

# Continental Civil Society Conference

## Accelerating Africa's Integration and Development in the 21st Century: Prospects and Challenges of Union Government

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### 1. Background

The 9th Ordinary Summit of the African Union was held in Accra, Ghana, on July 2-3, 2007, to decide on whether or not the African Union should take the first step towards becoming the United States of Africa by the year 2015. Programmed as the occasion for the "Grand Debate" on the phased transformation of the African Union into a fully-fledged United States of Africa, the Accra Summit was from the start geared to be a historic moment for making, perhaps, the most important political decision on African unity in the 21st Century. The summit was to decide on the first step, involving the establishment this year, of a transitional African Union Government (AUG), which would function as the centralized political authority on the continent and whose edicts should be obeyed by all the current states of Africa. In that regard, the setting up of the AUG necessarily entails the ceding of some measure of the political and legal sovereignty of the existing states of Africa to the new central political authority.

Ahead of the "Grand Debate", one could surmise that the outcome could be open-ended. The debate could well spur Africa towards the immediate establishment of the transitional African Union Government (AUG), or create inertia out of a possible stalemate. Either outcome has far reaching consequences. Africa's integration and development may either be accelerated or stagnated or decelerated. Given that all African stakeholders desire neither a slowdown nor stagnation of the continent's integration and development, how can the debate lead to the most preferred outcome, i.e. accelerated progress towards full economic and political integration and development of the continent? How can Africa's pro-democracy, good governance and pro-poor development actors influence such an outcome?

### 2. Rationale

Since January 2007, when the African Heads of States and Governments called for public consultations and debate on the proposal, national and sub-regional level debates slowly gathered momentum. Civil society organizations (CSO), including AFRODAD, through the Southern Africa ECOSOCC process, and in conjunction with other regional CSOs such as Action Aid, Southern Africa Trust and MWENGO, joined in calling for a people-driven process in which the voices and perspectives of the people of Africa would be brought to bear on both the debate and its outcomes. Accordingly, many have launched campaigns to raise awareness and educate the public about the continental union government proposal. In countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia public debates or consultations took place, while several countries were expected to do the same soon.

Apart from the civil society-led consultations, a handful of national parliaments or legislative bodies have also had debates. These national level activities have been matched by continental level consultations. In early May 2007, African Foreign Ministers and Permanent Representatives of the AU held consultations on the matter in Durban, South Africa, followed by the recent AU-Civil Society consultations held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in late May 2007. Invariably, all the consultations have turned into debates on whether the African Union Government should be established now or in the future.

Two main schools of thought have so far emerged, reflecting different opinions about how Africa should proceed on the integration path. One school a “slow track” approach, arguing that integration and development should be advanced at a considered pace that ensures building and strengthening current AU structures as well harmonizing and rationalizing regional economic communities before taking the bold leap to the United States of Africa. The other school advocates “fast track” pace of integration, arguing that as long as the continent remains a motley gathering of fragmented states the ideal conditions for full integration will never be attained. Therefore, there will never be a right time for full integration than now. In addition to the arguments about the rate of integration, process issues have also been raised, pointing to the need to ensure that public consultations on the proposal are as inclusive as possible.

Although the arguments on both sides appear to have merit, they have so far not focused on the substantive issues that led to the proposal to establish the continental union government. Since the transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) there has been a growing momentum towards deeper regional integration that will harness Africa's resources and accelerate the continent's development. Initiatives such as NEPAD speak to the need to collectively accelerate Africa's development, just as earlier initiatives such as the Lagos Plan of Action, the Final Act of Lagos and the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) had sought to do. However, there is widespread feeling that progress in advancing this collective agenda has been much slower than expected and/or desired. Self-interests of the individual African states as well as uneven development of their capacities to pursue an accelerated integration and development agenda are considered as major impediments to progress.

