participation. These included the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development (1990), The Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and Fundamental Changes taking place in the World (1990), the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, in particular, Articles 90 and 91, which noted the need for a mechanism for consultation with African socio-economic organizations and associations, the Grand Bay Declaration of the OAU Ministerial Conference on Human Rights and the Sirte Declaration of 1999. Furthermore, the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments which met in Lome, Togo, in July 2000 adopted the Solemn Declaration on the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation (CSSDCA), which provided for the views of civil society to be conveyed to the CSSDCA Standing Conference, scheduled to meet every two years during the OAU annual Summits. This was further entrenched by the provisions of the Constitutive Act, particularly as it relates to the establishment of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the Union, an advisory organ composed of different social and professional groups of the Member States of the Union.

6. Significantly also, the programme of reform and renewal that the Secretary-General of the OAU submitted to the sessions of the Council of Ministers and the Summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1997 included the strengthening of OAU Civil Society collaboration. Moreover, especially as from 2001, the OAU began to elaborate a framework for the implementation of this initiative. Thus the OAU convened the first OAU Civil Society Conference in June 2001 that elaborated a general framework of cooperation between the OAU/AU and the African CSOs, including the appointment of a focal point for CSO relations, which was approved by the Seventy-Fourth Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers in July 2001. The Council of Ministers further encouraged the Secretary-General to intensify efforts aimed at further involving civil society in the work of the OAU/AU. The tempo was further accelerated by the introduction of the CSSDCA programme into the work programme of the OAU/AU in December 2001 as the CSSDCA was assigned the responsibility of mainstreaming civil society in the affairs of the organization. The appointment of a civil society officer within the CSSDCA Unit in June 2002, in line with the recommendation of the 1<sup>st</sup> OAU/AU-CSO Conference, was part of this process.

### **III. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

7. A second OAU/AU CSO conference was held from 11-14 June 2002 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on the theme, “Developing Partnership between the OAU and African Civil Society Organizations”. The Conference created an AU-Civil Society Provisional Working Group, on the basis of regional representation, to work closely with the Commission for a period of two years on a continuous basis in between meetings of the larger Assembly. It also agreed to transform this working Group into a formal steering Committee, with truly regional representation at its next meeting. The Group has held two meetings thus far (in Accra, Ghana, in October 2002, and in Addis Ababa in May 2003). At its first meeting, the Group amongst other things, prepared proposals for the Criteria for Accreditation and Observer Status to the AU and deliberated on a Draft Code of Conduct and Ethics for African

CSOS accredited to the AU. The draft Code requested by civil society groups themselves, is being prepared with a view to ensuring that CSOs meet the highest standards as they embrace new continental responsibilities within the framework of the AU. The second meeting of the Group reviewed proposals for the Draft Statute of ECOSOCC prepared by a Working Group that was set up by the Interim Chairperson.

8. The Draft Statutes of ECOSOCC were submitted to the Executive Council of the Union in Maputo in July 2003. In its Decision, Council mandated the Commission to broaden Consultation on the Draft Statute within the African Civil Society Community, to ensure early circulation of the Draft Statute to the PRC, and to organize a meeting for its review, before submission to the 4<sup>th</sup> Ordinary session of the Executive Council in February 2003. Since then the Commission, working in close partnership with the AU-Civil Society Provisional Working Group, has initiated a broad consultative process, including national and regional consultative forums, to gather inputs from the African CSO community. The input gathered will subsequently be collated to improve the Draft Statutes. Further to consultations with the civil society community, the improved Draft Statutes will be forwarded to the PRC for consideration. It is envisaged that the Draft Statutes would then be finalised for submission to the next session of the Council of Ministers in the first of 2004, and that the Decision of Council on Draft Statutes would determine the way forward on the ECOSOCC process.
9. Along with this, the CSSDCA Unit, working in close concert with relevant Directorates in the AU Commission, has instituted a process of convening parallel civil Society Forums to add perspective to official Ministerial meetings. The results of these deliberations provided inputs for the AGOA and Minister of Trade meetings held in Mauritius in 2002 and 2003 respectively. The results of the deliberations enriched the official meetings. The practice has now become standard practice and arrangements are underway to convene similar forums this year.

10. It is also significant that the structure of the AU Commission, as approved by the Assembly of the African Union at its Second Ordinary Session in Maputo in July 2003, includes provision for two more desk officers in the CSSDCA Unit to handle civil society affairs. This is a mark of the importance that the Assembly attaches to the need to mainstream civil society in the affairs of the Union.
  
11. Furthermore, taking note of the continuing ties between the descendants of Africa around the world and the Continent, the AU is determined to establish clear linkages enabling the mainstreaming of the African Diaspora in renewed efforts for the advancement of the Continent, as part of efforts towards ensuring that all segments of the African people effectively take ownership of the Union. In order to launch this process, the 1<sup>st</sup> African Union - Western Hemisphere Diaspora Forum was held from 17-19 December 2003, in Washington, DC. A Progress Report of activities that had been implemented towards the development of the AU Diaspora Initiative was submitted to the 34<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Session of the Council of Ministers, which took place in Sun City, South Africa, in May 2003. The Council expressed satisfaction on the Commission's efforts, and strongly recommended that proposed activities for advancing the Initiative be implemented as a matter of urgency. This was further reiterated by discussions at the Maputo Summit. Preparations are underway for the convening of a Technical Workshop on relations between the African Union and the African Diaspora. The objectives of the Workshop would be to develop a concept paper and generate proposals on relations between the AU and the African Diaspora. The Commission is also involved in preparations to convene an Europe -Africa Diaspora Forum as soon as possible in line with the decision of the Executive Council in Sun City as amplified by Assembly discussions in Maputo.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

12. These efforts demonstrate the commitment of the Commission to the full implementation of the vision of

popular participation and ownership of the Union by the African peoples entrenched in its Constitutive Act and other policy documents. The challenge for the Brainstorming is to review the status of these activities/processes and devise strategies and capacity support requirements that would strengthen these efforts and institutions and enable the full participation of civil society in the building the Union for peace and development in Africa. Key elements of this challenge include:

- The finalisation of the Statutes and effective establishment and operationalization of ECOSOCC;
- The strengthening of operational capacity of the Commission to mainstream civil society activities in the affairs of the Union;
- Providing an enabling environment for civil society networks to support these efforts;
- Convening a third AU-CSO general conference, possibly in July 2004, to further review the state of relations, evaluate the progress made so far and put forward recommendations for consolidation of the process in the true spirit of partnership as enjoined in the Constitutive Act of the Union.