

REPORT ON THE AFRICAN UNION DIASPORA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE, 16-18 NOVEMBER 2007, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA.

Introduction

Council will recall that at its Eight Ordinary Session held in Khartoum, Sudan, from 16-21 January 2006, the Executive Council took Decision EX.CL/269 (VIII) on the African Diaspora Process, which authorized the preparation of a follow-up to the 1st AU-South Africa, African Union (AU) and Caribbean Diaspora Conference held in Kingston, Jamaica, from 16-18 March 2005. The Decision also requested South Africa and the AU Commission (the Commission) to cooperate in ensuring the success of that process.

Pursuant to this Decision, South Africa and the AU Commission worked closely together to ensure its operationalization. In this process of active engagement, both parties agreed on a roadmap based on a Global Consultative Dialogue (Regional Consultative Conferences, RCCs) to build momentum for an Africa Diaspora Summit that would embrace a Programme and Plan of Action to further consolidate the development of the Diaspora Initiative.

Roadmap

Accordingly, the Commission and the Government of South Africa developed a roadmap that involved a three-tier system that would enable the implementation of this process. The first included a series of regional Consultative Conferences to be held in Africa and the various regions of the world where the African Diaspora populations are concentrated in large numbers. The sequence of events was organised in a manner that would conclude with a regional consultative Conference, which would allow representatives and experts of AU Member States to review the consolidated outcome document emerging from various RCCs and effectively marry continental inputs with the desires and expectations of Diaspora communities

worldwide as a basis for consideration by High Officials to the Union and Caribbean States in order to facilitate the consideration by Ministers of African and Caribbean States.

Quite expectedly then, this would be followed by a Ministerial Conference involving Ministers of Member States of the Union and the Caribbean, important regional organisations such as CARICOM and representatives of Diaspora communities from the different regions of the world. The Ministerial Conference would refine and further consolidate the outcomes into a Draft Programme and Plan of Action which would be sent to all participants, Member States and Diaspora formations worldwide for further inputs and comments. A small technical group meeting would then consolidate the outcomes in a reviewed Programme and Plan to be submitted, in the third and final phase, to a Summit of Heads of State and Government, which will be preceded by a Second and shorter Pre-Summit Ministerial Meeting that will finalize the Programme and Plan of Action for adoption by Heads of State and Government of the African Union and the Caribbean States.

Regional Consultative Conference (RCCs)

The Regional Consultative Conferences (RCCs) were convened and facilitated by the Government of South Africa in concert with the Commission of the African Union. The Process began with national consultations in South Africa in early April 2005 and was followed by Regional Consultative Conferences (RCCs) in Brasilia, Brazil, on 16 April 2007; London, UK, from 23-25 April 2007; New York, USA, from 22-23 June 2007; Barbados, the Caribbean from 27-28 August 2007; and Paris, France, from 12-13 September 2007. The continental consultative Conference for Africa was held in the headquarters of the AU in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 15-16 October 2007, to review and consolidate the various outcomes of the RCCs in preparation for the Senior Officials and Ministerial Conference held in Midrand, South Africa, from 14-15 November 2007 and 16-18 November 2007 respectively.

The decision to convene the RCCs was based on the realization that effective partnership between Africa and Its Diaspora calls for greater understanding, close cooperation, common vision and mutual design of goals, objectives and strategies for the re-unification and rejuvenation of the global African family. The various fora therefore, enabled Africans, worldwide, to come together for the first time in a new world to address common concerns and marry their hopes, objectives and aspirations in order to develop consensus on how to travel on the road ahead, as well as address their commonality and establish result oriented programmes that would give effect to hope, opportunity and purpose.

The RCCs were very successful and provided the necessary ingredients for the Programme and Plan of Action reviewed by the Senior Officials and subsequently endorsed by the Ministers in Midrand in mid-October 2007. The value and impact of RCCs have also stressed the need for these consultations to remain as an enduring process to facilitate, strengthen and sustain AU Diaspora networks in the various regions of the world and harness their energies to the work of the Union. As part of the process, follow-up consultations are envisaged at some time in the near future in the Middle East, Gulf States, Oceania and Asia.

Senior Officials and Ministerial Meetings

The outcomes from six RCCs were discussed first by a meeting of senior Officials in Midrand, South Africa, from 14-15 November 2007 and, subsequently by a Ministerial Conference on 17-18 November 2007 in the same location. The meeting of Senior Officials reviewed the outcomes of the RCCs within the context of six sub-themes that had served as a guide for the various consultations, namely:

- Global Dialogue, Peace and Stability;
- Historical, Socio-Cultural and Religious Commonalities;
- Knowledge Sharing;

- Women, Youth, Children and Vulnerable Groups;
- Economic Cooperation; and
- Regional Development and Integration

The meeting of Senior Officials worked extensively on the Programme and Plan of Action that was subsequently forwarded to Ministers for consideration and endorsement. The Ministerial Conference, which held on 16-18 November 2007, reviewed and consolidated the Draft Programme and Plan of Action (see attachment). The meeting was attended by representatives of 39 Member States of the Union including: Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

It was also attended by a delegation of the Caribbean Community Organization (CARICOM) led by the Assistant Secretary-General, H.E. Colin Granderson. Both the Senior Officials and Ministerial meetings had a distinct format because they were also attended by representatives of Diaspora communities from Europe, the Caribbean, North America, etc., as well as representatives of African Civil Society Organisations who participated fully and actively in the discussions.

