

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis-Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Téléphone : +251 115 517 700 Fax : +251 115 517844 www.africa-union.org

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
Fourteenth Ordinary Session
26 – 30 January 2009
Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA**

EX.CL/488 (XIV)

**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE PERMANENT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL COUNCIL OF THE AFRICAN UNION
(ECOSOCC)**

**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE PERMANENT GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL
COUNCIL OF THE AFRICAN UNION (ECOSOCC)**

Council will recall its Decision (Doc. EX.CL/412(XIII)) at the Thirteenth Ordinary Session held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt from 24-28 June 2008 on the Report of the Commission on the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) In that Decision, Council commended the efforts of the Standing Committee of the Interim ECOSOCC in implementing its previous Decisions on elections into ECOSOCC and recognised these efforts as having established an appropriate foundation for launching the Permanent Assembly of ECOSOCC. It then requested the Chairperson of the Commission in consultation with the Chairperson of the Union to set an early date for launching the Permanent Assembly of ECOSOCC and to take all necessary measures to facilitate the process.

The Launch of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC)

Soon after the session of the Council and following urgent consultations between the two leaders of the Union, the Permanent General Assembly of ECOSOCC was launched in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in September 2008 under the leadership of the Chairperson of the Union and President of the United Republic of Tanzania, His Excellency, President Jakaya Kikwete.

The launch of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the AU was a decisive step in the efforts of the African Union to consolidate the institutional architecture of the Organisation.

Part of the credit for this development must go to my predecessor, Prof. Wangari Maathai, Nobel Laureate and Presiding Officer of the Interim ECOSOCC Assembly and the Chairperson of the Credentials Committee of the Interim ECOSOCC Assembly, Hon. Saida Agrebi, ss. Their efforts were critical to the successful conduct of national, regional and continental elections into the Permanent ECOSOCC Assembly. Prof. Maathai also presided over the transition process that oversaw the elections of the principal Officers of the Permanent Assembly. Both elections were widely acknowledged as free, fair and transparent.

The process of institution-building of ECOSOCC

However, the process of institution-building of ECOSOCC continues and the new ECOSOCC Assembly is committed to strengthen its foundations as a critical organ of the Union. The ECOSOCC of the African Union is a unique kind of institution. It is not the same as the UN-ECOSOC or EU-ECOSOC because it is an opportunity for African civil society to play a direct and active role in charting the future of the continent, organizing itself in partnership with African governments to contribute to the principles, policies and programmes of the Union.

The establishment of ECOSOCC does not prelude or exclude normal civil society activity outside the framework of the continental body. However, it provides a more important and significant layer of precise involvement and contribution to the processes of policy decision-making and implementation. In this regard, the impulse is not for the African Union to organise civil society. Rather the organizing principle of the ECOSOCC of the African Union is one in which civil society would organize themselves through elections to work with the organization.

In his keynote address at the launching of the Permanent Assembly of ECOSOCC, President Jakaya Kikwete, the Chairperson of the Union and President of the United Republic of Tanzania, underlined this unique status. He noted “that this is the first time that an institution such as the African Union that began as an Inter-Governmental Organization is incorporating non-state actors as full partners in the policy-making enterprise. Our ECOSOCC is not an allied or associated body of the Union. It is more or less a civil society parliament made up of elected representatives of civil society organizations of Member States and the regions of the continent. Therefore, the civil society on the continent will have a formal forum where their voices could be heard and considered. The civil society has now become part of the normal and routine processes of policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation within the African Union. In following this path, the African Union has gone beyond the mere processes of consultation that other institutions still adhere to Africa therefore, has given the values of democratization and inclusiveness, a more holistic and enduring meaning and significance.

The commitment of the new Permanent General Assembly is to enshrine the value and objectives that instigated this unique institution and to harness it to the cause of peace, development and prosperity in Africa.

The work of the Permanent ECOSOCC General Assembly

As evidence of this commitment, the ECOSOCC Assembly commenced its work almost immediately after its launching in Dar-es-Salaam. It began with an orientation meeting for new members in Nairobi, Kenya from 16-19 October 2008. The orientation meeting developed Rules of Procedure for the operations of the organ. It also established a precise programme for the completion of elections in Member States where they have not yet been held as requested by the Council Decision in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, in July 2008. The programme anticipates the completion of the elections in March/April 2009 in order to enable the formation of Cluster Committees that would facilitate the programmatic thrust of ECOSOCC. The Cluster Committees would work effectively with the relevant departments of the Commission and other organs of the Union to fast-track the process of unity and political and economic development of the Continent.

The Permanent Assembly has also taken on board the requirement of the Audit Panel of the Union and the recommendations and Decisions of Council on the same. Consequently, it held a second meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, from 16-19 December 2008 to develop and consolidate its Strategic Plan of Action for the next four years of tenure and to review the Statutes of ECOSOCC as recommended by the Audit Panel and this august Council at its Extra-Ordinary Session in Arusha, Tanzania, in May 2008. The process is on-going and we are determined to complete these activities so that ECOSOCC can effectively report back to you at your next Ordinary Session in Madagascar in July 2009.

Furthermore, during its Abuja meeting, the ECOSOCC General Assembly adopted a resolution on the organisation of a Festival of African Heritage and Music (FAHM) in 2010. The purpose of the festival is two-fold: first, ECOSOCC observed that its composition so far has not fully incorporated cultural groups and their activities. Moreover, this process is required to popularise the African Union and effectively associate the grass-roots with its objectives and programmes. The preparation for this festival will begin in earnest in early 2009.

In addition, ECOSOCC through its Secretariat in CIDO has worked with the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the Union to develop appropriate mechanisms for civil society interaction and support for the work of this very important organ. During the Retreat of the PSC in

Livingstone, Zambia in December 2008 that was subsequently adopted in Addis Ababa in December 2008.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To enable ECOSOCC to effectively accomplish its mission, the implementation of two related Decisions of Council are essential. The first is that ECOSOCC should be effectively-resourced. In her valedictory speech at Sharm El Sheikh, Prof. Maathai, noted that so far ECOSOCC has been treated as a poor cousin in terms of the budgetary provisions of the Union. In its related Decision (Doc.EX.CL/412(XIII)), this august Council requested Member States to provide adequate support to ECOSOCC and to the Permanent Assembly as soon as it is established. The time has come to redeem this pledge. In the Interim period when ECOSOCC was focused simply on elections the provision of severely limited resources could be understood. This is no longer the case. ECOSOCC should now receive necessary and ample resources to enable the effective operationalisation of its working Clusters.

In addition while every effort would be made to mobilize extra-budgetary funds to support the operations of ECOSOCC, it is important that the core resources come from the Union itself so that the organ becomes the grass-root voice that the international society learns to respect rather than satellite extensions of foreign civil society organisations.

Secondly, the distinct effort of the Secretariat in the African Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) has been remarkable. The leadership has been committed and exemplary in the performance of its duties. However, in order to strengthen its performance in this new and more challenging phase of ECOSOCC, it would be necessary to implement the recommendations of the Audit Panel and Executive Council in Arusha, Tanzania, in May 2008 on up-grading CIDO staff complement and budget.

Finally, the Permanent General Assembly wishes to place on record its appreciation of the contribution of Members of the Council and the Embassies of various states towards the building of ECOSOCC. It is our profound desire that this support would be strengthened and upgraded in this programmatic phase of the development of ECOSOCC.