Against the backdrop of the shared dissatisfaction with the current pace of Africa's integration and development, how can progress be best accelerated in the 21st century? In what ways and to what extent will a union government accelerate or retard progress in Africa's integration and development? Under what conditions union government should be formed and run effectively and efficiently? Are there feasible alternatives to union government? What are they and how can they be pursued? What are the prospects and challenges of union government and its alternatives? The on-going public consultations and debates on the continental union government proposal have so far not addressed these questions fully. Yet there was urgency to do so, if the forthcoming AU Summit was to make a well-informed decision that inspires broad-based support for effective and successful implementation.

### **3. Objectives**

It was against this background that a continental conference was convened, that would bring together the broad array of stakeholders and participants in the on-going consultation processes on the continental union government proposal and provide an effective platform for:

- a. Further structured debate and collation of views on the issues that have already been dealt with at the level of national debates in civil society and Parliaments/legislatures while addressing outstanding issues not yet covered in the national level debates on the AUG proposal
- b. Critical review of the mode of public consultation and debates which have taken place so far, as well the time frame for their conclusion, with the view to making recommendations or submitting proposals for an enhanced and inclusive process of public consultations based on common guidelines, modalities, mechanisms, roadmap and extended timeframe
- c. Deliberation and consensus building on the strategic issues that must be resolved in order to advance the collective agenda for accelerated integration and development of Africa
- d. Formulating a common position on whether the 9th Ordinary AU Summit in Accra should decide on the immediate establishment of the African Union Government or not, and propose alternative timeframe for consideration of the Summit.

- e. Outline a post-conference agenda for further civil society-led campaigns and advocacy for accelerated integration and development of the African continent that is people-centered, pro-democracy, pro-poor, self-sustaining and independent

#### **4. Deliberations**

The Pan-African conference was convened ahead of the 9th Ordinary Summit of the African Union, in Accra, under the theme: Accelerating Africa's Integration and Development in the 21st Century: Prospects and Challenges of Union Government.

Conference participants included a broad representation of CSO actors drawn from academia, independent think tanks, gender-oriented groups, and the Pan-African and international development NGO communities in Africa and the Diaspora, as well as activist NGOs at the national levels. Other participants were AU decision makers, officials of the Regional Economic Communities (REC), Members of the Regional and Pan-African Parliaments, AU-ECOSOCC, government officials, politicians, and Pan-African and national business associations.

The conference took the form of panel/roundtable discussions in plenary followed by brief small group breakout sessions. Each session focused on specific aspects of the Union Government proposal as well as broad aspects of the accelerated integration and development agenda of the continent. Proceedings in both the plenary and breakout sessions were aided by commissioned analytical papers, reports on debates in member states, compilation of short interviews, expert presentations, presentation of key trends and arguments. A steering and drafting committee oversaw the proceedings and preparation of the Communiqué that was debated, signed by all represented organisations and adopted by the conference.

More than 100 civil society organizations from 50 countries across Africa, including the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD) and two representatives of the ECOSOCC process in Southern Africa, participated in this conference. The intent of this conference was for civil society organizations (CSOs) to convene and develop a harmonized approach to ensuring that the citizens of Africa are included in the formation of a unified African government.

The conference addressed important matters concerning integration, strengthening the Regional Economic Communities, African citizenship and identity, and the African Diaspora's inclusion in the process. Other matters addressed included democratic governance, human rights, trade, economic and human development, and the question of sovereignty.

However, at the core of this conference was the importance of the voice of the people in the formation of the AU government. Representatives previously held consultations with local, national, and governmental level organizations and individuals to solicit input and concerns about the impending AU government. Reports from these consultations were delivered here, including reports from local level consultations held in Ethiopia, Senegal, and Ghana. The overall message that came from these consultations is that civil society must be involved in this process at every stage.

Ozias Tungwarara of AfriMAP set the tone for the conference by positing that the conference should consider not who will govern Africa, but how Africa was going to be governed. This conference, by considering this theme, would set the tone for the heads of state, to meet shortly.

Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, a Pan Africanist and deputy director of the UN Millennium Campaign in Africa, urged participants to the conference to evolve a grand vision for the AU government. It was up to the participants to set the agenda as to how, what and when to form the union government.

Of particular interest was that the "Grand Debate" was being held in Accra, Ghana, thereby evoking the spirit of the father of pan Africanism, Dr Kwame Nkrumah. This was the time to therefore fulfill the dreams of Africans by ensuring that this debate created a lasting and solid African unity.

The debate on Africa's union should not be just exclusively among the leaders but should incorporate the voices of Africa's people. Because of Africa's myriad of problems it was evident that people no longer trusted their leaders, and vice versa as leaders live in perpetual fear of being overthrown by their people. This would be an ideal time to do away with the "trust deficit".

The conference was reminded of the irony of debating a union government in a continent that still restricted the free movement of its people by enforcing visa requirements, even to attend this conference. Dr Abdul-Raheem bemoaned the fact that the maintaining of these visa requirements symbolized the borders of the mind that African leaders still kept and that perhaps this would slow the progress towards globalizing Africa without Africanizing it first. This was the time to put Nkrumah's dreams into operation, allowing a time where all Africans could vote directly for their own representatives to the Pan African Parliament.

Ghana's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon Nana Akuffo Addo, M.P, suggested that the union government envisaged by all participants should be one that is people-driven and one that embraced regional integration. He said Africans should strive hard to reject the label of "scar mentality" so often used to describe Africa's debacles.

Other speakers also decried the existence of visas across Africa and said these should be abolished to realize quicker the regional integration of Africa. The Minister was presented with a symbolic African Citizen's Passport, which CSOs were launching in the hope that African governments would follow suit.

Although there was consensus that debate was needed to determine the form of union government that should be adopted, there was an overwhelming feeling that people, in general, were keen for a united Africa and that as a start it would be prudent to quicken the rationalization of the regional economic communities and allow for the free movement of people and goods.

Professor S.K.B Assante presented a paper that broke down the objectives of regional integration and received criticism from his peers who had worked with him in both government and the UN system as they felt he favoured the continuation of the RECs as he had spent a great deal of his professional life building them. The feeling was that the RECs were an important building block to a union government as they would facilitate the building, rehabilitation and improvement of roads, communications, infrastructure, and production and consequently lessen Africa's dependence. If macroeconomic policies were improved, Africa's financial base would also strengthen, building Africa's industrial base and leading to less dependence on second-hand goods from China and Europe.

Africa should also concentrate on strengthening inter-African trade as well as adopting a market and monetary integration approach. At the moment the RECs were not strong because of poor implementation of regional protocols at regional and national levels. Even the groundbreaking initiatives of today such as NePAD have not gained total acceptance with only 26 countries signed on to the APRM, a strong component of NePAD, with only three, Ghana, Rwanda and Kenya having completed.

Participants felt that among the things that needed interrogation was why the RECs had failed so as to move on from there. Could the reason have been that people were not involved? Most felt that the slow progress of regional integration was impeding the attainment of a union government and it was therefore

imperative to involve “committed” people. It was felt that the ruling class needed political will to overcome even the regionalism that was being promoted at the RECs level. Perhaps it was better to promote important commissions and institutions at of the AU now for speedier attainment of Union Government.

It was also felt that governments were afraid to engage at regional level for fear of losing their sovereignty to a collective power. The biggest challenge was to therefore deal with the lack of political will among African leaders.

The highlight of the conference was the reports from different countries on consultations and debates from civil society and social movements. CSOs across Africa organized experts’ conferences, public consultations and media events to inform, seek views and make recommendations on the Union government.

