

AFRICAN UNION

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**FIRST SESSION OF THE AU CONFERENCE
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AFRICAN COMMON POSITION ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION

*(Africa's contribution to the 47th UN Commission on Social Development,
New York, February 2009)*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Constitutive Act of the African Union and its Vision and Mission, lays emphasis on the right to development; ensuring the well-being of the African peoples and mainstreaming sound and sustainable social development in national, regional and continental policies. It also aims to accelerate political and socio-economic integration of the continent. In this regard, the promotion of sustainable development at political, economic, social and cultural levels as well as cooperation in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of African people, are among the priorities of Africa's development Agenda in the 21st Century.

Over the years, political, social, economic and cultural dynamics, in addition to globalization, have had a negative impact on social development. Among others, this has led to social fragmentation; widening disparities and inequalities of income among social groups; marginalization; degradation of environment; uncontrolled urban development; and escalation of violence and crime.

In order to contain the above challenges, Africa should ensure effective implementation of commitments of the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development (1995), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Millennium Development Summit (2000), and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), among other development strategies. Of paramount importance are the commitments enshrined in the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa (June 1994) and the Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment Promotion and Poverty Alleviation (September 2004).

Social integration was identified as one of the priorities at the World Summit on Social Development. In the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme for Action which was adopted, Member States committed themselves to:

“promote social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe, just and are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, and on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people including the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of persons.”

In promoting a cohesive society, it is important to develop policies and put in place mechanisms that enable the population to access their rights, participate

actively in decisions that affect their lives, and participate in peace building and stability. In this respect, social protection is considered as the backbone of social policy, and should be integrated and mainstreamed in poverty alleviation and overall development strategies.

However, at the ten-year review of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, it was noted that only limited progress had been made in implementing the commitment towards achieving “a society for all”. There is need therefore to develop and/or implement policies to address the socio-economic challenges and provide equal opportunities for all, especially in developing countries.

In the Common position on Human and Social Development in Africa, which was Africa’s contribution to the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development, it was recognized that social disintegration had increased and impacted negatively on communities and access to social welfare services. The Actionable Agenda for Human and Social Development identified four major interrelated areas, namely, poverty alleviation; productive employment and income generation; enhancing social integration, national cohesion, peace and political stability in Africa; as well as democratization and popular participation in development. It was recognized that social problems, ethnic and communal tensions, political instability and lack of human security have thwarted progress in human development. It was therefore recommended that appropriate policies and institutions be put in place to enhance social integration and promote political stability in the continent.

In view of the forth-coming 47th Session of the UN Commission for Social Development which has Social Integration as a priority theme (February 2009), it is pertinent for the African Member States to speak with one voice and reaffirm their determination to address the social challenges affecting the majority of their peoples.

II. PREAMBLE

WE, MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN MEMBER STATES OF THE AFRICAN UNION (AU):

RECOGNIZING the principles and objectives enshrined in the AU Constitutive Act as well as its Vision and Mission on socio-economic development, especially promotion of regional cooperation and integration;

RECALLING the importance of various AU policy documents related to social and cultural development which contribute to the promotion of socio-economic development and alleviating poverty, laying emphasis on addressing the needs of the vulnerable and marginalized groups;

CONCERNED about the worsening social conditions in the majority of the African countries, caused by economic, social, environmental degradation, food insecurity, unplanned urban development compounded by rural urban migration, inadequate infrastructure, as well as the increasing prevalence of trafficking in humans and drugs, and related crimes, and the need to address these challenges urgently;

AWARE that sustainable development can be attained only if it is human-centered, promotes universal access to social services for all, and ensures participation by all;

ALSO AWARE that social protection is a package of policies and programmes aimed at reducing poverty and vulnerability, promoting inclusive development, economic growth, and enhancing access to basic social services;

ALSO RECALLING the Copenhagen commitment to promote social integration to create “a society for all” through fostering inclusive societies that are safe, stable and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of human rights, non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality and opportunity, security and participation of all people, including the disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that the Copenhagen commitments, the MDGs and other social development strategies are mutually reinforcing and should be implemented in conjunction, in order to achieve coherent, people-centered sustainable development;

ACKNOWLEDGING that an inclusive society should cover all sectors of the society, in particular, the marginalized and vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, children and youth, the older persons, women and girls, migrants, refugees and displaced persons, people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and other diseases, among others;

AWARE that the International Community and development partners have an important role to play in collaborating with and supporting Africa in implementing its social development agenda, and that this partnership should be well coordinated and in line with national development programmes;

REALIZING that in order to achieve maximum development through effective utilization of African resources, there is need for AU Member States to develop products based on African culture to meet their needs as well as those of non-AU Member States.

