African Union convenes CSO and Member States to deliberate on Improved Engagement.

30-31 October 2019 – Freetown, Sierra Leone – The African Union’s Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) held a coordination meeting on improved engagement between civil society and governments in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The meeting was organized in partnership with the African Union’s advisory organ, the Economic, Social & Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) with the purpose of increasing productive engagement between African governments and civil society in support of development in Africa.

In his welcoming remarks, the ECOSOCC National Chapter Representative Mr. Emmanuel Saffa Abdulai took time to appreciate the role played by the African Union in bridging the gap in the work done by civil society and governments. Mr. Abdulai who is also ECOSOCC’s Political Affairs Cluster Chairperson impressed upon participants during the meeting that civil society and governments are meant to be partners in the development of the African Union member states.

Mr Abdulai’s statement was echoed by the ECOSOCC’s Deputy Presiding Officer West Region Mr. Francis Apka Komi saying that one of ECOSOCC’s tasks is to ensure that the relationship between civil society and governments move from being confrontational to being collaborative.

Speaking on behalf of the African Union’s Citizens and Diaspora Directorate’s Director Mr Ahmed El-Basheer, CIDO’s Regional Policy Officer, Mr William Carew reiterated that the African Union’s Chairperson attaches a great significance to the effective participation of civil society in the policy processes of the African Union. “The Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora within the Commission and the ECOSOCC work hand in hand in playing a pivotal role in defining the African Union’s development agenda while providing independent spaces for interaction between civil society organizations and AU member states”, he said.
Two senior Deputy Ministers represented Sierra Leone’s government during this coordination meeting on improved engagement between civil society and governments and they shared welcoming remarks to participants present.

The Deputy Minister of Planning and Development in the Sierra Leonean government Mr Robert Tamba Michael Chakanda expressed the government of Sierra Leone’s pleasure to have the meeting held in Freetown citing that the Sierra Leonean government is one of the few governments across Africa that recognizes and appreciates the work of civil society in its work of serving the citizens.

“Allow me to reiterate the Sierra Leone government’s support for the work of civil society in its complimentary role towards the work of governments. It is indeed only by working hand in hand and not as opponents that governments and their corresponding civil society organizations will ensure development and consequently oversee the overall realization of the African Union’s Agenda 2063”, he said.

In his keynote address, Sierra Leone’s Deputy Minister of Political Affairs, Mr Amara Kallon, recognized that governments need civil society for accountability as they carry out their mandate in serving citizens. Mr Kallon however, took the moment to call upon civil society to conduct its operations within the same high-end standards that they expect their respective governments to stand for. “As you exercise your civil society right to criticize, you are bound to an obligation to your country and the continent to partner with government and explore ways of finding solutions to create a better future”, Minister Amara Kallon said.

The two-day stakeholder coordination meeting gave a platform for African governments and civil society to map out a coordination process in the implementation of AU member states’ development policies. The meeting also allowed civil society organizations from the continent to engage government representatives, share their experiences from the frontlines of civil society, and exchange ideas on how to strengthen the relationship between governments and non-state actors. Accordingly, the meeting brought together a geographically representative group of AU member states, ECOSOCC officials and civil society groups from the continent.

**Note to Editors:**
ECOSOCC is an advisory body of the AU whose purpose as an organ is to give civil society organizations a platform to contribute their input in the AU institutions and decision-making processes, in various projects and programmes. ECOSOCC is made up of CSOs from a wide range of sectors including labour, business and professional groups, service providers and policy think tanks, both from within Africa and the African diaspora. National Chapters are designated chapters of the ECOSOCC in a member state.

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