

**Directorate of Information and Communication**

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**4<sup>th</sup> Annual African CSO Continental Forum on the Joint –Africa EU Partnership Strategy (JAES): Towards Preparation for the Joint Annual Forum (JAF)**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 25 September 2015** - The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual African CSO Continental Forum on the Joint -Africa EU Partnership Strategy (JAES) has just been concluded in Djibouti. The consultation lasted for three days from 18-20 September 2015. The Forum began with a meeting of the African Steering Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015 followed by the Continental Forum of African Civil Society Organizations on 19-20 September 2015.



The Forum was attended by about 40 leaders and representatives of civil society organizations across the five regions of the African continent. The Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate of the AU Commission (CIDO) facilitated the Forum with support from the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC) and the Partnership Management and Coordination Division (PMCD) of the Bureau of the Chairperson.

The main focus of the Forum was to define Africa CSO priorities and framework of action within the current cycle of the Africa-EU partnership process with emphasis on preparation for the Joint Annual Forum (JAF) as the only comprehensive stakeholder

platform for civil society participation. The Forum was concerned with reviewing the concept note that is being developed by state actors for this purpose and making appropriate recommendations and proposals to ensure that JAES remains people-centred and people-driven in the aftermath of the Brussels Summit of April 2014 and its outcomes.

The official opening ceremony was held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015 and received 5 main addresses from the Director of CIDO, Dr. Jinmi Adisa, Mr. Joseph Chilengi, the ECOSOCC Presiding Officer, Professor Dipo Kolawole, the Chairperson of the African Steering Committee and Mr. Ismail Sanalasse Said, the President of Djibouti Civil Society Associations. Subsequently, Mr. Hassan Omar Mohammed Bourhan, the Minister of Interior and Decentralization of the Republic of Djibouti formally declared the consultation open.

In his official opening remarks, the Minister praised the AU Commission, particularly CIDO and ECOSOCC for taking serious measures to ensure strong and effective CSO participation in the JAES process. He conveyed the greetings of the President of the Republic and pledged Djibouti's support for the outcomes of the Forum. He observed that Djibouti has always respected and encouraged effective contribution of civil society in the development process of the state system and that the decision of Djibouti to support the same processes in relations across the Mediterranean is simply a logical extension of Djibouti's desire to build a comprehensive stakeholder community in Djibouti, within Africa, in Africa's relation with the world and in global affairs.

**On the Outcomes of the Brussels Summit of April 2014**, the Forum observed that the implementation mechanisms and structures contained in the two Outcome Documents of the Africa-EU Summit of April 2014 (the Roadmap and Declaration) were essentially state-centred, noting that the main exception was the framework of Joint Annual Forums (JAF) which replaces the Joint Task Force of the previous partnership cycle and will gather together all actors of the partnership. The Forum recognized the JAF will serve therefore, as the only comprehensive stakeholder Forum for driving the people-centred aspirations of the Africa-EU partnership Process. Consequently, the Forum embraced JAF as the appropriate mechanism for channelling, promoting and sustaining the activities of non-state and non-governmental actors.

The Forum however, regretted the undue delay in activating the JAF process in view of its peculiar importance. It observed that it is almost one and half years since the Brussels Summit of April 2014 and a process intended annually had not yet taken place and even now only has a remote chance of happening this year. The meeting called on all parties and structures responsible for the planning process, particularly the two Commissions, to accelerate the process of implementing JAF. It further underlined the need for actors in civil society to play a critical role in lending content to JAF, defining its agenda and work program, its modalities of operation, execution of its mandate and outputs.

**Regarding the relations with State Actors in the JAF Process**, the Forum noted the important profile of state actors in the current efforts to define JAF Agenda, content and modus operandi. The participants concurrently agreed with the general objectives being proposed for JAF and the concept paper being developed by the two Commissions as a baseline working document. Moreover they added that in order to perform its functions as designed by the Summit the orientation, constitution and working methods of JAF and use of its outputs must be people-centred and civil society actors must be fully integrated within its framework. In conclusion and as part of this process, the Forum decided to review the JAF concept paper of the two Commissions and make appropriate recommendations to the paper which remains work in process.

**Furthermore, some recommendations were made in relation to the JAF Concept Paper.** The Forum emphasized the need for the JAF to be held as soon as possible, preferably in the last quarter of 2015 or very early in the first quarter of 2016 to be followed by another in a time frame preceding the 2015 Summit and recommended that the location of JAF meetings should be rotated among the two continents with the first in Africa and a second in Europe in line with the two JAF model proposed by the Forum.

The Forum underscored that as the only comprehensive stakeholder platform of JAES, JAF must be open to all stakeholders particularly civil society actors and agreed that the context of such inclusive participation must be in a continuum that includes preparation, consultation, definition of purpose, goals and execution of outputs. Each of contributing parties should also select its own representatives that will work with other stakeholders to define collective results.

**On the civil Society Interventions**, the Forum agreed that civil society interventions should assume a coordinate and collaborative structure. This will include autonomous CSO action to popularize and extend the reach and impact JAES to the grassroots, interconnectivity across the Mediterranean and the holding of regional conferences and regional platforms to disseminate information and build grassroots support for JAES. The Forum also recommended upwards and downward mainstreaming of civil society contributions within JAF and the alignment and use of the Pan-African civil society envelope to support these processes across the two continents.

The Forum proposed a duration of 2-3 days for JAF as required to produce meaningful outcomes. It also requested that the definition of the JAF agenda be based on wider stakeholder agreement and that the working sessions should have chairs and rapporteurs (from civil society). It further recommended that conclusions should be adopted by plenary sessions. Inputs of seminars and regional conferences must also feed into the agenda and work programs of JAF, concluding that outputs of JAF should include assessment and progress reports on a) challenges, options and possible solutions as well as methods to address challenges; b) discussion of thematic and strategic issues; c) agreement on reporting frameworks to assess the implementation of the roadmap; d) timetable of operation, feedbacks and corrective mechanism; e) effective employment of outputs to strengthen the framework of operations.

The Forum observed that the importance of JAF notwithstanding, the people-centred aspirations of the architects of the Africa-EU Partnership requires that CSO involvement in JAES must go beyond JAF and should be mainstreamed in all aspects and forms of the partnership endeavor particularly its key and important elements.

As part of this process, the Forum stressed the need for civil society actors in Africa (as in Europe) to be involved in and contribute towards the outcomes of the Africa-EU Summit on Migration scheduled to be held in Valetta, Malta, from 11-12 November 2015. The Forum observed that migrants are mostly from civil society and it is essential that civil society actors from developing countries, including Africa, should be an integral part of the search for solutions on attendant problems. The Forum, in particular, underlined the need for an Africa Continental CSO Consultation on the Migration prior to the Summit as distinct from the side event that is being organized by Europeans organizations and the University of Malta on the eve of the Summit. It stressed the need for assimilation of such issues effectively within the framework of inclusive continental and Intercontinental CSO dimension of the JAES process to guarantee the integrity of inputs within the process (Full report on AU website: [www.au.int](http://www.au.int) ).

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