

From a “grand debate” to grand actions for a united Africa

Civil Society Communiqué to the Assembly of the Heads of States

Meeting during the 9th Ordinary Summit¹

We, the undersigned organisations from all five regions of the African Union and the Diaspora welcome the opportunity of the Grand Debate to decide on the next steps for the acceleration of political and economic unification of our beloved continent.

There is a clear consensus among us in favour of rapidly accelerating continental integration in order to respond to current and future economic, political and social challenges. Accordingly, we support the proposal for the establishment of a Union Government. We believe that the Union Government must be a People’s Union and must be built on values of participation and democracy in its construction and implementation at continental, regional and national level.

A sufficient body of Summit Decisions and research exists for your Excellencies to decide in this Summit on elements of the proposal for Continental Government without further delay. You have, we believe, a historic responsibility to act decisively and not prolong the process further with suggestions of more studies and audits. There is no need to choose between Africa Union Government and the strengthening of the Regional Economic Communities. We need to accelerate both levels of implementation, as they are critical to the realisation of African citizens’ aspirations for continental integration.

Further, your Excellencies, we recognise that in committing to the realisation of an African economic community and political union in past Summits, you have already affirmed the concept of people’s sovereignty, shared responsibility and non-indifference².

The presence of renewed growth rates, reduced incidences of conflict and war and more open and democratic societies encourages us to call on you to seize this opportunity for a bolder acceleration of continental integration based on the full participation of its peoples. We agree that the acceleration of deeper continental integration of Africa needs to be achieved within a feasible, time-bound and realistic framework.

Consequently, we call on your Excellencies to consider;

A democratic and participatory Union

1. Amending the Protocol to the African Parliament by changing its mandate towards a legislating African parliament directly elected by universal suffrage with proportional representation in the January 2008 Summit
2. Giving a mandate to the African Parliament to establish an expert group on elections to advise, after consultation with national electoral bodies, on the legal, operational and financing modalities for continental wide elections from 2009 onwards
3. Adopting the feature of the proposal requiring consultations with Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) before the adoption of Assembly decisions. Further, you need to ensure that the mandate and programme of ECOSOCC be adequately reinforced and resourced to enable it to reach out to marginalised groups.
4. Reporting back to your national assemblies after the Summit and be personally available to lead the public debate with diverse constituencies.

Implementation of existing policy and rights standards

5. Endorsing the values contained in the Proposal for Union Government and further including the respect for a common African citizenship and gender equality as core values.
6. Ensuring that the bodies responsible for monitoring and enforcement of commitments on human rights, development and democratic governance are properly resourced to enable them to fulfil their mandates effectively. By doing this, we will avoid the current situation whereby, existing continental treaties and commitments of member states are inadequately implemented nationally.

¹ Over 150 men and women from 100 organisations in 30 countries across Africa and the Diaspora extensively discussed the proposal to establish African Union Government during the Continental Conference on Accelerating Africa’s Integration and Development in the 21st century. This followed publications, public consultations, people’s hearings and media work by civil society organisations and a few Governments in seven countries namely, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Libya and Zimbabwe on the proposal.

² Most importantly, the Constituent Act of the Africa Union (2001), the African Peer Review Mechanism, the African Charter on People’s and Human Rights (1986), the Abuja Treaty on the establishment of the African Economic Community (1991)

7. Addressing the urgent need for more functional judicial structures of the AU as means to ensure that member states can be held accountable to their commitments. Further, that you consider rapidly adopting and implementing the proposed protocol to establish a merged African Court of Justice and Human Rights.

African citizenship

8. Removing all visa requirements for African citizens to travel across the continent as a first step towards a Protocol on that enshrines the right to residence, work and movement. Without continental citizenship, continental Government is meaningless.

9. Respecting the rights of citizens, fulfilment of our basic needs, the right to vote and papers enabling us to claim other rights.

10. Adopting a decision that Member states should initiate a sustained citizenship mass education programme for adults and children to create a culture of positive self-consciousness in being African. This should be overseen by a newly established steering committee in the Office of the President of the African Union.

11. Strengthening the commitment to Africans in the diaspora by formally recognising them as the fifth political region of Africa, granting of African citizenship and appointing a Deputy Commissioner for diaspora affairs.

Shared Sovereignty and continental executive institutions

12. We call on you to extend to the African Union Commission and other organs, the authority and resources to enable them to effectively implement the common policy and rights standards. Doing this does not imply a further loss of sovereignty.³

13. The establishment of an expanded Executive Council to include not only Ministers of Foreign Affairs but also Chairpersons of Ministerial conferences is a critical decision you could make in this regard.

14. Lastly, we propose that you adopt existing proposals for specific tax on airline tickets and imports to generate resources for the structures and programmes of the AU.

