



African Union



**Organization of
American States**

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

**African Union Hosts and OAS hold forum on Democracy and Human Rights in
Africa and the Americas**

Addis Ababa 12 October 2011 – The African Union Commission (AUC) and the Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS) alongside the AU and OAS Member States, began meeting today, 12 October 2011, at the headquarters of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to discuss challenges and opportunities in the promotion and defense of democracy and human rights in Africa and the Americas.

Introductory speeches by Dr Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Mr. Jose Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States presented a general vision about the challenges faced by countries in their respective regional organizations, as they work to support democracy and democratic processes and promote and protect human rights in Africa and the Americas. The Secretary-General of International Institute on Democracy and Election Assistance (IDEA) Mr. Vidar Helgesen also made a short remark on the activities of his organization in support of democracy and elections.

The meeting, which is holding within the framework of the Second AU- OAS Forum on Democracy and Human Rights in Africa and the Americas, was also attended by Mr. Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the AUC, Ambassador Ruben Maye Nsue Mangué, Chairperson of the AU Permanent Representatives Committee, Mr. Bayney Karran, Chair of the Permanent Council of the OAS, AU Commissioners and the AUC Chief of Staff Ambassador John Shinkaiye.

Mr. Ping underscored the importance of the joint efforts by the AU-OAS- IDEA to cooperate with a view to support democracy and democratic processes so as to promote and protect the human rights of the people in Africa and the Americas. He called on the governments in Africa to implement the instruments on good governance leading to the organisation of free and fair elections in the respective countries in respect of the will and rights of the people.

Chairperson Ping highlighted that democracy has brought some considerable changes in the manner in which elections are organised, as governments and the people progressively begin to accept the verdict of the ballot box and the results of elections. He said democracy does not constitute an imported civilization to Africa; it is a human phenomenon that needs to be gradually integrated into the customs and tradition of Africa.

According to Mr. Ping, the continuation of cooperation between the OAS and the AU in the protection and promotion of human and peoples' rights will further strengthen each regional system's capacity to respond more efficiently to the needs of its users. He underlined the need to continue developing common human rights principles, minimum standards applicable to every human being, adding that, in the area of human rights AU and OAS have been collaborating closely since the last joint forum that took place in the USA in 2007.

In his address, Mr. Insulza said this Forum is a follow-up to the first "Democracy Bridge Forum" that the OAS hosted at its headquarters in Washington DC in June 2007. The OAS Member States, he said, adopted two General Assembly Resolutions in 2008 and in 2009 on "Support for Enhanced Inter-regional Cooperation with the African Union" to signal their backing for the intensification of this collaboration, while in 2010 and 2011 OAS Member States adopted resolutions calling for the "Recognition of the Year for People of African Descent".

The OAS Secretary General explained that both organizations are committed to similar objectives and the recognition of these similarities and potential synergies led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in October 2009. The MOU establishes the framework for a deeper level of cooperation between the two organizations, specifically on issues relating to the promotion of democracy and strengthening of democratic institutions and processes, conflict resolution, protection of human rights and social and economic development. "The MOU represents a historic step in the building of a strategic alliance and partnership between us", Mr Insulza underlined.

Mr. Insulza also spoke out on women's rights.

"...Inequality and the under-representation of women in the legislative, executive and judicial sphere, as well as in the leadership of political parties are critical indicators of the deficits of our democracies and our rule of law".

He added that the lack of equal representation of women in the political field and economic affairs must be addressed.

The meeting will go into its second and final day tomorrow, Tuesday 13 October. Deliberations will be structured around working groups on technical aspects of the topics presented on the first day, namely the strengthening of democracy and democratic Governance, and the promotion and protection of human rights.

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