

**CONCEPT NOTE ON PAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON THE PROPOSED
AFRICAN UNION GOVERNMENT**

**THEME: ACCELERATING AFRICA'S INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
IN THE 21ST CENTURY: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF UNION
GOVERNMENT**

**ACCRA, GHANA
JUNE 22-23, 2007**

1. BACKGROUND:

The 9th Ordinary Summit of the African Union, which will soon be held in Accra, Ghana, on July 2-3, 2007, is expected to decide on whether or not the African Union should take the first step towards becoming the United States of Africa by the year 2015. Programmed as the occasion for the *grand debate* on the phased transformation of the African Union into a fully-fledged United States of Africa, the Accra Summit is indeed a historic moment for making, perhaps, the most important political decision on African unity in the 21st Century. The summit may decide on the first step, involving the establishment this year of a transitional African Union Government (AUG), which would function as the centralized political authority on the continent and whose edicts should be obeyed by all the current states of Africa. In that regard, the setting up of the AUG necessarily entails the ceding of some measure of the political and legal sovereignty of the existing states of Africa to the new central political authority.

Ahead of the grand debate, one can surmise that the outcome could be open-ended. The debate may well spur Africa towards the immediate establishment of the transitional African Union Government (AUG), or create inertia out of a possible stalemate. Either outcome has far reaching consequences. Africa's integration and development may either be accelerated or stagnated or decelerated. Given that all African stakeholders desire neither a slowdown nor stagnation of the continent's integration and development, how can the debate lead to the most preferred outcome, i.e. accelerated progress towards full economic and political integration and development of the continent? How can Africa's pro-democracy, good governance and pro-poor development actors influence such an outcome?

Since January 2007, when the African Heads of States and Governments called for public consultations and debate on the proposal, national and sub-regional level debates have slowly gathered momentum. Civil society organizations (CSO) have joined in calling for a people-driven process in which the voices and perspectives of the people of Africa will be brought to bear on both the debate and its outcomes. Accordingly, many have launched campaigns to raise awareness and educate the public about the continental union government proposal. In countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia public debates or consultations have already taken place, while several countries are expected to do the same soon.

Apart from the civil society-led consultations, a handful of national parliaments or legislative bodies have also had debates. These national level activities have been matched by continental level consultations. In early May 2007, African Foreign Ministers and Permanent Representatives of the AU held consultations on the matter in Durban, South Africa, followed by the recent AU-Civil Society

consultations held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in late May 2007. Invariably, all the consultations have turned into debates on whether the African Union Government should be established now or in the future.

Two main schools of thought have so far emerged, reflecting different opinions about how Africa should proceed on the integration path. One school a "slow track" approach, arguing that integration and development should be advanced at a considered pace that ensures building and strengthening current AU structures as well harmonizing and rationalizing regional economic communities before taking the bold leap to the United States of Africa. The other school advocates "fast track" pace of integration, arguing that as long as the continent remains a motley gathering of fragmented states the ideal conditions for full integration will never be attained. Therefore, there will never be a right time for full integration than now. In addition to the arguments about the rate of integration, process issues have also been raised, pointing to the need to ensure that public consultations on the proposal are as inclusive as possible.

Although the arguments on both sides appear to have merit, they have so far not focused on the substantive issues that led to the proposal to establish the continental union government. Since the transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) there has been a growing momentum towards deeper regional integration that will harness Africa's resources and accelerate the continent's development. Initiatives such as NEPAD speak to the need to collectively accelerate Africa's development, just as earlier initiatives such as the Lagos Plan of Action, the Final Act of Lagos and the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) had sought to do. However, there is widespread feeling that progress in advancing this collective agenda has been much slower than expected and/or desired. Self-interests of the individual African states as well as uneven development of their capacities to pursue an accelerated integration and development agenda are considered as major impediments to progress.

Against the backdrop of the shared dissatisfaction with the current pace of Africa's integration and development, how can progress be best accelerated in the 21st century? In what ways and to what extent will union government accelerate or retard progress in Africa's integration and development? Under what conditions should union government be formed and run effectively and efficiently? Are there feasible alternatives to union government? What are they and how can they be pursued? What are the prospects and challenges of union government and its alternatives? The on-going public consultations and debates on the continental union government proposal have so far not addressed these questions fully. Yet there is urgency to do so, if the forthcoming AU Summit is to make a well-informed decision that inspires broad-based support for effective and successful implementation.

