

## **ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL (ECOSOCC)**

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Venue: Online, via Zoom

### **E-Symposium marks 20 years of civil society engagement with the African Union through ECOSOCC**

The African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (AU-ECOSOCC) hosted an enriching E-Symposium on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2024, under the theme "ECOSOCC Beyond 20: Redefining the Role of Civil Society in the African Union Ecosystem." The symposium is one of the key engagements in the build up to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations scheduled for July 2024.

The symposium convened key stakeholders and representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) across Africa to not only reflect over two decades of vital contributions by civil society but to also look ahead to enhancing future collaborations within the AU ecosystem.

Ms. Fatima Karadja, former Deputy Presiding Officer of ECOSOCC, reflected on the founding principles of the African Union, emphasizing that public policies should emanate from the people, thereby underscoring the critical role of CSOs in policymaking.

Ms. Karadja also stressed the timely need for ECOSOCC to undertake a comprehensive review of its past achievements and challenges to better target future objectives.

"ECOSOCC is at a point of maturity at the border between teenage and adulthood. We want to take stock of what has been done so far to better shoot at a target in the future.

"So, these 20 years will enable us to draw lessons from the past, to assess the extent and the impact of its action, to assess and redefine what have been the assets, the ups and the downs, the shortcomings. That is a complete stocktaking so that we improve our aiming and set objectives," she said.

Mr. Fabien Anthony, Chairman of the Pan-African Council highlighted ECOSOCC's role in facilitating the involvement of African CSOs and the diaspora in AU policy dialogues, thus ensuring a broad spectrum of voices are heard in critical discussions.

Participants from various CSOs then shared their experiences and visions for the future, discussing the value of civil society voices in AU decision-making processes and strategies for enhancing policy impact.

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Mr. Khalid Boudali, Presiding Officer of ECOSOCC, said that the symposium is an essential platform for civil society to shape its interaction with the AU. He noted the historical resilience and transformation of CSOs over the past two decades and their proactive role in advocacy and policy formation.

“Through this symposium, we did engage in a series of enlightening deliberations on the involved role of CSOs in policy making, delving deep into the intricate complexities of citizen engagement within the African ecosystem,” said Mr. Boudali.

“But as ECOSOCC or the leadership of ECOSOCC, we still strive to unearth novel avenues for collaboration and passionate advocacy,” he said.

Echoing Mr. Boudali and Ms. Karadja’s sentiments, Mr. Richard Ssewakiryanga, ECOSOCC Presiding Officer Emeritus, lauded civil society as the continent's lifeblood.

“While Africa has governments, we know that civil society are the lifeblood of the continent. In many parts of Africa, the state is not as efficient, is not as equipped, and what supports people across the continent is the work, the energy, and the efforts of civil society. This role of civil society is unique to African countries,” he said.

Mr. Ssewakiryanga also highlighted ECOSOCC's role in transforming CSO grassroots experiences into advisory opinions that position CSOs as thought leaders.

Mr. William Carew, Head of Secretariat, spoke on the centrality of citizen engagement in the development process. Reflecting on the challenges and opportunities encountered by ECOSOCC over the past twenty years, he described the symposium as a "golden opportunity" to discuss and devise solutions to enhance civil society engagement with the AU.

“As we discuss ECOSOCC Beyond 20, we also want to look at how we redefine the role of civil society organizations within the AU ecosystem,” said Mr. Carew as he closed the E-Symposium.

An outcome document will be developed from the symposium discussions and presented to AU Member States ahead of the ECOSOCC's 20th Anniversary celebrations in July 2024. This document will also serve as a reference for ongoing reviews of ECOSOCC's legal instruments and will encapsulate the symposium's deliberations.

The symposium was a testament to ECOSOCC's commitment to advancing the role of civil society within the AU ecosystem.



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### **About ECOSOCC**

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) was established in July 2004 as an Advisory Organ composed of different social and professional groups of AU Member States. The mandate of ECOSOCC is to contribute, through advice, to the effective translation of the objectives, principles and policies of the African Union into concrete programmes, as well as the evaluation of these programmes.

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