

**Press Release No 189/ 2014****SPREADING THE ECOSOCC GOSPEL IN LESOTHO: AU MOTIVATION AND SENSITIZATION CAMPAIGN**

**Maseru, Lesotho, 25 August 2014** - About sixty civil society organizations from across the length and breadth of the Kingdom of Lesotho attended the ECOSOCC Sensitization and Motivation Campaign held in Lehakoe Club, Maseru, Lesotho today 25<sup>th</sup> August 2014.



In his Welcome Address to the gathering, HE Julius Tebello, the Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Lesotho, noted that the sensitization mission of the African Union is designed to implement the Decision of the recent AU Summit in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea and that " The Kingdom of Lesotho was a party to that decision in the same way that we were party to the Decision to create the African Union." " Our country," he added, " takes great pride in our membership of our continental organization, the African Union."

The Principal Secretary stated that the decision to make the African Union people-centered was a conscious one arising from the re-orientation of the OAU from decolonization towards development and integration within the framework of the African Union. CIDO and ECOSOCC reflected this preoccupation in the design of AU institutional structures. Two main features set ECOSOCC aside from similar organs in other international organizations including the UN. It is elected and led by civil society and it participates directly in the policy decision making process.



Mr. Tebello observed that " Lesotho is too important to be left out of this vital process" and called on the civil society community to ensure that Lesotho has effective and legitimate representation in the AU ECOSOCC." We want Lesotho civil society to go into ECOSOCC and be part of its leadership and to work closely with government and AU institutions to ensure Africa's development".

The challenge was recognized and embraced in the opening statement of Mr Motsamai, the Director of the Lesotho Council of NGOs. Mr Motsamai acknowledged the need for CSOs to organize themselves to play their anointed roles within the framework of the the AU and ECOSOCC and linked it to the the mission statements and objectives of CSOs in Lesotho in general. He saw the challenge of ECOSOCC as consistent with the objectives and principles that underlined CSO activities and in congruence with the objective desires of CSO activism in the pursuit of liberty, happiness and fulfillment in Africa.

Ambassador Lazarus Kapambwe, the Advisor to the AU Chairperson, added that the mission to Lesotho was a crowning stage of the first step of AU efforts to ensure that all Member States are fully represented in ECOSOCC as the civil society parliament of the Union. CSOs in Lesotho should act in concert with the AU to ensure the success of this mission. "Too often in the past, African civil society were not fully taken into account in determining the future and destiny of Africa. In this ECOSOCC process, they have been charged with co-responsibility." He urged CSOs to take heed of the Zambian proverb that only those who partake of a meal can take part in subsequent discussions about how tasty and delicious the food is. You have to be in the kitchen to determine the flavor of the palate.

After the opening ceremony, Mr Chilengi acquainted the audience with the history, experience and record of ECOSOCC while Dr Jinmi Adisa, the Director of CIDO underlined the purpose and content of the sensitization program, expectations from Civil society organizations and application processes. He guided the audience through the application procedures. The application forms, he explained, has three main parts. The first requested information on the Organizations, address, contact details, designated representatives, date and country of registration and registration authorities. The second focused on objectives, mission and character of the Organization, whether it is national regional or continental, the category of the organization in the framework of the ECOSOCC statutes , membership charges, if any, the leadership and executive body to see whether it is truly African and affiliates and tributaries associated with the organization. The third part relates to funding sources and expenditure.

Dr. Adisa observed that several disqualifications occurred because though the forms were easy to fill, mistakes were often made in the process. Some relevant details were omitted, applications were sometimes signed by officers that did not appear competent or high enough to commit organizations. In some cases also, the organization was not specific about whether the application was for national, regional or continental spots. Thus some level of patience and diligence would be required to ensure that the applications were properly completed.



A vigorous and active interaction session followed. Comments, observations and questions focused on the experience and lessons of previous ECOSOCC Assemblies, the relative advantages and disadvantages

of civil societies operating in an adversarial manner other than as stakeholders in the policy process. Participants concluded that both roles can be effectively combined and the choice of approaches would be dictated by which one would produce effective results. There was a recognition of the need for CSOs to understand the context of policy demands and the cultural and political sensitivities of the policy making environment in which they were operating. Strategies and tactics must be adapted to the situation.

Issues were also raised about how ECOSOCC can tackle wider responsibilities relating to social justice, economic development and international partnerships and dealings with global financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF and treatment of the Ebola virus. There were also comments on the requirement for 50 per cent internally derived revenue for CSOs in ECOSOCC with some alleging double standards because some states also had more than 50 per cent of their revenue coming from external sources. Even so, it was also recognized that the situation of states was distinct from that of civil society. States had several things that could be traded for financial support while CSOs that were fully funded by external sources were much more amenable to pressure and control.

Finally, the CSOs stressed that the lesson of the current sensitization exercise for ECOSOCC was that it had played a critical role in image building for the AU. It can therefore, not be a one-off event. The sensitization exercise must be continuous and the AU as whole has to take a much more active role in sensitizing the African public about its purpose, activities and the process of its development. The AU must now venture into image building and use ECOSOCC as a beachhead for this enterprise. ECOSOCC meetings should be rotated among various countries in the continent and each ECOSOCC meeting should be preceded by a one day sensitization meeting with civil society groups in the country in which the meeting is taking place. In addition, ECOSOCC should convene quarterly sensitization meetings in different regions of the continent as part of its normal schedule of activities.

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