

Opening Statement by Mr. Steve Lalande, CEO, Liaison Unit for Non-Governmental Organizations (LUNGOS), at the ECOSOCC Sensitization and Motivation Campaign, Victoria, Seychelles, 19 September 2014.

Honorable Minister Jean Paul Adam

Ambassador Lazarous Kampambwe

Members of the National Assembly

Hon Chair of LUNGOS and LUNGOS Board Members

Members of the African Union Delegation

Participants

It gives me great pleasure today to welcome the African Union delegation to our beautiful islands, which is part of Africa and which also as a State, is a member of the African Union.

I hope that our guests have already discovered that Seychelles are like the jewels of Africa and whilst many visitors come from far away other continents to visit, many fellow Africans also want to visit Seychelles. With the growing number of airlinks to the mainland, I am sure that this will become more feasible for many African tourists. Economically Africa is currently experiencing fairly strong growth rates and it is up to us as Africans to take the destiny in our hands and build a prosperous future. Civil society organisations are key ingredients in the prosperity of our continent.

The purpose today is to present the Economic Social and Cultural Council of the African Union.

We have here a significant number of members of civil society that have turned up to listen and ask questions. I thank you all for being here today.

I was recently attending an important meeting about the role of civil society within the SADC region, and we already have 2 great examples within our region of civil society's engagement in helping in resolving intra-state conflicts, in both Madagascar and Lesotho.

In Seychelles civil society organisations engage in various areas of development and LUNGOS as the platform for NGOS provides a structure for civil society to come together into different thematic clusters and engage the state. Similarly,

ECOSOCC provides the structure and opportunities for civil society to engage, as a body the member states of the African Union.

I believe that, ECOSOCC has the potential to be one of the best conduit 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.

Regional Organisations such as SADC are key instruments in continental integration. I just came back from a SADC CNGO meeting, where Seychelles moved from Treasurer, now holds the Vice Presidency and will next year ascend to the Presidency. We were contemplating about proposing a replica of an ECOSOCC type of mechanism within SADC. ECOSCC serves as a good model of integrating civil society in the work of a continental organization. ECOSOCC is even closely studied and researched by other organisations, such as EU.

LUNGOS and the Seychelles Community Training Institute (SECTI) were members of the 1st general Assembly of ECOSOCC. Mrs Sylvian Valmont who is now a member of the National Assembly and myself represented Seychelles. I was elected by members of the ECOSOCC general assembly in the second half of the 1st general assembly to Chair the Trade and Industry Cluster. The first President of ECOSOCC was Wangari Maathai the Nobel Laureate from Kenya and Mr Akere Muna of Cameroon was the second president. The Citizens and Diaspora Division of the AU has worked very hard to make ECOSOCC stand on its feet. I take this opportunity to thank Dr Jinmi Adisa and his team in the division for their hard work. Miss Nadia of CIDO was here in Seychelles several years back for the first motivation event. We also have with us, Mr Joseph Chilengi from Zambia, also from civil society. Mr Chilengi has been very passionate about the work of ECOSOCC and has been a strong promoter of the cause.

ECOSOCC has had some challenges, but there has been lessons learnt and the willingness to move forward is strong. It is with this hope in the future of our continent and the much needed contribution of civil society that we focus on getting the 2nd General Assembly going and civil society getting down to engaging in the work of the African Union.

We hope that Seychelles will also be a location for future events of ECOSOCC. Again, I wish to thank everyone for turning up for this occasion.

I also hope that our brothers from the AU delegation will eat breadfruit, for legend says that once you eat breadfruit, you are bound to return.

I thank you.

Steve Lalande