Participants to consultations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe supported the idea of a Union government for Africa but emphasized the following:

1. All African people must be involved in the processes of establishing a union government. A union government must represent a Union of the peoples.
2. AU member states must establish common standards in democracy, human rights and rationalize the existing Regional Economic Communities to achieve African unity
3. The current AU must demonstrate a greater capacity to resolve on-going conflict in the continent for it to expand its mandate to a continental level
4. There should be more involvement of the African people in the processes to establishing a Union government.
5. Clear standards must be established on good governance, democracy and human rights
6. There must be clear recognition and understanding that establishing a Union government is an effective way to deal with the development challenges that the African continent faces
7. Accelerate the establishment and enforcement of policies that enshrine the freedom of movement for people, goods and services and African citizenship
8. Broaden consultation with the public and grassroots communities to ensure establishment of a people-driven Union government
9. Strengthen the current AU to effectively enforce decisions made
10. AU member states and governments must engage more with the African people in the process to establishing a Union government
11. Discussions of establishing a Union government must be informed by the achievements and lessons learnt from the current AU
12. That the Union proposal should be endorsed with all AU member states and governments working towards its full actualization by 2015
13. There needs to be involvement of all African people at all levels in the discussions and policy developments on the best approaches and processes to achieving unification of the continent
14. The leader of the proposed union government should be an African with proven leadership capabilities, unquestionable character and one who believes in unity of a multinational Africa
15. The free movement of people and a more developed infrastructure are crucial in achieving unity
16. There is need to integrate macro-economic planning to coherently exploit Africa’s vast resources
17. CSOs should play a key role in influencing the creation of a people-driven African government
18. Union governance must allow for greater coordination and mobilization of resources in achieving growth and development
19. AU member states and governments must work towards rationalizing and harmonizing the existing RECs as building blocks to achieving continental governance
20. The current AU should work towards achieving financial self-reliance

A civil society communiqué entitled “From a “Grand Debate” to grand actions for a united Africa” was created at the close of this conference for presentation to the Assembly of Heads of States. The Communiqué states: “There is a clear consensus among us in favour of rapidly accelerating continental integration in order to respond to current and future economic, political and social challenges. Accordingly, we support the proposal for the establishment of a Union Government. We believe that the Union Government must be a People’s Union and must be built on values of participation and democracy in its construction and implementation at continental, regional and national level.”

Speakers at this conference included the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ghana Hon. Nana Akuffo Addo who delivered the official opening, Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey of IDEG who was one of the facilitators of the conference, Ozias Tungwarara of AfriMAP, Dr. Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem of the UN Millennium Campaign, Hakima Abbas of the AU-Monitor, Professor Atukwei Okai, Irungu Houghton of Oxfam and various civil society organization representatives.

## **5. AFRODAD Role/Possible Opportunities**

AFRODAD, deriving its mandate from the mandate of its executive director, Charles Mutasa, who is the Deputy Presiding Officer of the ECOSOCC Interim Bureau and its Southern Africa representative, has been at the forefront of popularizing the ECOSOCC process in the SADC region. This has been done through the facilitation, with other partners and funders, of the launching of national chapters in the SADC countries and the convening of regional workshops to formalize the process among stakeholders in the SADC. This has seen the convening of three important regional workshops, a regional planning workshop in Harare, April 2006; a consultative workshop in Johannesburg, December 2006 and another in Windhoek, April 2007.

The thrust has been to popularize the ECOSOCC among various stakeholders as an integral link to the AU and get a buy-in as soon as possible before the mandate of the Interim bureau expires. As soon as national chapters have been formed, they should take over the task of popularizing the process in their own countries and especially target the cooperation of their governments and CSOs.

AFRODAD, along with Action Aid, MWENGO and the National Association of non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO) had organized a grand debate for civil society in Zimbabwe to formulate views to take to the “grand debate” in Accra, Ghana. This debate did not take place and consequently four representatives from the Southern Africa ECOSOCC process were sent to Accra to input the views of the Southern Africa process in the debate.

This has created further linkages with other processes involving CSOs and people’s movements, with a call to take the process forward to the People’s Summit in Lusaka, Zambia parallel to the heads of State SADC Summit.