WE HEREBY AGREE AS FOLLOWS TO:

1. **REAFFIRM** our commitment to global and continental social development instruments, in particular the Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008).
2. **ADHERE** to the principles of creating “a more stable and safe society for all”, in which everyone is accorded his/her rights but with reciprocal responsibilities, has access to accurate and timely information and can play his/her role in decision making and implementation.
3. **PROMOTE AND PROTECT** respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law.
4. **BUILD** inclusive societies based on values of equal opportunity and non-discrimination, tolerance, mutual respect and value for diversity.
5. **FOSTER** equal opportunities and social justice by making sure that all people are equal before the law, have access to basic services, and are afforded equal chances and opportunities, and are included in structural reforms.
6. **ADDRESS** the special needs of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, enhance their capacities towards self-sufficiency and integrate them in political dialogue and socio-economic development.
7. **ENHANCE** social cohesion by promoting universal access to education and skills development, health, shelter and urban development, environmental protection, food and water security and appropriate nutrition, information and technology, and professional training, to enable access to decent employment opportunities and poverty reduction.
8. **PUT IN PLACE** mechanisms to reduce political, economic and social inequalities, close the gaps between existing exclusion and integration, and create equal opportunities.
9. **STRENGTHEN** African family as a core of society and provide it with the capacity to overcome the challenges and dynamics of development and globalization, taking into consideration the importance of African culture and values.
10. **MAINSTREAM** gender equality in all development programmes, protect women from violence, marginalization, and discrimination and ensure that they have equal access to education, employment, health care, financial security, land, inheritance, legal protection, and other services.

11. **ELABORATE AND/OR ALIGN** social protection policies with the provisions of the Social Policy Framework, emphasizing the central role of comprehensive social protection policy in strengthening growth as well as ensuring social justice for equitable and sustainable economic development in Africa.
12. **PROVIDE** social protection to the marginalized and vulnerable social groups in form of cash transfers and social welfare services.
13. **PROMOTE** partnership between Governments (including at local level), private sector, and civil society in order to foster social integration.
14. **PROMOTE** the development of world class products based on African cultural heritage.
15. **SUPPORT** African Research Institutions to conduct research on social development issues in order to assist Member States develop coherent policies.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION :

i) At National Level

Member States are urged to:

1. Implement the Actionable Agenda of the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa as well as the commitments in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the MDGs.
2. Develop and implement comprehensive policies to support socio-economic policies, in line with the Social Policy Framework for Africa.
3. Improve coordination in the public sector through a multi-sectoral approach in order to overcome fragmentation and piecemeal programming to deal with social challenges.
4. Improve public administration, including democratic governance and rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and encourage broad-based participation.
5. Accelerate socio-economic growth and improve development indicators aimed at attaining the MDGs by 2015.

6. Strengthen the process of integration of the marginalized and vulnerable groups in Poverty Reduction Strategy and other development programmes.
7. Develop structures that ensure greater involvement of the community, local Authorities, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the design and implementation of social, economic and cultural projects and programmes with the aim of improving the social welfare of their populations.
8. Collaborate closely with the Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders in implementing the social development Agenda.
9. Develop and produce world class products based on cultural heritage to increase their articles for world trade.

ii) At Continental and Regional Levels (African Union, Regional Economic Communities and other Regional Groupings):

1. Coordinate and harmonize programs, follow-up and report on the implementation of policies to support socio-economic development, in line with the Social Policy Framework for Africa.
2. Initiate actions to address social challenges that might emerge in the continent.
3. Promote an integrated approach to handling cross-border situations and programs related to social development.
4. Raise awareness on the importance and the need to invest in social development in the overall development Agenda of the Continent.
5. Promote international and inter-regional cooperation and integration, including resource mobilization.
6. Facilitate the sharing of best practices and experiences among African countries and with other Continents.

iii) International Level (UN Agencies, Multilateral and Bilateral Development Partners, and International NGOs):

1. Collaborate with and support Member States, the AU Commission and the Regional Bodies in implementing social development policies including the Social Policy Framework for Africa;
2. Call upon UN and other International Organizations to support the African Union Commission in developing a programme on capacity building at the continental and regional levels;
3. Mobilize adequate resources to supplement local efforts, in line with international commitment, including debt relief, ODA and other commitments, in order to facilitate development in Africa;
4. Strengthen mechanisms to respond to emerging challenges as well as emergencies and disasters, and mitigate their adverse impact on populations and communities;
5. Harmonize and coordinate their efforts and cooperation programs for more effectiveness.

iv. Immediate Follow-up Action

Request the Minister of Health and Social Services of the Republic of Namibia, as Chairperson of the 1st Session of the AU Conference of Ministers in Charge of Social Development, to present the Common Position to the 47th Session of the UN Commission on Social Development to be held in New York, February 2009.