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Press Attaches and Focal Persons in Communication at AU Member States Embassies in Addis Ababa converge in Sierra Leone to brainstorm on how to broaden outreach about the Union and Agenda 2063 at national levels



Free Town, Sierra Leon 6 June 2016: Ahead of the 27th AU Summit scheduled for 10 to 18 July 2016 in Kigali, Rwanda, the Press Attaches and Focal Persons in



Communication at AU Member State Embassies in Addis Ababa met on 6 and 7 June 2016 in Freetown, Sierra Leone to brainstorm on the AU communication strategy with the view to popularize the activities and achievements of the AU Commission and create impact by taking information from the AU headquarters to the people at the national level

The workshop was raised much awareness about the continental Organisation as is holding in the same venue where the Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was hosted in 1980. The opening ceremony took place in the presence of the Minister

of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone, H.E Dr. Mohamed Gibril Sesay, the Representative of the Chair of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), the Representative of the Bureau Chairperson of the AU Commission, Mrs. Christiane Matondo, the Sierra Leonean Deputy Minister of Information and Communication, H.E Mr. Doradji Ketong, the Ag. Director of Information and Communication of the AUC, Mrs. Esther Azaa Tankou, the Diplomatic corps, Members of Government, senior media editors and correspondents from renown press organs based in Sierra Leone, as well as AUC Official, and resource persons who presented the programs, projects and aspirations of the Ten Years Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063.

Representing the Chair of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), H.E Mr. Doradji Ketong said Sierra Leone has continued to stand strong in spite of the crisis caused by the Ebola epidemics and congratulated the country for successfully fighting the Ebola virus. He commended the Government and the people of Sierra Leone for showing resilience and courage in fighting and eradicating the deadly disease. Mr. Doradji underlined that the solemn declaration which brought together Heads of State and Governments of the AU reiterated the need to enhance African integration and the need to enhance peace and security in the continent as this will determine Africa's destiny. He said the Agenda 2063 represents an opportunity to proclaim the African renaissance, reflect on the achievements of past fifty years while planning on the next fifty years so as to prepare a better Africa for future generations. Mr. Doradji called on the need to join efforts and be united. He underscored the need for synergy between the political social and economic sectors and the role of media to promote the values and vision of the AU. On concluding Mr Doradji said that the meeting presents an opportunity for the Member States and communication experts to find better popularization mechanisms for the Africa Agenda 2063. (See complete speech of the PRC Chair on the AU website: www.au.int).

Dr. Mohamed Gibril Sesay, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone, lauded the initiative of the workshop and thanked the AU Commission for choosing Sierra Leone to organize such an important meeting which will not only raise awareness about the vision and missions of the African Union, but will sensitize the population on the need to have the sense of belonging and be part of the development process of the continent through the Africa Agenda 2063. 'This is an important gesture of solidarity and a strong message from the AU headquarters showing human affection to their sisters and brothers in one of the countries just coming out from the plague of a deadly disease, the Ebola and whose economy was seriously affected even though now things have started regaining their normal trends with the many investment opportunities in Sierra Leone' stated the Ministers of State. He welcomed the participants to Freetown while echoing the late Chinua Achebe who stated "that stories or narratives are the most durable of human achievements and the stories you tell will outlive you". In the same vein the Minister of State labeled the gathering as one of pertinent importance for communicators to tell the story of Africa's premiere institution, the African Union.



H.E Dr. Mohammed said that it is now time for African communicators to tell their story through the African narrative stressing that Africa is not only about the wars, as painted by western media but about the resilience and solidarity of its people to face problems, the progress activism of development and compassion. The Minister for Cooperation and Foreign Affairs called upon media and communication experts to spread the positive news about democratic values and the positive socio economic initiatives of Africa. “We need to show case the vision of the African Union to Africans, we need to show that the African Union is a union of African people and not just of states a union of common men and women who can together lead to the achievement of Agenda 2063. Said Dr. Mohammed. (See complete speech of the Minister of State on the AU website: www.au.int).

“The workshop will go a long way in shaping the manner in which Agenda 2063 will be popularized in light of the common dream of Heads of States who adopted the development Agenda for a prosperous and peaceful Africa.” said Mrs. Matondo while addressing the participants. She noted that the resilience and courage of the people of Sierra Leone is encouraging as it is proof that with solidarity and determination a country can overcome all problems. “Africa came together as one to strongly combat the Ebola Virus. Let us also combine our efforts to achieve the goals and aspirations of Agenda 2063” said Mrs. Matondo.

Mrs. Esther Azaa Tankou, the Acting Director of the African Union Directorate of Information and Communication (DIC) in her opening remarks welcomed all the Press

Attaches and focal persons of communication from the Embassies of AU Member States based in Addis Ababa, and thanked them for accepting to undertake the long journey from the east region to the far western country of Sierra Leone in the coastal city of Freetown. “This is sign that African solidarity and determination to socialize and integrate is a very important step to implementing the Agenda 2063’. She noted that the focal persons responsible for communication and Editors in chief of African media will use the platform to exchange views on how to popularize the Agenda 2063 for the “Africa We Want”. Mrs Tankou also noted that the venue of the workshop hosted the Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1980 and now the same venue is hosting the representatives of AU Member States to discuss how to shape the future of the continent so that Africa should continue to play its rightful role in the world arena with the view to enhance the socio-economic and political development of the continent. “Our presence in Freetown today represents a symbolic gesture and it will send a strong message from the AU Commission as this will raise awareness through the local and social media to inform African citizens at national, regional, continental and international levels about the activities of the Union.” Noted the AU Ag. Director of the DIC while reiterating the commitment of the Chairperson of the AU Commission, H.E Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, to narrow the gap between the African citizens and the AU through a robust communication strategy for a people centered Organisation. “Dr. Dlamini Zuma has placed communication as one of her eight priorities in the Strategic Plan of the AU”, stressed Mrs. Tankou. She concluded by thanking the Embassy of Sierra Leone in Addis Ababa for facilitating the smooth organization of the workshop.

Honorable Cornelius Deveaux Sierra Leonean Deputy Minister of Information and Communication welcomed the hosting of the Press Attaches and editors in chief of Africa Media meeting which he said comes at the right time when the AU people of Sierra Leone needed to recognize and be reminded of the important role the AU Commission played in mobilizing AU countries to stand as one in support of the Ebola affected countries. He commended the Directorate of Information and Communication of the AU for engaging with AU Member State Press Attaches in a bid to broaden outreach of the AU and expand knowledge about the African Union in view of Agenda 2063. He highlighted the relevance of information, communication and dissemination to the realization of Agenda 2063 as a way to impact the lives of Africans. Hon. Cornelius called for a proactive disclosure of information and accountability to spread the word to the youth, the women, educated and non-educated, farmers civil society, people from all walks of life noting that it is only then that these groups of people can be active participants in quest for a sustainable continent with people inclusive growth ensuring ownership of the process of Unionism. (See complete speech of Minister Deveaux on the AU website: www.au.int).

The two day workshop concluded with a guided tour to the Ebola centers and sites on Tuesday 7th June 2016.

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