

AFRICAN UNION  
الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE  
UNIÃO AFRICANA

---

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P.O. BOX 3243 Telephone 517700 Fax: 517844

---

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Third Extraordinary Session

21 -25 May 2003

Sun City, South Africa

Ext/EX/CL/5 (III)

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIASPORA INITIATIVE WITHIN THE  
FRAMEWORK OF THE OAU/AU**

# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIASPORA INITIATIVES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE AOU/AU**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The relationship between Africa and the African Diaspora has its roots in the slave trade from 1500s - 1800s that transported millions of Africans across the Atlantic to the New World of Europe and the Americas. The so-called slaves struggled for survival and freedom to preserve their dignity and to assert their worth as human beings. They adapted themselves to the ways of their new environment but were never completely assimilated because they also retained as much of the African cultures that they represented. This bond of spiritual kinship that connected them to the African continent was reflected in the lyrics and cultural resonance that floated around the plantations and households in which they lived and worked amidst suffering, humiliation and various forms of deprivations. The Rastafarian culture in the Caribbean and other parts of the world and the musical roots of jazz, blues, reggae, folk songs, pop, etc were products of this extended family.

Indeed, the activities and challenges of both continental Africans and Africans in Diaspora continued to impact upon each other, with history as a common reference point. Those transported across the Atlantic began as second-class citizens in their new abode just as the establishment of the colonial order of the African continent relegated their brothers to the same status on the continent. Hence, the quest for freedom and social emancipation became a shared concern. Africans on both sides of the Atlantic divide felt the impact of vestigial discrimination in the aftermath of the abolition of the Slave Trade and the onset of the twentieth century.

Thus the Civil Rights Movement in the Diaspora and the Independence Movement in Africa coincided with each other and became mutually reinforcing. Continental Africans supported the Afro-American quest for equality and civil rights while Afro-Americans campaigned strenuously for African Independence. The Pan-Africanist philosophy of founders of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) drew inspiration from their predecessors in the Diaspora Pan-Africanist movement including Marcus Garvey, Sylvester Williams, John Padmore and the vast majority of people of African descent that stood behind them. The combined vision of continental Africans on both sides of the Atlantic created a vision for development and self-actualization that gave impetus to the struggle for independence in the 1960s and the formation of the OAU in 1963.

## **II. INITIATIVE TO ENGAGE THE DIASPORA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE OAU**

### **a) The Sullivan Initiative and the Afro-American Summits**

Prominent Americans visited the continent and identified with OAU aims and objectives including decolonization and the fight against apartheid. Some members of the Congressional Black Caucus in the US Congress canvassed Afro-centric policies. This relationship established the basis for the Sullivan Summits that was attended by representatives of the OAU. The purpose of the Sullivan Summits is to unite people of African heritage with Africa and to build a bridge from America and other parts of the world to the African continent. The Summits have grown in size and influence from the first Summit held in Cote d'Ivoire in 1991 to the fifth Summit of 1999 in Accra, which attracted about 5,000 delegates including 13 African Heads of State and an official US delegation led by the Secretaries of Transportation and Labour. The sixth Summit will be held in Abuja, Nigeria, from July 14 - 18 2003.

### **b) OAU/AU Civil Society Conferences**

The second initiative that embraced the Diaspora was the Civil Society Conferences. As part of the process of transformation and renewal, the OAU/AU held two major OAU-Civil Society Conferences on 11-14 June 2001 and 11-15 June 2002 respectively. The objective of these Conferences was to forge partnership between the OAU/AU and Civil Society Organizations in promoting peace, security, development, human rights and democracy on the Continent. The second Conference in 2002, which focused on the contribution of the Civil Society to the establishment of the African Union, included representatives of the Diaspora. That Conference also elected a Provisional Working Group, with a two-year tenure, to work with the African Union Commission on a continuous basis in between larger assemblies, which are to be held on bi-annual basis. The Diaspora was given two representatives on this working Group - one for Europe and one for the Western Hemisphere including the US and other parts of the Americas.

## **The Washington Forum 17-19 December 2002**

Further to this, the AU Commission made plans to launch AU Diaspora Forums in Europe and the Western Hemisphere. Consequently, the First AU-Western Hemisphere Diaspora Forum was convened in Washington DC from 17-19 December 2002. The Interim Chairperson of the Commission explained that the general purpose was to establish a framework through which the African Diaspora would be mainstreamed in the activities of the new African Union. The objective is to empower the Diaspora to become more associated with AU objectives, growth and development so that they can contribute effectively to the realization of its goals. He further observed that such collaboration would not be a one-way street as it is designed to be "sustained and reciprocal".

