



BRIEF ON THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL OF THE AFRICAN UNION (ECOSOCC)

1. About ECOSOCC

One of the main defining characteristics of the African Union when it was launched in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002 to replace the Organization of African Unity was the desire to construct a people-oriented and people driven continental organization. The continent's leaders drew their inspiration from calls for democracy and development from all segments of civil society and were intent on mobilizing all its constituencies to promote integration. Thus, the Constitutive Act of the Union stressed the need to build strong partnerships between governments and all segments of civil society as a means of achieving its aims and aspirations.

2. The Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC) was established under Article 5 and 22 of the Constitutive Act to facilitate this objective. The Statute of ECOSOCC, adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Union in July 2004 provided for a "Parliament of non-state actors in civil society" composed of different social and professional groups of the Member States of the Union and the African Diaspora to serve as an advisory group of the Union that collates and harnesses the contributions of civil society to improve AU policies and programmes. The impulse is NOT to organize civil society " Rather the organizing principle is for civil society to organize itself to partner with governments and other stakeholders in the African Union to promote integration and development in Africa.
3. The distinctive character of the African Union's ECOSOCC is that it marked the first time in the process of organizational development of international organizations that civil society is given a formal space in the policy making process. The Statute of ECOSOCC affords African civil society the opportunity to play an active and direct role in close proximity to the political leadership of the continent

4. Composition

The space is open to all civil society organizations that meet the criteria for representation. Beyond that, the facility to serve as electors has often been broadly defined to include all African civil society organizations. These CSOs include but not limited to the following: a) Social groups such as those representing women, children, the youth, the elderly and people with disability and special needs; b) Professional groups such as associations of artists, engineers, health practitioners, social workers, media, teachers, sport associations, legal professionals, social scientists, academia, business organizations, national chambers of commerce, workers, employers, industry and agriculture as well as other private sector interest groups; c) Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and voluntary organizations; d) Cultural organizations and e) social and professional groups in the African Diaspora in accordance with the definition approved by the Executive Council.

5. History and Organizational Development

The process began with the establishment of the Interim ECOSOCC Assembly that was launched in Addis Ababa in 2005 under the leadership of the late Nobel Laureate, Professor Wangari Maathai. The main task of the interim ECOSOCC Assembly was to organize a continent-wide elections to establish a Permanent General Assembly. With the success of this endeavor the African Union took a decisive step in its bid to consolidate the institutional architecture of the Organization with the launch of the Permanent General Assembly of ECOSOCC in Dar es Salam, Tanzania in September 2008. The then Chairperson of the Union and President of the United Republic of Tanzania, presided over the event. President Jakaya Kikwete noted that “with the establishment of ECOSOCC we are creating a people –oriented, people-centered and people-driven community in the Union in which all stakeholders are effectively represented “. Moreover, he added, “this event today has its uniqueness and significance in the annals of international organizations. This is the first time that an institution such as the African Union that began as an intergovernmental organization is incorporating non-state actors as full partners in the policy making process. 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.

6. The Fourth Ordinary Session of the ECOSOCC General Assembly

The purpose of the 4th ordinary session of the general Assembly, which is being held in Nairobi, Kenya from 29 October to 2 November 2011 is to build on these objectives. Significantly also, the event will witness the first ever mid-term elections of the Executive Council of ECOSOCC, the Bureau and Standing Committee that coordinates the work of the organ.

7. The success of this enterprise will go a long way to underscore the virility and democratic spirit of African civil society and the value of their advise and interaction with governments in this regard. The Statue of ECOSOCC makes it mandatory that the Organ must renew its leadership every two years so that each Assembly with a tenure of 4 years has two successive leaderships. The provisions were based on the demands and desires of civil society in their various consultations that culminated in the Statute