

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**High Level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs: State of  
Implementation of Various Commitments, Challenges and the Way  
Forward"  
22 September 2008**

**Summary Report  
Side Events**

**Title: The Governance Challenge in Africa**

**Date and Venue: 22 September 2008, Conference Room 8, UN Secretariat**

**Organizers: UNOSAA, UNU, UN-HABITAT, IPU, UNODC, UNIFEM**

**Co-Chairs: Mrs. Julia Joiner Commissioner for Political Affairs, African Union  
Commission.**

**Mr. Anders Johnsson, Secretary-General, Inter-Parliamentary Union**

**KeyNote Speaker on Governance and Leadership in Africa: Dr James C. Jonah,  
Former UN Under-Secretary-General Political Affairs and Former Minister of  
Finance, Sierra Leone**

**Democratic Governance: State and Non-State Capacity**

**Presenter: H.E. Mr. Ken Lipenga, Minister of Economic Development and Planning,  
Government of Malawi;**

**Discussant: Prof Mathews Chikaonda, Group Chief Executive of Press Corporation  
and former Minister of Finance and Governor of the Central Bank of Malawi**

**Equality, Opportunity and the Rule of Law – Access to Justice and Human rights and  
the Right to Development**

**Presenter: Mr. John Githongo, Vice President for International Policy and Advocacy,  
World Vision International**

**Discussant: Prof. Haroub Othman, Professor in Development Studies, University of  
Dar-Es-Salaam; and Chairman of the Zanzibar Legal Services Center, Tanzania**

**Governance Initiatives in Africa: Impact of APRM (African Peer Review  
Mechanism) – Lessons Learned**

**Presenter: Mrs. Marie Angeliqve Savané, Member of the APRM Panel**

**Discussant: Prof. S. K. B. Asante, Member of the National APRM Governing Council,  
Ghana**

## **1. Summary of Discussions, Conclusions, Recommendations and Follow-up Actions**

The Co-Chair, Mrs Joiner opened the meeting by observing that Governance challenges are not unique to Africa and this compels us to recognise that conceptions and practices of governance are evolving in many different ways across the globe.

Mr Cheick Diarra the Special Advisor on Africa and Dr Jean-Marc Coicaud Director United Nations University delivered Opening statements reiterating the fact that good governance and development reinforce each other and good governance is therefore essential for durable peace and sustainable development, which are among the critical challenges facing many countries on the African continent. Dr. Coicaud mentioned that Africa remains the focus for United Nations University's research and capacity building efforts

A keynote address on "Governance and Leadership" in Africa by Dr. Jonah, presented a comparison between the 19<sup>th</sup> century European theories, evolution of governance and highlighted the plight of Africa which is going through similar processes and drew a distinction of government structures which again evolved from the traditional society to a rational society. The challenge is how can African democratic institutions work and how can we promote effective leadership. The issue of accountability and authority was raised and how leadership can be accountable to the people. A quotation on leadership was made by Mrs. Joiner from the recent comments by **H.E President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of Nigeria** who stated that **"the opportunity to lead in whatever capacity on its own does not confer leadership; instead, leadership is earned after the discharge of the responsibility honestly, sacrificially, and to the best of one's ability. Only then can those beneficiaries of the service selflessly rendered recognise such a person as a leader"**. President Yar'Adua's comments were made in the context of calling for a campaign on building an appropriate leadership culture in Nigeria.

The issues of Democratic Governance from a state and non-state capacity perspective were raised. Democracy is about sustainable development and needs to be seen as part of the process in which people work towards improving their lives. Such a process does, in many respects, require that increased attention is given on governance engagements and the manner in which people are enabled to exercise their rights and participate in the governance process. Issues pertaining to emergence of corruption in Africa were also raised. The biggest challenges in Africa remain the challenge of capacity. It is imperative that there is recognition that governance is not just about the choices that Africans make, but also about their own capacity to make those choice happen, and translate into action. Naturally, with ownership, there comes responsibility. In this context when there are failures, the cost of such failures is experienced by Africans. Africa needs to be given an opportunity to demonstrate that positive change driven from within the Continent is possible.

Presentation and discussion on Equality, Opportunity and the Rule of Law-Access to Justice, Human Rights and the Right to Development” observed that at independence almost all the African countries had written constitutions which embodied a Bill of Rights and a multi-party democracy. The first victim of independence constitutions was democracy itself and the rights of the people. The Independence Constitution, whether modeled along Westminster or Gaullist lines, was abrogated. In its place there came a constitutional model that vested enormous powers and institutional resources in the Executive. The checks and balances powers of Parliament and the Judiciary were curtailed, and the restraint bodies were marginalized. In many African countries the establishment of one-party system or the imposition of military rule led to the eradication not only of political dissention but the shutting down of organizations of civil society. All political activities had to be conducted under the auspices of the ruling parties. People’s initiatives and enthusiasm were crushed. The concept of party supremacy prevailed. Thus a democratic culture of tolerance of different views was not allowed to flourish.

The panelists also highlighted the fact that human rights are a bastion of any constitutional order and the heart of any democratic society. Their protection and promotion in a society is what propels a society to have a harmonious development. These sentiments are also expressed in the Constitutive Act of the African Union. All the African countries have in their constitutions the provisions on the fundamental freedom and rights.

The judiciary is not only one of the three pillars of a modern state but also an important instrument in the protection and enforcement of human rights. In many African states the courts are playing an important role in the promotion of human rights but they are very much congested. Moreover, human rights abuses and violations of children’s and women’s rights are very much in the increase all over Africa

The APRM presentation emphasised that that implementation has been mixed and recognised that the challenges are more complex and require considerable levels of patience and perseverance. It was observed by the panellists that even though they was skeptical on the outcome of the process initially, they recognized the overall success of the initiative and concluded that after all, a political dialogue was possible in Africa. Setbacks related to the process were identified which included, the slow pace of the whole process mainly due to inadequate capacities.

The governance and democracy journey in Africa requires innovation in approach, in this context it is imperative to forge more dialogue in order for the process to move forward. While some solutions have been initiated in Africa, like the Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the APRM process, it is evident that neither Africa nor its global partners necessarily have all of the answers.

Mr Johnsson made closing remarks by congratulating Rwanda for being the first country in the world to have voted the highest number of women parliamentarians - results of the just ended elections reflected an increased number of women representation - 56% of all Members of Parliament in Rwanda were women. He thanked all the panellists and participants for a very lively, open and substantive discussion on the topic of governance.