

## Concept Note on Union Government

The Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, at its 8th ordinary session in Addis Ababa from 29-30 January 2007, decided that the next ordinary session of the Assembly to be held in Accra, Ghana in July 2007, will be devoted to a **“Grand Debate on the Union Government.”** In the same vein, the Executive Council of the African Union did hold a retreat of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Durban, South Africa from 8-9 May 2007 to brainstorm on the state of the union, which is to the same effect as the Grand Debate.

The argument is that a union government will allow for greater coordination and mobilization of resources, which is fundamental for growth and development. The ultimate goal of the African Union is full political and economic integration leading to the United States of Africa. A "United States of Africa" could help ensure the development of smaller, weaker African countries and the continent as a whole.

A *"Study on An African Union Government: Towards the United States of Africa"* was prepared and presented to the Seventh Session of the Assembly in Banjul, in July 2006 by President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Chairperson of the Committee of Seven. In Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.123 (vii) the Assembly reaffirmed “that the ultimate goal of the African Union is full political and economic integration leading to the United States of Africa”, and requested the Commission to convene an Extraordinary Session of the Executive Council as soon as possible to "consider the Report and propose an appropriate framework of action" 2005, under the theme “Desirability of a Union Government in Africa.” More important to note Hs been the following recommendations,

- a) The “necessity for Union Government is not in doubt”;
- b) It must be a “Union of the African people and not merely a Union of states and governments”;
- c) Its formation must be “based on a multi-layered approach” and on the principle of "gradual incrementalism”;
- d) The role of the RECs should be highlighted as building blocks for the continental framework

The United States of Africa remains a constant theme - the great dream cherished from the earliest days of pan-Africanism. For many political leaders, the failure of the post-colonial state is the root cause of the marginalisation and upsurge in violence that is plunging whole swathes of Africa into chaos. They also think the failure is the source of the dramatic rise in poverty that now threatens the survival of tens of thousands of people. It is destroying what remains of social cohesion, and leaving the way open to the terrifying pandemics of Aids and malaria. An unexpected consequence of the crisis in the nation-state is that the concept of nation is no longer shackled by the law or by revolutionary mystique. It is further argued that establishing the united states of Africa is reinstating these nations will make it possible to bring to an end the crisis of national

consciousness and identity that is ravaging Africa, and will prevent political manipulation of disputes over nationality.

### **Rationality**

A kind of integral federalism is thus emerging and, in it, power is allocated on the basis of a threefold federation of nations, citizens and localities. It operates on the premise that the state acts on behalf of several nations, scattered over a number of localities. That special characteristic gives the concept of renaissance its original meaning - a revival of what went before, be it state or civil society. In that sense, authority and political action can be exercised rationally and effectively only if power is accorded first by reference to nations and citizens, and only then by territory.

The document on the United States of Africa, published by the African Union (2006) claims: 'it should be realized that what unites Africans far surpasses what divides them as a people' (page 8). Yet, this did not translate into a political will to overcome their divisions and move toward strengthening African unity. Therefore, what African leaders need first and foremost is the political will to make the tough decisions and the courage and determination to implement them. In reality, the decision to establish the United States of Africa is the latest in a long series of decisions and agreements, most of which were never implemented. Some of the agreements on regional integration are more than 30 years old, but they are still lagging behind for lack of genuine will to implement them. The slow pace of integration and lack of solidarity is a reflection of the unwillingness of many African leaders to place the fundamental interests of the continent above national or even personal interests in order to move decisively toward genuine unity and cooperation.

### **Major objectives**

To collect views from Civil Society and Social Movements on the issue of Union Government in Africa.

### **Proposed activity**

AFRODAD, MWENGO, ACTION AID, PRF, NANGO and the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development propose to organize a half-day meeting in Harare on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> June from 0900 to 1300hrs in a publicly accessible venue.

The preferred meeting format is the one promoted by the Social Forum.

This a creative mixture of plenary, group work in thematic clusters, open debate and finally promotion of a collective viewpoint in the form of report backs from group work and any other written viewpoints expressed within the context of the space.

## **Proposed Programme**

### **0900- 1000hrs: Plenary**

Welcome remarks and introduction of Chairperson

1. CSOs intervention to introduce methodology of meeting and thematic areas of the discussion and explain road-map **African Union on the Grand Debate for Continental Government**
2. Perspectives from a Parliamentarian.
3. Perspectives from the Government of Zimbabwe
4. Perspective from an ECOSOCC representative in Zimbabwe

### **1000-1200hrs**

Breakaway groups- ten groups anticipated of at least 30 people each.

### **1200-1300hrs**

Closing Plenary

### **1300-1400hrs**

Lunch and end of meeting

### **Target audience**

**It is proposed that the mobilization team targets at least 300-400 people who will come predominantly from the groups and organizations listed below, taking into account the special interest groups, the marginalized and socially excluded.**

- NANGO members.
- Representatives of social movements in the Zimbabwe Social Forum
- Select Parliamentarians
- Government officers from the Ministry of Foreign affairs (The AU desk).
- Representatives of faith-based organizations in Zimbabwe.

Finally, it is also proposed at least two people from Zimbabwe should be supported to attend the Accra meetings scheduled for 20-23 June 2007 that will be reviewing submissions from African CSOs and forwarding them as a consolidated proposal to the AU Summit.