## **Conclusion**

The participation of AFRODAD to this crucial debate could have been enhanced had the “Grand debate” planned for Harare actually taken place. It was, however useful in inputting the steps taken in the ECOSOCC process in the SADC region and highlighting the progress that had been made in pushing the ECOSOCC process in the region as it is an integral interface of civil society and the AU. The pity was in missing the CIDO-organized pre-Summit workshop which would have dealt more with the ECOSOCC agenda than the “Grand Debate” which was based more on the modalities of a Union Government.

The networking at this and other parallel processes also further enhanced AFRODAD’s profile as a Pan African movement which takes seriously pan African issues and engages widely at regional level.

## **Appendix: selected Papers and Speeches**

### **Brief Summary of the Proposal for Continental Government1**

#### **The Moment and Background**

The July 2007 Summit has only one agenda to discuss African Union's "Proposal for Continent Government". This proposal is a culmination of proposals coordinated by the Committee of Seven (African Heads of Government) championed by Libya, Uganda and more recently since 2005, Nigeria. There is a longer history of the AU tracing back to 1963 when it is first established and was known as the Organization of African Unity.

#### **Rationale**

Today Africa faces common challenges including over dependency and under exploitation of African resources by Africans. Regional integration therefore remains key to resolving issues of food security, small economies of scale and weak international bargaining capacity and more importantly, achieving continental unity

Values underpinning the Proposal

Four key values are stated; the rule of law, popular and transparent governance and the respect for human rights

#### **A Phased Proposal**

The proposal upholds common policy standards, harmonized approaches and joint global negotiation in 16 areas including esunconfirmedial social services, agricultural and industrial development, trade, governance and democratization, external relations among others. The process would be carried out in three phases:

Phase 1 (2007 - 2009): Establishment of the Union Government.

Phase 2 (2009 -2012): Union Government fully operational and constitutional ground for United States of Africa lay. Phase 3(2012-2015): All required structures of the United State of Africa at the level of the States, the regions and the continent in place

#### **Key Features of the Proposal**

The Proposal has nine key features namely:

1. Election of the President of the Heads of States Assembly for three years rather one year with the President not necessarily being a sitting Head of State.
2. The Union President will be required to attend meetings of the Peace and Security Council.
3. An expanded Executive Council to include not only Ministers of Foreign affairs but also Chairpersons of Ministerial conferences
4. Less oversight role but more collaborative role for the Addis based Ambassadors in the Permanent Representatives Committee to support the Commission on implementation
5. An executive Commission with a President and Vice-president who are appointed by the Assembly for 6 years and Commissioners appointed by Council
6. A legislating African parliament who will directly be elected by universal suffrage with proportional representation
7. Consultations with Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) shall be enshrined in all Assembly deliberations
8. Establishment of financial structures should harmonize internal African trading and financial exchange
9. Establishment of National Commissions on AU Affairs must include CSOs and disseminate decision to accelerate implementation

**Two schools of thought have emerged among member states**

1. The African Union should build and strengthen current AU structures, harmonize and rationalize regional economic communities before taking the bold leap to the United States of Africa.
2. The African Union should accelerate the pace of integration for as long as the continent remains a motley gathering of fragmented states, the ideal conditions for full integration will never be attained.

CSO Actions to popularize and deepen people's debates on the Continental Government

International, Pan-African and national civil society coalitions and organisations have undertaken to do the following over May and June:

to hold national public debates on May 25th 2007 in several African countries, carry out expert assessments, raise public awareness on key features of the proposal through mass media and invite musical artists across the continent to carry out performances on pan Africanism. They will also continuously engage governments of African states and hold a Continental Conference on African Peoples and Continental Government. In Ghana, a host CSO Committee has begun to coordinate and support civil society organizations that may wish to attend the Summit.

\* This brief is summarized by Oxfam for the purposes of popularizing two formal documents by the African Union namely; Study towards Continental ^Government (also known as the base document) and the Report on African Union Government Implementation Modalities.