

DECLARATION OF THE FOCUS GROUP OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

Chair: Hon. Chukwuemeka Chikelu,
Chairman, Committee on Co-operation and Integration in Africa
House of Representatives, Nigeria

Organiser: Mr. Ibrahima Fall, Secretary General of the African
Parliamentary Union

1. The Parliamentarians Caucus represents the members of national and regional parliaments present at the African Development Forum III, convened under the auspices of the African Parliamentary Union. Discussions involved non-parliamentarians. The participants received a message from the President of the African Parliamentary Union H. E. Derwitt Yohannes presented by Dr. Zaray Mohamed Salah, Vice-President of APU. The APU applauds the wisdom of the ECA in inviting the participation of parliamentarians in ADF III.

Background

2. Participants noted various institutional weaknesses facing African parliaments that act as constraints to their effective functioning. These include:

- (i) Absence of established democratic culture;
- (ii) Low capacity among parliamentarians and the staff of parliaments;
- (iii) Poor funding;
- (iv) Lack of independence;
- (v) Weak oversight capability.

3. The meeting also observed that in some countries, the lack of transparency in the electoral process as well as issues like official corruption have robbed parliaments and parliamentarians of the confidence of the people.

4. The meeting noted that parliaments are often relegated and uninformed of the process and progress of integration and the assumption of treaty obligation by the executive. The result is that the integration process is seen as being purely government-to-government and not carrying the people or their elected representatives along. The ownership of the integration process by the people is therefore lost.

5. Several participants cited the absence of effective, programmed collaboration between Pan-African organizations, development agencies and the umbrella body of African parliaments, the African Parliamentary Union (in existence for 26 years), as a factor in the

low input of parliamentarians in regional integration and regional development strategy and policy.

6. The fact that the African Union (AU) provides for the establishment of a Pan-African Parliament and that many sub-regions have established regional parliaments in the process of integration was noted. Participants however observed that:

- (i) None is directly elected by the people, therefore raising again the issue of ownership and participation in the integration process.
- (ii) None has any substantive legislative power, e.g. of approving the budgets of regional integration organizations or making laws on any matter. They are all consultative bodies.
- (iii) All meet infrequently, i.e. once or twice in a year, therefore their relevance as consultative bodies is greatly reduced.
- (iv) Most are very poorly funded.
- (v) No set standards exist for nominations into these parliaments, i.e. relating to gender, opposition party representation, representation of ethnic minorities.

7. Against the background of the above, the meeting agreed that parliamentarians are a potent force for regional integration efforts. If properly harnessed, their increased involvement in the process of integration may, in addition to other stakeholder groups, make the critical difference in the success of the new impetus for African integration.

- (i) By virtue of their constituency network, they are a veritable tool for mobilizing the people in support of integration.
- (ii) If they are directly elected into regional parliaments, their grassroots campaigns for election give unparalleled exposure to integration and automatically broaden participation in the process thereby addressing crucial issues of ownership.
- (iii) Parliamentarians, if properly engaged, can ensure that various legislation in national parliaments relevant to integration are facilitated and not blocked.
- (iv) Parliamentarians can apply their control of the national budgetary process to promote adequate budget accommodation for various sectors of the economy, relevant to integration, e.g. transport, communications, dues to regional integration bodies.
- (v) Parliamentarians are able to raise national debate and sustain the political will for action on issues such as Human Rights, gender, HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, and debt.
- (vi) Parliamentarians can also play a significant role in strengthening democracy and stability which are critical elements for integration. Their role in conflict resolution, election monitoring, and legislation for democracy, amongst other things, is important in this respect.

- (vii) Perhaps most importantly, parliamentarians can be utilized in the integration process under the envisaged peer review of NEPAD mechanism for good political, economic and corporate governance. Their constitutional powers of oversight of government action grants them unparalleled access to information and statistics to gauge the progress of their national governments in meeting various targets and obligations relevant to regional integration. This is a useful self-monitoring mechanism that can yield much fruit for the integration process and in particular its defined priorities.

Recommendations

8. It is the urgent need to harness the potentials above that compels urgent action at national, regional and continental levels to address the challenges facing parliaments and parliamentarians and in its wake, gain a new and effective partner for integration. In this regard, a number of recommendations were made by the Parliamentarians Caucus:

- (i) Strengthening National Parliaments and the democratic culture through:
 - Capacity building for Parliamentarians and their staff;
 - Enhanced provisions for funding parliaments and their activities;
 - Insistence on respect for the separation of powers and independence of Parliament;
 - Strengthening and respecting oversight powers of Parliament;
 - Enhancing transparency of the electoral process.
- (ii) Ensuring participation of parliamentarians at every stage and forum relevant to integration in order to mobilize the people, broaden participation and ensure budget and legislative protection of integration.
- (iii) The ECA, AU and other such bodies are encouraged to engage, support and collaborate with the umbrella body of African Parliaments, namely the African Parliamentary Union, to organize meetings and provide a forum (seminars, workshops) for exchange of views on the integration process and capacity building.
- (iv) Strengthening Regional Parliaments by direct election of members, enhanced legislative competence, uniform standards for selection and election, and better funding.
- (v) Integration of Parliamentarians into peer review and self-monitoring mechanisms, envisaged under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).
- (vi) Parliaments should set up standing committees directly responsible for monitoring and promoting cooperation and integration in Africa, as well as committees on Human Rights if they do not have such committees already in place.
- (vii) Minimum democratic standards should be set and only countries that meet these shared values should be members of regional and continental parliaments.

Parliamentarians Questions to Heads of State

1. Did the Heads of State recognize the importance of participation by African parliaments and parliamentarians in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)?

If they did, what specific role have Parliamentarians been required to play in ensuring the success of NEPAD as it seems, for now, essentially a government-to-government issue?

2. The African Parliamentary Union is the umbrella body of African Parliaments and its membership is made up of Africa's National Parliaments. The body has for 26 years worked for the promotion of democracy and representative institutions in Africa. Are African Heads of State aware of its existence and are they prepared to work closely and support it to utilize its expertise and network in building the African Union Institutions particularly the Pan-African Parliament?

Parliamentarians' Recommendations for Final Declaration

1. Conference notes with satisfaction the participation and input of African parliamentarians to ADF III under the auspices of the African Parliamentary Union and recommends that this involvement is sustained in future regional integration fora and encourages other regional integration organizations and multilateral institutions (ECA, OAU/AU, UN, ETC) to support parliamentarians action in Africa for promotion of democracy, good governance and rule of law.
2. Conference recommends the integration of parliamentarians in the peer review and self-monitoring mechanism envisaged under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).