



PRESS RELEASE

THE AFRICAN UNION ORGANISES THE 6TH ANNUAL CONTINENTAL FORUM OF ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES



Opening Ceremony, 28 November, 2019

Nairobi, 28 November 2019. As part of its mandate to advance democratic and participatory governance in Africa, the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) of the African Union Commission (AUC), in collaboration with the Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA), has organised the 6th Annual Continental Forum of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) on 28-29 November 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya on the theme: ***“Enhancing Participation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees in Elections: Towards More Inclusive Electoral Processes in Africa.”*** The theme of the Forum resonates with the AU 2019 theme - “The Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally IDPs and Refugees: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa” declared at the 32nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in February 2019.

The EMBs Forum was preceded by a General Assembly of the AAEA on 27 November 2019. Together with the General Assembly of the AAEA, the EMBs Forum aims at exploring trends, policy directives and practical measures for promoting meaningful participation of IDPs and refugees in electoral processes. This marks the first time on the continent that senior electoral officials are collectively engaging with the policy issue of internal displacement, refugees and elections in Africa. The Forum brings together Chairpersons of Election Management Bodies across the continent, electoral stakeholders and partner organisation.

During the Opening Ceremony, on 28 November 2019, Her Excellency Minata Samate Cessouma, Commissioner for Political Affairs, remarked that *“strengthening the participation of IDPs and refugees in elections is relevant and urgent.”* She further recognised that, as key actors in the consolidation of democracy on our continent, the EMBs contribute directly to the realization of the 2063 Agenda of *“an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a force dynamic on the international scene.”* Against this backdrop, she implored on the EMB leaders to seize the occasion to collectively reflect *“on the relationship between democratic governance and the problem of internally displaced persons and refugees in Africa in order to develop sustainable solutions to the problem of the marginalization of displaced persons and refugees in electoral processes.”*

In the same vein, Mr. Wafula Chebukati, Chairman of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) Kenya, and host Commission of this year’s EMB Forum, reiterated that *“the issue of participation of Refugees and IDPs in the electoral process is a conversation we must have in order to avert the disenfranchisement of this section of humanity.”*

Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, Regional Director for Africa and West Asia, International IDEA, delivered a comprehensive keynote address, emphasizing the inextricable nexus between governance and displacement, the acute research and policy gaps on the subject, and concrete areas of EMB intervention which could help assuage the problems that drive displacement on the continent.

The EMBs Forum was officially opened by Justice (Rtd) Paul Kihara Kariuki, Attorney General of the Republic of Kenya on behalf of His Excellency Uhuru Kenyatta, President of the Republic of Kenya. Speaking on behalf of the President of the Republic of Kenya, the Attorney General noted that: *“The participation of IDPs and Refugees in Elections is an area that must be approached with boldness, sensitivity, pragmatism and focus on the constant need to continually improve the socio-political climate in our Nations. This endeavour is by no means an easy one; with numerous political, social, financial, technical and logistical hurdles standing in its way. If improperly crafted and executed, the participation of IDPs and Refugees in Elections has the potential to exacerbate the tensions that have historically been prevalent during the election periods in most African Nations.”*

During the 6th EMBs Forum, a Policy Brief of the 5th Continental EMBs Forum held in 2018 on the theme *“Towards Corruption-Free Electoral Processes: Strengthening Electoral Integrity in Africa”* was officially launched which offers policy trajectories for EMBs and other electoral stakeholders on fostering electoral integrity on the continent

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