

**Press Release No. 182 / 2014****NAMIBIAN CIVIL SOCIETY EMBRACES THE CHALLENGE OF PARTICIPATION IN ECOSOCC AND THE AFRICAN UNION**

**Windhoek, Namibia 20<sup>th</sup> August 2014** –Namibian Civil Society have been called upon to embrace the challenge of effective participation in the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union ((ECOSOCC) as an entry point for enabling the integration and development agenda of the continent as well as the progressive growth of the Namibian State and Society.



The call came in the opening statements of both the Director and Chairperson of NANGOF-TRUST, the umbrella organizations of NGOs in Namibia, Mr. Irvin Lombardt and Mr Sandie Tjaronda, in the course of the sensitization and motivation campaign on ECOSOCC held in Safari Court Hotel Conference Centre, Windhoek, Namibia today.

The Chairperson of NANGOF-Trust, Mr Tjaronda observed:

ECOSOCC supports policies and programs that promote peace, security and stability in Africa and foster development and integration on the continent as well as promote and defend a culture of good governance, democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, human rights and social justice... In this context, I agree that this visit is timely and relevant in making civil society visible and it endorses the relevance of civil society to the development of Namibia and the continent at large.

Thus he added " Civil Society is an integral component of our societies and this position must be internalized in our Organs of Government and other key machineries such as the African Union and SADC."

In the same vein, Ambassador Lazarus Kapambwe, the Advisor to the AU Chairperson noted that " ECOSOCC provides a barometer for assessing the state of health of African Civil Society and the overall development of the continent. It is an Organ that embraces the active involvement of non-state actors in the continent in the policy-making environment. The ECOSOCC Assembly represents but does not replace civil society"

Mr. Chilengi, a member of the 1st ECOSOCC Permanent General Assembly (2008-2012), observed that while Namibia through NANGO-Trust hosted the last regional consultation leading to the formation of the 1st Permanent ECOSOCC Assembly, it was ironic that it had no representative in the same Assembly and that the time had come to correct that disconnect. The apparent vigor of the the civil society community in Southern Africa must be reflected in the context of ECOSOCC and the African Union. CSOs in Southern Africa should not just seek to participate in ECOSOCC but also to play a critical role in guiding the process.

Following these presentations, Dr Adisa, the Director of the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate of the African Union (CIDO) which hosts the ECOSOCC Secretariat , then outlined the history and development of the current electoral process, related Summit discussions and decisions that paved way for this sensitization exercise and the application requirements, processes and procedures. Specifically, he underlined the eligibility requirements specified in the ECOSOCC Statutes and the timelines set for the current exercise. He urged Namibian civil society organizations to take advantage of the process not just for the purposes of electioneering but to buttress and anchor the legitimacy of the ECOSOCC experience. Accordingly, they should seek to establish national ECOSOCC chapters that would serve as mechanisms for consultation, responsive representation and accountability. They should also seek to ensure that the next ECOSOCC Assembly develops, as a first order of business , a framework for observer status for all CSOs on the continent to ECOSOCC so that they can be directly associated with the conduct of their elected representatives and appreciate how that conduct conforms to the mandate that they give to them.

In the course of the interactive session that followed issues were raised regarding the requirement that fifty per cent of the resources of the intending Organizations must be internally derived. Some felt that this was very restrictive and did not take full cognizance of the realities of the African continent that did not provide appropriate funding support for Civil society activities. Indeed it was argued that the provision may be supportive of NGOs favored by Governments. It was however" noted that the provision challenged civil society groups to seek to broaden their resource base and "Africanize" funding sources but the challenge would only be reasonable in a context where governments and continental and regional organizations also assumed critical responsibility and obligations.

The issue of the urbanization of civil society universe in Africa was also an aspect of concern. CSO groups observed that attention of the CSO community was generally focused on regional capitals and related concerns whereas the majority of the people lived in rural areas. Thus rural issues that were of major concern to the broad generality of the people were often overlooked or neglected. If ECOSOCC is therefore to be truly representative it must avoid the phenomenon of concentration on urbanism.

The meeting was concluded with agreements on next steps and the way forward. It was agreed that the civil society organizations present at the workshop would serve as a vanguard or inner concentric circle for spreading the message to the wider rank and file as in Zimbabwe. In the same vein, the AU was invited to send a delegation to the Namibian CSO expo that would be organized by NANGOF-Trust very soon as a secondary outreach mechanism to support the ECOSOCC process.

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