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PUBLIC DEBATES LAUNCHED AFRICA-WIDE TODAY ON THE AFRICAN UNION PROPOSAL FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AFRICA

Today, Africa Union Day, marks the start of public consultations in over fifteen countries just a few weeks before 53 Heads of States meet in Accra to agree on the AU Proposal to establish the United States of Africa.

In an unprecedented decision, the Heads of States agreed in January to meet in Accra on July 2-3rd to discuss only one agenda, the establishment of a Union Government as a first step towards the United States of Africa.

Yet, despite extensive research and consultation, the proposal is yet to be placed before Africa's 832 million citizens for consultation. Civil society organizations with support from Governments have kicked off debates in fifteen countries. The debates are an unprecedented attempt to involve the public across Africa in the decision-making processes of the African Union Assemblies.

“Without public consultation, the United States of Africa proposal will have as much chance of flying as an elephant. African governments and citizens must explore the immediate implications and opportunities a Union Government creates for ordinary citizens, particularly those affected by the denial of human rights, poverty and injustice,” said Thomas Deve of Mwelekeo wa NGO (MWENGO), one of the organisers in Zimbabwe.

In the fifteen countries, citizens will be asked to reflect on the opportunities of a Union Government for raising the bar for human rights, democratic governance and conflict. The proposed African Economic Community, a dream that recently got a step closer with the signing of common tariffs within COMESA, will be debated with an eye to an African common market that targets growth, poverty reduction and industrialisation

“African civil society organisations are in the forefront of generating dialogue between leaders and citizens on this issue. There are many implications. A more unified voice would produce an effective collective negotiating position on global trade policies such as the Economic Partnership Agreements or with China for instance,” said Valerie Traore, Pan African Programme Manager, African Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD) in Nairobi.

While there is general agreement among member-states on the need for deeper and faster continental political and economic integration, the proposal is controversial. Member-states are split between those calling for the strengthening of existing AU structures before taking a bold leap to the United States of Africa and those that argue that as long as the continent remains a motley gathering of fragmented states, continental integration is a futile exercise.

A Ghanaian CSO host committee is preparing to take the views generated in the public debates to the Heads of States at the AU Summit in Accra. Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey, Convenor of the Ghana AU Summit Civil Society Coalition says, **“Public engagement should not end with an event at the AU Summit. It should be built into all regional integration efforts to ensure that they are relevant, responsive and accountable to African people.”**

Ends.

Notes:

1. The public consultations are taking place in the following countries, **Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Mozambique, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe among others.** They will take place between May 25th and June 15th, a few weeks before 53 Heads of States discuss the proposal.
2. In two separate sittings over this month, Africa's Foreign Ministers and over 200 African Parliamentarians have met to discuss the Proposal and make recommendations to Africa's leaders.
3. The recent decision by COMESA to create a free trade zone among 19 countries and a combined population of 400 million people, half of Africa's total population, brings the dream of an African Economic community one step closer.
1. The Proposal comes at an important moment for a generally more prosperous, peaceful, democratic and sought after Africa than previous decades. With 832 million, Africa's peoples represent 13% of the world's population. With an average annual population growth rate of 2-3%, Africa will have reached a population of 1.5 billion inhabitants by 2030. Africa contains the world's second most important source of bio-diversity, 30% of all the world minerals, 40% of its gold and 60% of its cobalt. One in four barrels of oil on the global market will soon come from West and Central Africa. Average GDP growth rate of 5.7%, up 0.5% since 2004. 28 countries recorded positive growth over 2005, only one Zimbabwe recorded negative growth. Yet, the progress on regional integration has been slow. Africa currently has fourteen regional economic communities in some form or the other with most countries in Africa are members of at least two regional bodies. The DRC simultaneously holds membership in four. Yet, two relatively effective RECs namely ECOWAS and COMESA boast of 26 countries as members. Whereas, between 1956-2001, 26-armed conflicts and 186 coup de etats took place, over the last five years there have only been 4 and 2 respectively.

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSAL FOR CONTINENTAL GOVERNMENT¹

The Moment and Background

The July 2007 Summit has only one agenda to discuss African Union's "Proposal for Continent Government". This proposal is a culmination of proposals coordinated by the Committee of Seven (African Heads of Government) championed by Libya, Uganda and more recently since 2005, Nigeria. There is a longer history of the AU tracing back to 1963 when it is first established and was known as the Organization of African Unity.

Rationale

Today Africa faces common challenges including over dependency and under exploitation of African resources by Africans. Regional integration therefore remains key to resolving issues of food security, small economies of scale and weak international bargaining capacity and more importantly, achieving continental unity

Values underpinning the Proposal

Four key values are stated; the rule of law, popular and transparent governance and the respect for human rights

A Phased Proposal

The proposal upholds common policy standards, harmonised approaches and joint global negotiation in 16 areas including essential social services, agricultural and industrial development, trade, governance and democratisation, external relations among others. The process would be carried out in three phases:

Phase 1 (2007 – 2009): Establishment of the Union Government.