2. PROPOSAL FOR CONTINENTAL CONFERENCE

A continental conference that brings together the broad array of stakeholders and participants in the on-going consultation processes on the continental union government proposal will provide an effective platform for:

- a. Further structured debate and collation of views on the issues that have already been dealt with at the level of national debates in civil society and Parliaments/legislatures while addressing outstanding issues not yet covered in the national level debates on the AUG proposal
- b. Critical review of the mode of public consultation and debates which have taken place so far, as well the time frame for their conclusion, with the view to making recommendations or submitting proposals for an enhanced and inclusive process of public consultations based on common guidelines, modalities, mechanisms, roadmap and extended timeframe
- c. Deliberation and consensus building on the strategic issues that must be resolved in order to advance the collective agenda for accelerated integration and development of Africa
- d. Formulating a common position on whether the 9th Ordinary AU Summit in Accra should decide on the immediate establishment of the African Union Government or not, and propose alternative timeframe for consideration of the Summit.
- e. Outline a post-conference agenda for further civil society-led campaigns and advocacy for accelerated integration and development of the African continent that is people-centered, pro-democracy, pro-poor, self-sustaining and independent

With the following **objectives** in mind, it is proposed that a Pan-African conference be convened ahead of the 9th Ordinary Summit of the African Union, in Accra, under the theme:

**ACCELERATING AFRICA'S INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF UNION GOVERNMENT**

2.1 Participants and stakeholders:

Conference participants will include a broad representation of CSO actors drawn from academia, independent think tanks, gender-oriented groups, and the Pan-African and international development NGO communities in Africa and the Diaspora, as well as activist NGOs at the national levels. Other participants are AU decision makers, officials of the Regional Economic Communities (REC), Members of the Regional and Pan-African Parliaments, AU-ECOSOCC, government officials, politicians, and Pan-African and national business

associations. *Contacts have been made with the broad range of organizations and constituencies and efforts at issue formal invitations have been intensified.*

2.2 Date and Venue:

The conference is scheduled for June 22-23, 2007 in Accra, Ghana. So far reservations have been made for suitable conference facility that can accommodate a maximum of 100 participants, and has auditorium and breakout rooms that can serve up to 200 participants in the business sessions. The proposed conference venue is the Ghana Institute for Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Greenhill, Achimota. Lying close to the Legon campus of the University of Ghana, GIMPA is highly accessible and secure and about 20 minutes drive from the Kotoka International Airport in Accra. *The conference venue has been secured.*

2.3 Format of conference:

The conference will take the form of panel/roundtable discussions in plenary aimed to promote debate and dialogue, while small group breakout session will be more interactive and deliberative. Each session will focus on specific aspects of the Union Government proposal as well as broad aspects of the accelerated integration and development agenda of the continent. Proceedings in both the plenary and breakout sessions will be aided by commissioned analytical papers, reports on debates in member states, compilation of short interviews, expert presentations, presentation of key trends and arguments. A steering and drafting committee will oversee the proceedings and preparation of the position papers and resolutions that will be adopted by the conference. *The full structure of the conference is captured in an annotated programme to be circulated shortly.*

2.4 Implementation, coordination and funding efforts:

The proposed conference is one of the major activities that Ghana Civil Society Coalition on the AU Summit 2007 is undertaken, jointly with a number of Pan-African and international organizations committed to Africa's accelerated integration and development. Since the beginning of April 2007, IDEG and working groups of the coalition and some of the international organizations have been actively preparing for the conference. Progress has been made in securing venue, agreeing dates and getting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ghana, and CIDO (AU) to include the conference in their respective calendars. Further, AfriMAP-OSI has pledged funding, while IDEG is working to secure part funding from the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and from CODESRIA and the Centre for Democracy and Development, Nigeria. Efforts have also been intensified to collaborate with other civil society organization planning events in the run-up to the Summit to participate in the conference and post-conference activities. *The major implementation tasks that are outstanding are the securing and disbursement of funds to cover the travel costs of participants, pay for the*

conference venue and facilities, and remunerate resource persons and personnel and operations of the secretariat organizing the conference.

2.5 Outputs and outcomes:

- Analytical papers commissioned in March 2007 delivered already
- Informed debate and dialogue among a critical mass of state and non-state stakeholders on the Union Government proposal and process held
- Recommendations and common position paper on the AUG proposal and proposals on the way forward prepared
- Advocacy opportunities identified and post-conference advocacy agenda related to the establishment of a Union Government outlined
- Advocacy aimed at informing and possibly influencing the decision of the 9th AU Summit through AU Ministerial Committees, the PRC and the Summit undertaken (24-30 June 2007).
- Post-conference advocacy meeting between Heads of States and Governments, on the one hand, and African civil society representatives held on July 1, 2007. Discussions with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ghana, on format, venue and time for the meeting in progress
- Continent-wide civil society-initiated activities aimed at promoting peoples' participation in the debates on the AUG proposal and influencing decision-making at the 9th Ordinary AU Summit in Accra documented and published.

2.6 Timeframe:

- Invitation letters and emails issues by June 10, 2007
- Visa and travel arrangement in place at the conference organization secretariat
- General logistic and other arrangements for the conference in progress and will be completed by June 19, 2007
- Preparation of conference materials and information pack by June 19, 2007
- Presenters and conference programme finalization in progress and secured by June 15, 2007
- Drafting of proposals, positions and recommendations assigned to task force to be appointed shortly ahead of the conference

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