

Opening Statement by Amb. Lazarous Kapambwe, Advisor to the AUC Chairperson, at the ECOSOCC Sensitization and Motivation Campaign for Rwandan CSOs -- Gorilla Golf Hotel, Kigali, Rwanda.

Your Excellency, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Rwanda,

The Chairperson, Rwanda Civil Society Platform,

My Colleagues from the AU,

Distinguished Delegates of Rwandan Civil Society,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here this morning to address this distinguished gathering of the CSO community in Rwanda in the course of the ECOSOCC Sensitization and Motivation Campaign in Kigali, Rwanda. Rwanda is the 2nd Leg of the campaign in East Africa, having started in Uganda, and proceeding to Tanzania, the Seychelles and Eritrea.

The purpose of this sensitization campaign was amplified in the remarks of His Excellency, the Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Rwanda. Our cardinal objective is to implement Decision EX/CL/849 of the Executive Council that directed the African Union Commission to undertake a continent wide sensitization exercise to inspire and motivate the civil society community in Rwanda, amongst others, to register and participate in the process of elections to the 2nd permanent ECOSOCC General Assembly. In the same vein the Permanent Secretary has also highlighted the functions and role of ECOSOCC within the African Union.

What remains to be said is that, through this process, the African Union seeks to engage the people directly and to make the partnership concept embodied in the Constitutive Act a reality. We recognize that the challenge that confronts governments at all levels everywhere is to make governance a truly collective act driven by collective inspiration.

We have come to Rwanda because, unfortunately, this is one of the countries which has not been able to present enough eligible candidates to enable the holding of credible elections from which to select the two CSOs that should represent Rwanda in the ECOSOCC General Assembly. The directive of the AU Heads of State is that we must complete the elections and have a General Assembly in place and functioning by the end of this year.

It is important for civil society organizations to understand that participation in, and representation of the Rwandan civil society in ECOSOCC, is not restricted to those who win elections to the General Assembly. Those two representatives must report to the larger body of Rwanda civil society and be guided by it. The task of the representatives in the ECOSOCC General assembly is to represent, by expressing and fulfilling the mandate that you give to them.

Furthermore, ECOSOCC operates in clusters that approximate the key operational Departments of the AU Commission. Each ECOSOCC cluster is designed to work in partnership with its correspondent directorate in the AU Commission. The composition of clusters involves more than the elected members of the General Assembly. In the subsequent presentation by Mr. Joseph Chilengi, a member of the Executive in the last ECOSOCC General Assembly, you will see just how it involves all CSOs on the continent. The work of ECOSOCC is comprehensive and multi-dimensional and extends to every aspect of our society. The lesson is that ECOSOCC depends on everyone here for its success and effective operation.

I have with me Dr. Jinmi Adisa, the Director of the Citizenship and Diaspora Directorate at the African Union Commission. This Directorate, among other things, leads the process of mainstreaming citizen's involvement in the Affairs of the African Union, as well as being the secretariat of ECOSOCC. Dr. Adisa will elaborate on the guidelines and eligibility criteria for elections to the General Assembly, as well as its statutes.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the nature of ECOSOCC is such that it would be counter-productive for any member of the African society to seek to stand aside from it, to ignore it or brush it aside. This is Africa's unique framework that allows the people, ordinary citizens of Africa, to participate directly in the decision making process that affects every facet of our lives. In making ECOSOCC work, we shall be guaranteeing that the voice of every African is heard and taken into account as our leaders decide on the fate of our continent. It is in this spirit that I echo the earnest appeal of the Permanent Secretary before me and urge all and every civil society in Rwanda to prepare yourselves and participate effectively and urgently in ECOSOCC.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to your active participation in the interactive session that will follow.