The Programme and Plan of Action emanating from the Ministerial Meeting remains work in progress but a substantial agreement has already been reached in all major areas to which the totality of African populations worldwide have subscribed. The Programme has been translated into all AU working languages and is in the process of circulation to Member States for further input and comments as a basis for consideration during the forthcoming Diaspora Summit scheduled for the 08th to 11th October 2008. The Commission and the Government of South Africa are consulting with

Member States with a view to fixing precise dates for this meeting taking into account existing commitments and the need to hold the Summit as soon as possible in order to establish the necessary momentum for acceleration of progress in the implementation of the Diaspora Initiative.

The expectation is that the Summit will come out with a comprehensive blueprint for action that will set the pace for concrete actions to enable the effective reunification of the global African family and its concerted effort in the building of the African Union. Within this context, particular attention must be paid to bracketed areas in the Programme and Plan of Action that requires further consensus building in order to facilitate common ownership of the programme. Fortunately, these areas are few and far between and the interest, enthusiasm and commitment shown at the Ministerial Conference clearly demonstrate that it would simply require minor efforts to establish consensus on remaining issues areas.

Achievements and Lessons Learnt

The process that culminated in the AU Diaspora Ministerial Conference was an important and significant milestone in the history of the African Union in general and the development of the Diaspora initiative in particular. It provided an effective framework for bringing together different strands of efforts of Member States, the wider African community, regional organizations and Diaspora communities worldwide under a unified and integrated platform that can serve as both appropriate and effective framework for action. It enabled reflection, refinement and consolidation of initiatives that had existed within different platforms such as the Conference of Intellectuals (CIAD I and II), national efforts of Member States and the various initiatives of the Commission and also sought to relate them to each other in a pragmatic and programmatic fashion that would enable them complement each other and create momentum for further sustenance of these efforts. This integration effort remains work in progress but the framework has already been established and would be given further leverage by the effective finalization of the Programme and Plan of Action.

Furthermore, the process has also strengthened the Diaspora initiative by extending and broadening the framework of participation to various regions of the world. The difficulty with the Diaspora process has always been that it is resource-laden and resource-intensive at the foundation stages but given far-ranging commitment of Member States, the issue of obtaining adequate resources to nurture the programme has always been problematic. Yet, it is necessary that the Diaspora Programme should take to the road and conscientize and evangelise African communities worldwide. South Africa's resource support for the RCC initiative has provided an effective building block for this enterprise that must however, be sustained to ensure necessary results.

In addition, the RCC process has enabled members of the African global family in the different regions of the world to participate fully and effectively in the design and implementation of the African Union Diaspora programme and thus ensure that ownership of the programme is truly and effectively global. It has also served as a tool for wider mobilization of all African constituencies and renewed and rejuvenated the process of African development, as well as energise commitment in the building of the African Union.

In particular also, the process has deepened the dialogue between Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora in a manner that is solidifying consensus on effective methods and strategies for coming together and working together to rekindle the process of African renaissance. Thus, it has established a proper framework for creating and sustaining enduring partnerships and strengthening Pan African solidarity within an axis of South-South Cooperation that would facilitate the betterment of the African continent and its Diaspora.

A few issues of contention remain but they are few and far between and in the process of resolution. By drawing attention to these issues, the Ministerial Conference has highlighted areas in which work has to be accelerated in order to give a proper orientation to the Diaspora Programme. Two issues

are of a particular importance in this regard. The first highlights the importance of evolving an appropriate mechanism to determine the process of participation of Diaspora representatives in related meetings, as well as in the broader AU framework. Where and in which organs should the Diaspora be represented and how? What will be their relationship to the Executive organs of the Union in particular and, how would we determine the level and efficiency of their interventions? How precisely can we guarantee that the representatives of Diaspora communities would have the necessary legitimacy, moral and political authority to assist in the building of the African Union and the protection of the interests of the African global family?

Second, the idea of the Sixth Region which has served as an effective mobilization platform requires further examination. How precisely would the “6th region” work and relate to the other five regions? Literally, symbolically or both? Should the establishment be guided by a gradual approach that is strengthened on a cumulative basis?

These areas requiring further work and it would be essential for the Commission to provide a framework document that can guide Member States in the consideration and resolution of these questions so that we can marry expectations with realities and create an effective African global family that would take its rightful place among other nations of the world.

Conclusion

Finally, as we noted earlier, there are ongoing consultations about the precise dates for the African Diaspora Summit to be held on the 08-11 of October 2008. It is essential that all Member States participate effectively in this Summit at various levels and at the highest level possible so that we can produce a Programme and Plan of Action that truly integrate and reflect our interests and concerns, to which we can all be committed and which would serve as effective platform for action.