Strengthening regional institutions

15. We note that acceleration of the Union Government and Economic Community should not imply the end of the RECs. Closer collaboration between the RECs is a pre-condition for an effective integration. Your Excellencies will recall that the adoption of the 1991 Abuja Treaty took place in the understanding that the RECs are the building blocks for continental economic integration.

16. Currently, the rationalisation of the RECs has virtually stalled leaving duplication, overlapping economic mandates, incoherent political mandates and weak harmonisation with existing continental organs and institutions. Yet, we affirm the role of the RECs as a critical force for economic integration, common tariffs, currencies, policy standards and peoples participation.

17. Your Excellencies can act boldly in this regard by calling for the popularisation and adoption of the Draft Protocol on the rationalisation of Regional Economic Communities in the January Summit 2008. Further, the number of RECs need to be brought down to five representing the five regions of Africa.

Strengthening national institutions

18. We invite you to establish a focal point in the leadership of the ministry of foreign affairs with responsibility to provide information to civil society organisations, parliamentarians and the general public about national engagement in AU discussions.

19. Further, we invite you to champion the establishment of a national steering body on AU Affairs, independent of executive control but including representation from relevant ministries, parliament, other constitutional bodies and civil society, to champion and popularise AU affairs and accelerate implementation.

As we ask these decisions of you, we commit our organisations to communicate with our national delegations and machineries in our capitals, as well as to the citizens and peoples in Africa and the diaspora through the mass media.

Lastly, we recognise the historic moment this Grand Debate could mark for Africa's destiny. The responsibility lies not only with yourselves, your Governments but the people of Africa.

As a first step, we will seek out our national delegations at the Summit and our governments at home to take the necessary steps during and after the Summit to adopt decisions and take the necessary actions for a united Africa.

³ This would include among other issues the right to food, health and other essential services, peace and security, energy and infrastructure, climate change and global policy negotiation.

Signed

Abantu, Ghana, Abibiman Foundation, Ghana, African Civil Society Coalition On Hiv/Aids, Nigeria, Actionaid International, South Africa & Kenya, Afrimap, UK & SA, Afro Media Works, Canada/Ghana, AFRODAD, Mozambique, Afroflag Youth Vision(AVU), Ethiopia, Akuapem Community Foundation, Ghana, Alliances For Africa, Nigeria, AMCP, Mali & Togo, Amnesty International, UK, APRM, Ghana, Ashango/Epag, Ghana, AU Dispoara Forum Mission, Ghana, AWEAPON, Uganda, AWPDP, Ghana, Catholic Secretariat, Ghana, CDD-Ghana, Ghana, CDD-Nigeria, Nigeria, CEDEP, Ghana, CGD, Burkina Faso, Claydord Consult, Ghana, Codesria, Denmark, COHRE, Ghana, DHPD, Benin, Dzreke Virgins Association/ CUC, Ghana, El-Friends Of Ghana, Ghana, Faculty Of Law, University Of Ghana, Ghana, Fahamu, US and UK, Federation Des Femmes Entrepreneurs, Cote D'voire, FEMNET, Kenya, FEMNET, Zambia, Fifen/Fefeedes, Cote D'voire, Friends And Rivers And Water Bodies, Ghana, GCAP, Liberia, GAPVOD, Ghana, GAWE, Ghana, Ghana Aids Commission, Ghana, Ghana Society Of Physically Disabled, Ghana, Ghana TUC, Ghana, God And Glorious Partners International, Ghana, Ibis West Africa, Ghana, IDEG, Ghana, IGD, South Africa, Institute For Local Governance, Ghana, Interights, Senegal, International Centre For Conflict Human Rights, Ghana, IRRI, Uganda, ISODEC, Ghana, IUHR, Ghana, Kaleo Baptist Women Development Programme, Ghana, Komenda Traditional Council, Ghana, Lecia, Ghana, Mwengo, Zimbabwe, Namibia Dev. Trust, Namibia, National Governance Programme, Ghana, Network Of Ethiopian Schools, Denmark, Northern Net Work For Development, Ghana, OATUU, Ghana, Opoku Foundation , Ghana & UK, OSIWA, Nigeria, Oxfam International, PADEAP, Nigeria, Pan African Revival Network, Ghana, PAWA, Ghana, Plan International, Senegal, Poverty Reduction Forum, Zimbabwe, Send Foundation, Ghana, SOCD, Somalia, Springs Human Resource Support Services, Ghana, The Ark Foundation, Ghana, TICAD Civil Society Forum, Japan, Trust Africa, Senegal, TWN, Ghana, UN Millenium Campaign, Universite D'abomey Valami-Osiwa, Benin, University Of Development Studies, Ghana, V.T.F, Ghana, WACSOF, Burkina Faso, WANEP, Ghana, Wildaf-Benin, Benin, Women Peace And Security Network Africa, Liberia, Young Women's Christian Association, Ghana, Zimbabwe Exiles Forum, Zimbabwe

Adopted Accra, Ghana, 23rd June 2007