Phase 2 (2009 – 2012): Union Government fully operational and constitutional ground for *United States of Africa* laid.

Phase 3 (2012 – 2015): All required structures of the *United State of Africa* at the level of the States, the regions and the continent in place

Key Features of the Proposal

The Proposal has nine key features namely;

1. Election of the President of the Heads of States Assembly for three years rather one year with the President not necessarily being a sitting Head of State.
2. The Union President will be required to attend meetings of the Peace and Security Council.
3. An expanded Executive Council to include not only Ministers of Foreign affairs but also Chairpersons of Ministerial conferences
4. Less oversight role but more collaborative role for the Addis based Ambassadors in the Permanent Representatives Committee to support the Commission on implementation
5. An executive Commission with a President and Vice-President who are appointed by the Assembly for 6 years and Commissioners appointed by Council
6. A legislating African parliament who will directly be elected by universal suffrage with proportional representation
7. Consultations with Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) shall be enshrined in all Assembly deliberations
8. Establishment of financial structures should harmonise internal African trading and financial exchange
9. Establishment of National Commissions on AU Affairs must include CSOs and disseminate decision to accelerate implementation

Two schools of thought have emerged among member states

1. The African Union should build and strengthen current AU structures, harmonize and rationalize regional economic communities before taking the bold leap to the United States of Africa.
2. The African Union should accelerate the pace of integration for as long as the continent remains a motley gathering of fragmented states, the ideal conditions for full integration will never be attained.

¹ This brief is summarised by Oxfam for the purposes of popularising two formal documents by the African Union namely; Study towards Continental Government (also known as the base document) and the Report on African Union Government Implementation Modalities.

CSO ACTIONS TO POPULARISE AND DEEPEN PEOPLE'S DEBATES ON THE CONTINENTAL GOVERNMENT

International, Pan-African and national civil society coalitions and organisations have undertaken to do the following over May and June; to hold national public debates on May 25th 2007 in several African countries, carry out expert assessments, raise public awareness on key features of the proposal through mass media and invite musical artists across the continent to carry out performances on pan Africanism. They will also continuously engage governments of African states and hold a Continental Conference on African Peoples and Continental Government. In Ghana, a host CSO Committee has begun to coordinate and support civil society organizations that may wish to attend the Summit.

For further information on these activities contact Hakima Abbas hakima@fahamu.org

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ON PROPOSAL FOR A UNION GOVERNMENT

"Pan Africanism is the fullest expression of our struggle today and our greatest building base is Africa. We must sensitize the member states and push them to action. We must press for a public opinion that is pan Africanist at continental level."

**President Alpha Konare, Chairman of the African Commission,
Jan 2007, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.**

"The proposal for a union government must be directed towards Africa's transformation through creative and well-thought out strategies that advance integration and not the isolation or balkanization of any country or region."

**Gichinga Ndirangu, Policy Analyst, commenting on Pan African Unity,
April 2007, Nairobi Kenya.**

"The most pressing needs in Africa are the issues of peace and security as well as HIV/AIDS and malaria. Women and children are the most affected. It is crucial that they.....(union government)....focus on the economic empowerment of women as a way of addressing most of our societal ills. Let the AU commission set priorities in these areas."

**Roselyn Musa, from African Women's Development and Communications Network, FEMNET, March 2007,
Nairobi, Kenya.**

"The building of the United States of Africa requires a new leadership with the political will to follow through their commitments. This means promoting a new type of leadership in Africa, imbued with the ideals of Pan Africanism, genuinely dedicated to the unity, independence and sovereignty of the continent and to promoting the welfare of their citizens."

**Demba Moussa Dembele on the challenges of establishing a United States of Africa,
April 2007, Dakar, Senegal**

"Today, as we sink deep into the uncharted seas of globalisation, and let the shylocks and sharks of the global market devour our resources and dictate our policies, our societies are being torn asunder along various parochial fault lines of ethnicity, race, region and clan. If ever there were a time to rekindle the dream and vision of pan-Africanism, then that time is now."

Prof. Issa Shivji, Political Analyst, on the essential building blocks of the pan-African vision, April 2007

"The Accra (AU) Summit will focus on the direction of the Union, but any changes or decisions....can themselves have no weight unless they are rooted in the decision and opinion of the people."

**Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo,
Ghana's Foreign Minister and Chairman of the AU's Executive Council, March 2007, Ghana.**

For more information on the debate for a United States of Africa, please visit the AU Monitor website:

<http://www.pambazuka.org/aumonitor/>

<http://www.african-union.org>