

**Welcome Address by Mr. Michel Makuza, Director of Multilateral Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Rwanda, at the ECOSOCC Sensitization and Motivation Campaign for Rwanda CSOs, Gorillas Golf Hotel, Kigali, Rwanda, 11 September 2014.**

**Your Excellency, Advisor to the AUC Chairperson,**

**The Director, Citizens and Diaspora Directorate of the African Union,**

**Distinguished Delegates of Rwanda Civil Society Organizations,**

**Representatives of the Fourth Estate in the Media,**

**Invited Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is with sincere pleasure that I welcome the AU delegation and all the Rwandan civil society organizations gathered here to this ECOSOCC Sensitization Campaign that is taking place here in Kigali today.

The purpose of this meeting is to implement the Decision EX/CL 849(XXV) that was taken by the Executive Council of the African Union in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in June 2014 regarding the process of elections into the Social, Cultural and Economic Council of the African Union (ECOSOCC). Prior to that Decision, the Executive Council of the Union had received the Report of the Commission, which indicated that the electoral process into the ECOSOCC General Assembly had been delayed because several Member States of the Union did not have sufficient eligible candidates for elections into the Organ.

Consequently, Council directed that the Commission should undertake a continent-wide sensitization and motivation exercise across states that had insufficient candidates and that subsequently elections into ECOSOCC must be organized before the end of the year in 2014. This is the exercise that has brought the AU Campaign mission to Rwanda today.

The Government of Rwanda was party to the Decision of the Executive Council of the African Union and fully supports the objective and purposes of the Sensitization exercise. Rwanda's support is based on its commitment to the foundation and principles of the Constitutive Act of the African Union that is based on partnership between governments and all segments of society.

The challenge facing our continent today is on how to instigate and foster auto-centered development on our continent, a development process that is rooted in our needs, focused on our demands and responds vigorously and appropriately to the requirements of our situation. Such a development process must be people-centered and people-driven. The civil society communities within African states and societies have a critical and meaningful role to play in this enterprise as springboards and facilitators of the enterprise of government. Their role in this regard will have to be constructive, rational and purposeful to produce the necessary results.

This is the responsibility that the African Union has bestowed on the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) as a civil society organ and parliament of the Union, elected and directed by civil society. ECOSOCC as an organ of the Union is composed of 150 members. Civil society organizations in each of the 54 Member States elect 2 members. Five organizations with a mandate and presence across the continent are elected on continental basis, 10 are elected on a sub-regional basis and 6 are nominated by the AU Commission to represent special interest groups that have not been covered by the electoral process. The African Diaspora communities across the various regions of the world are also expected to elect 20 Members.

ECOSOCC is an advisory organ of the AU. Its main responsibility is to contribute through policy advice to the policy-decision making process of the African Union. Such advice is to be provided across the wide range of AU program and activities. ECOSOCC must garner inputs, sensitize and mobilize support for these policies and programs. It must feed into policy formulation, implementation and the process of follow-up and implementation.

Within this context, our country, Rwanda, because of its unique historical experience and the traumas it has gone through in the wake of our turbulent and revolutionary history fully appreciates the role of ECOSOCC and support the need to use this distinct organ to harness the full potentials of the African citizenry and marry them to the purpose of state building and regional development and integration in Africa.

The miracle of Rwanda today, almost twenty years after the genocide experience, is that we have built a modern progressive society that turns defeat into victory. We have done this by incentivizing and mobilizing the active involvement of all strata of our society to engage in the task of national reconstruction and development. Far from being a charity case, Rwanda has become one of the success stories of our continent. Our efforts have been result oriented because we have succeeded in building a people-oriented and people driven community in Rwanda.

ECOSOCC is designed as a pivot of this enterprise on the continent. It is thus a welcome challenge for us in Rwanda to be a veritable champion and leader of

this enterprise. It is discomfiting for us therefore, to find ourselves in the column of countries with insufficient candidates for elections into ECOSOCC. Surely this is a mistake of sorts.

It is a mistake that we have come here today to ensure that we can and must rectify. Our history and experience instructs us of the necessity to move rapidly and immediately out of the columns of countries with insufficient candidates to the column of drivers and leaders of the ECOSOCC enterprise. It is my firm conviction that we shall do so firmly after the sensitization exercise today.

As a result, I am calling on all Rwanda civil society organizations present here and others that are not to organize themselves appropriately to ensure that Rwanda takes its rightful place by registering and participating in the ongoing process of ECOSOCC elections in a very timely fashion. This is a duty that you owe to Rwanda and our beloved African continent. Africa Arises.

I thank you all.