



## Press Release N°233/ 2014

**Seychelles takes up the gauntlet on ECOSOCC.**

**Victoria, Seychelles, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2014** – The Sensitization and Motivation Campaign for civil society organizations in Seychelles was carried out in Care House, Victoria, the capital of Seychelles earlier today. The meeting was attended by a large variety of civil society organizations in the country.



The meeting commenced with a welcome statement the Chief Executive Officer of the Liaison Unit for Non-Governmental Organizations (LUNGOS), the umbrella organizations for CSOs in Seychelles, Mr. Steve Lalande. He noted that LUNGOS and the Seychelles Community Training Institute represented by Mrs. Sylvian Valmont, who is now a member of the Seychelles National Assembly, represented Seychelles in the 1<sup>st</sup> Permanent General Assembly of ECOSOCC.

The experience had shown that ECOSOCC had the potential to be one of the best conduits for civil society to engage in the work of the African Union as it has been designed to contain thematic clusters on various areas, from Peace and Security, trade, social matters etc. The experience of ECOSOCC had proved instructive for sub-regional organizations and such as SADC is now contemplating about providing a replica of an ECOSOCC type of mechanism within SADC. “ ECOSOCC serves as a

good model of integrating civil society in the work of the continental organization” He expressed the hope that Seychelles will also be a location for future events of ECOSOCC.



Amb. Lazarus Kapambwe in his opening statement thanked the people and the Government of Seychelles for the warm welcome accorded to the AU delegation in the process of various meetings with government and policy makers, the media and the wide range of civil society organizations in the period leading up to the sensitization meeting. He recalled the purpose of the mission as instructed by the Executive organs of the AU and expressed optimism that Seychelles because of the history of its past participation in ECOSXOC will respond positively to the call for the country to produce sufficient eligible candidates for ECOSOCC elections so that it can get the required quorum to install a Permanent General Assembly before the end of 2014.

“ The challenge of ECOSOCC as an organ in its next congregation would be to assume full maturity so that it increases its relevance, scope of activities, impact and importance in the family of African Union organs, simultaneously, it must broaden its range of concerns beyond a welfare focus to anchor more firmly the people oriented objectives of the African Union. To do this effectively, ECOSOCC must give practical expression to the operations of the sectorial cluster Committees as stipulated in its Statutes as this will link the African Union organically with African grassroots organizations.”

In his Keynote and official opening address, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Seychelles, HE Mr. Jean-Paul Adam linked the purpose of ECOSOCC with the aims of the government of Seychelles. “ The aim of our government has always been to place people at the center of development. As an African Small Island Developing State, with limited natural resources – it has been essential that we look to our human resource as the first platform for our development. Investing in people is not possible without a strong and inclusive framework that recognizes the multi-faceted nature of sustainable development, and the importance of engagement with our citizens on the basis of understanding, respect and the promotion of dignity of our society. For us in Seychelles this is a promise that ECOSOCC can bring – an unparalleled platform for citizen engagement at the continental level”



“ I would like to, therefore, encourage civil society organizations represented here today to apply for membership of the second General Assembly (of ECOSOCC) and contribute to the work of the African Union, in all its facets. This will be an important

extension of the work currently being carried out by Seychelles to ensure that the work of the Union- for the next 50 years – reflects the opportunities that island nations offer the African Family as well as address our unique challenges. With the work being carried out to elaborate the future we want for Africa, through Agenda 2063, there is no doubt that civil society from Seychelles can bring a unique perspective to the work of ECOSOCC.” He concluded that he was almost certain that Seychelles would definitely fill the seats allocated to it in a timely fashion in the 2nd General Assembly of ECOSOCC.



After the opening session, the discussion moved into the main component of the meeting – the sensitization exercise. The exercise began with a presentation by Mr. Joseph Chilengi, a member of the 1st ECOSOCC Permanent General Assembly who traced the history and development of the ECOSOCC process and related this to its experience in the Interim Assembly of Prof. Wangari Maathai and its successor in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Permanent General assembly. He then highlighted the performance and achievements of ECOSOCC and its challenges. He concluded on the note that the past had provided a foundation for a greater future and that ECOSOCC was gaining ground within the framework of the larger family of African Union organs.

Dr. Jinmi Adisa, the Director of the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate of the African Union led the main sensitization exercise. He began by listing the opportunities and advantages of CSO participation in ECOSOCC. Every activity, he contended was only worthwhile in a context in which those involved can admit the comparative benefits of inclusion vis a vis the opportunity cost of doing something else with their time and energy. He then took participants through the history of the electoral process, the related decisions of the AU executive organs leading to the Malabo decision that set the pace for the sensitization exercise. In particular, he highlighted the different options considered by African leaders and the rationale for the choice that they made. Furthermore, he guided participants through the application processes and procedures and conducted a mock exercise on filling the application forms.



He ended with a checklist that CSOs can adopt at the end of the process to assure themselves that they have filled the forms appropriately. “Participation in ECOSOCC, he concluded was a choice that CSOs can make individually but responsibility for what ECOSOCC does is not a choice. It is a collective responsibility that all African CSOs will share whether or not they were involved in the processes that determine its contribution. It would be better therefore, for all the CSOs to be party to a process that measures their worth and contribution to the African society”.



In the interactive sessions that followed, CSOs raised issue about the AU communication strategy. They noted that sensitization exercises such as the one that is now being carried out by the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) in relation to ECOSOCC should become part of a wider AU strategy over and beyond ECOSOCC. The AU was not very visible on the ground in African Member States in contrast to the UN and there is need for the AU to adopt a more sustained and aggressive sensitization posture. Issues were also raised regarding when and where the ECOSOCC elections would be held, the eligibility criteria, the Electoral College and the modalities for determining who and who can participate as candidates in the elections.



There was additional emphasis on the need to mobilize CSOs and other constituencies through a variety of communication channels and on how the sectorial cluster communities can be made to work effectively in the 2<sup>nd</sup> ECOSOCC General Assembly. There was some concern that Seychelles does not have single member of staff in the African Union Commission and appeal that for this situation to be corrected as soon as possible. Members of the

AU delegation in turn explained the AU recruitment procedures and urged Seychelles to encourage its qualified personnel to apply as the AU gave preference to countries that are underrepresented in the processes of recruitment.

The meeting concluded with two main considerations. First, the CSOs gathered at the meeting reiterated the assurance of their Foreign Minister that Seychelles will fill its quota in the course of the ECOSOCC elections before the end of 2014. Secondly, participants agreed on the need for LUNGOS that is also undergoing transformation into a Citizens Engagement Platform (CEPS) to situate itself as a coordinating springboard for this purpose. In this regard, it was expected to serve as a rallying point for CSOs in Seychelles to apply for the elections and to organize a national ECOSOCC structure that would serve as a mechanism for consultation and accountability for representatives in ECOSOCC. In the spirit of partnership, the CSOs would approach both the Government of Seychelles and the AU to provide support for this national mechanism.

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