

## **DECLARATION ON THE FORUM ON GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA**

**Addis Ababa, 26 November 2005**

Organised as a joint initiative of the African Union Commission (AUC) and the « Alliance pour la réfondation de la gouvernance en Afrique », the Forum on Governance in Africa took place in Addis Ababa from 24 to 26 November 2005. It brought together participants from different sectors of society (including local authorities, public institutions, regional organisations, civil society, trade unions, pan African networks, the private sector, researchers and traditional authorities), different institutions from the African Union as well as development partners and international organisations.

The main objectives of the Forum were to identify the limits and structural bottlenecks for governance in Africa; to agree upon priority actions needed to improve governance, particularly in the framework of the African Union governance agendas and ongoing programmes; and to build commitment among African and non-African actors to support ongoing and possible new frameworks for dialogue and concerted action, in partnership with the AUC. The Forum understood the notion of governance in line with the key governance principles included in AU governance declarations (i.e. the rule of law, democracy, participation, accountability).

The debates, organised alternatively in plenary and working group sessions, focused on:

- the governance situation in Africa, which led the African Union Commission and the Alliance to initiate an innovative process of dialogue and exchange of experiences on governance in Africa in the form of a Forum;
- a diagnosis of the key governance challenges in Africa, including an analysis of regional perspectives on governance as well as of the diversity of actors involved;
- the identification of priority actions by level of governance (local, national, regional and continental);
- the governance agenda of the African Union, and more specifically the programmes of the different departments of the African Union Commission, of the Economic, Social and Cultural Committee (ECOSOCC) and of the NEPAD.

A consensus emerged on the following points:

- Governance is at the heart of the difficulties that affect African societies and is a major source of prevailing crisis situations (including poverty levels) as well as conflicts.
- Africa needs to collectively conceive and put in place a system of governance in which the different actors can recognise themselves and that responds to their aspirations. It requires a process of dialogue and negotiation between different actors, over a longer period of time, so as to elaborate new ways of managing public affairs, based on values, references and principles that are known, recognised and agreed upon by all players in society.
- The need to ensure that the process of renewing governance takes place at different levels (from the local to the continental level), includes the different actors and links up with existing initiatives.
- The local level should be the key strategic level to renew governance in Africa. Building on an effective decentralisation, the local level provides a suitable

environment to invent and apply new ways of managing public affairs and promoting local development. The local level is also key for improving the living conditions of the people and for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. In recognition of this, there is a need to ensure the representation of local government associations at the level of the AU through appropriate mechanisms and to integrate local governance in the Draft Charter on democracy, elections and governance.

- At the national level, the major challenge is to ensure that States are based on the principles of respect for human rights, democracy and governance as well as on effective public action -as these are the pillars for the legitimacy of government. This implies a strengthening of the capacity of the State to regulate, to ensure social dialogue and to create an enabling environment for economic growth and for the informal sector, on which many people depend for their survival.

- The renewal of governance at the regional level can be promoted by ensuring that the integration process rests more strongly on local actors and spatial dynamics (including cross-border initiatives) and by a targeted delegation of responsibilities to regional organisations, which should be reinforced at the institutional level.

- At the continental level, participants took stock of the mission and vision of the African Union, as well as of its commitments to promote governance, including through a host of implementation instruments (the Constitutive Act, the Durban Declaration on Elections, Democracy and Governance; the NEPAD Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance; the Protocol on the Rights of Women; the Lomé Declaration on unconstitutional changes of government; the African Common Position on the review of the MDGs). In this context, it was recognised that the African Union is an essential trigger for renewing governance in Africa. The Union has fundamental assets for playing this role, including a clear political mandate; the Regional Economic Communities (as pillars of the Union); organs that allow for participation of African citizens (ECOSOCC and the Pan African Parliament) as well a strategic instrument such as the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). However, to realise its full potential, it will be necessary to consolidate the institutional and financial basis of the Union and to reinforce its implementation, monitoring and evaluation capacity.

Building on this consensus, Forum participants:

- Consider that dialogue and partnerships, involving the different actors, are essential conditions for a successful process of renewing governance in Africa.
- Agree on the need to continue the process started by the Forum and to build a coalition of governance actors in partnership with the African Union and its different organs (the Pan African Parliament, the ECOSOCC).
- Call for the effective participation of governance actors in the programmes of the African Union -- in conformity with the vision of the African Union of “a peaceful, integrated and prosperous Africa, driven by its people”.
- Consider that the main roles of the Forum consist in connecting the multitude of innovative initiatives on governance that are taking place all over Africa as well as in establishing mechanisms that allow for a systematic exchange of experiences ; a progressive harmonisation of governance agendas as well as the effective application of new modes of governance.

- Invite the stakeholders of the Forum to give a concrete substance to the partnership with the African Union, including by supporting the ratification of key Conventions (e.g. the AU Convention on preventing and combating corruption or the Protocol on the Rights of Women). It also implies ensuring the participation of civil society (at local and regional level) in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, as foreseen in the Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the Union (article 20)
- Acknowledge the need to develop and support alliances of public, private and civil society actors
- Insist on the need to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations, community-based organisations and the media to participate in governance processes. This should also help to ensure a better access to information and adequate communication on governance and African Union programmes at all levels -so as to facilitate effective cooperation with the African Union.
- Call on the development partners of Africa to engage in an enlarged dialogue with all relevant stakeholders on the challenges and modalities for renewing governance; to support promising African initiatives; and to examine in a critical way the adequacy of current aid practices with regard to governance in Africa.
- Engage themselves to pursue the dialogue on the renewal of governance. To this end, it is proposed to institutionalise the Forum under the leadership of the African Union while ensuring coherence with existing frameworks for consultation (such as ECOSOCC); to hold regular Forum meetings; and to organise multi-stakeholder meetings on governance at the (sub-) regional level.
- Express gratitude to the African Union Commission for having hosted this Forum, which reflects a major innovation in the participation and dialogue between civil society and the African Union.
- Express gratitude for the development partners that have been willing to support this process, both financially and through their involvement.