The Forum served as an important outreach event for the Commission to explain and showcase the objectives and orientation of the new African Union and its transition processes. It provided a unique platform for disseminating information about the programmes of the Union such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) and for clarifying the interrelationship between them and the African Union. It was also a framework for sensitizing and mobilizing the support of governments and people of the Western Hemisphere for the African agenda. Most significantly, the Forum began the process of institutional linkage between the African Diaspora and Continental Africans in an effort to establish the Union project as a truly global African effort.

The enthusiasm and support shown by Africans in Diaspora led to proposals for support and interface with the African Union and its different programmes in areas ranging from health, education, science and technology etc. A Western Hemisphere Diaspora Network (WHADN) was established to interface with the African Union Commission in this regard and the Network set up permanent working groups made up of Experts and Resource persons in each area. The Working Group has put up proposals for effective collaboration in each of these domains. These proposals have been refined by the Commission in consultation with the nascent WHADN Secretariat to allow for effective programme support and to feed into the policy demands of the Commission. The Network has also decided on the establishment of an AU Education Endowment Fund and an AU Trade and Economic Development Forum for the US Diaspora and agreed on a series of measures for contribution to these funds including elements of salary deductions.

The AU Commission in association with WHADN has consolidated these proposals and programmes into a general framework of Cooperation. The World Bank has shown strong interest in supporting this framework and has invited representatives of the AU Commission (CSSDCA Unit) to its Headquarters in Washington to make a presentation on this subject so as to establish precise models for assistance and support. This presentation was made on 16 April 2003 and the discussion ended on a very positive and encouraging note. The Commission is also working with the WHADN Network to create a corporate framework under US laws to enable the Diaspora to contribute resources to the Endowment Funds.

### **c) Amendment to the Constitutive Act: The Extra-Ordinary Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments, February 3, 2003**

The issue of the Diaspora was given further momentum at the Extra-Ordinary Summit of the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on February 3, 2003 to deliberate on proposed amendments to the Constitutive Act. At the meeting of the Executive Council that preceded the Summit, Senegal proposed an amendment to formally integrate the Diaspora in the policy framework of the Union. The proposed amendment was refined and adopted by the Summit in a new Article 3 (q) that "invite and encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union". The amendment constitutes a milestone in the bid to incorporate the Diaspora into the policy making and policy support processes of the AU.

The debate that accompanied the amendment proposed by Senegal also highlighted the need to define clearly who really is a member of the Diaspora. Some felt it should include all people of African descent and others felt that it should be restricted to only those African citizens who have gone abroad. There was also the question of the nature of the reciprocal relationships that is envisaged. What precisely can the Diaspora bring to the AU and what can the AU bring to the Diaspora?

### **III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **a. Definition of the Diaspora**

What precisely are the criteria and qualifications of the African Diaspora? The Executive Council may wish to reflect further on this matter so as to provide some guidelines. What precisely do we mean by the African Diaspora? Do we mean all people of African descent in the Diaspora or citizens of African countries in the Diaspora? The definition of the African Diaspora would have implications for the form of association or participation in AU political processes.

After the Washington Forum, the Commission has been working with the Western Hemisphere Diaspora Forum to develop a concept paper and to generate proposals for consideration of the Executive Council in this regard. The Commission envisages the possibility of a technical workshop in the near future to consolidate these proposals.

#### **b. What can the African Union offer the Diaspora?**

Discussions during the, Washington Forum also offers a picture of some of what the Diaspora may expect - a measure of credible involvement in the policy making processes, some corresponding level of representation, symbolic identifications, requirements of dual or honorary citizenship of some sort, moral and political support of Diaspora initiatives in their respective regions, preferential treatment in access to African economic undertakings including consultancies, trade preferences and benefits for entrepreneurs, vis a vis non -Africans, social and political recognition as evident in invitation to Summits and important meetings etc. These deliberations must also focus on possibilities, criteria and qualification for Diaspora representation in the Economic, Cultural and Social Council (ECOSOCC), the Pan-African Parliament etc.

#### **c. What can the Diaspora bring to the AU?**

These include technical support for programmes of the African Union, public education and sensitization of the wider public in their respective regions, lobbying, provision of a domestic political constituency for AU goals and objectives, advocacy, fund raising, resource mobilization and resource support through such measures as creation of Endowments amongst others.