



Europe-Africa civil society forum

Lisbon, 15-17 November 2007

report by ECDPM, Maastricht (Netherlands)

The Portuguese NGDO platform organised a civil society forum on 15-17 November in Lisbon, within its Presidency Project.¹ Around 200 participants attended the forum, representing both African and European civil society organisations. This event aimed at opening and broadening the dialogue between the European and African continents.

The opening and closing sessions were held together with the Euro-African Parliamentary Forum and the Lisbon Forum, both organised by the North-South Centre (Council of Europe). At the opening session Mr. João Gomes Cravinho, the Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation, encouraged civil society participants to engage in the monitoring and implementing of the Joint EU-Africa Strategy. He was followed by Mr. Bem Tourock, the chairman of the network of the African Parliaments for NEPAD, and a member of South Africa's parliament, who spoke about the benefits of south-south cooperation and that a partnership between Africa and Europe would be appropriate only if it was on fair terms and that it was an equal partnership and not based on European "charity".

The two first days of the forum were structured in plenary sessions and workshops, focusing on four main themes: economy, trade and regional integration; governance and mutual accountability; cooperation and development: partnerships in development; and migration and development.

The forum produced a political declaration to be presented at the Lisbon Summit of Heads of State and Governments on 8-9 December. It also formulated recommendations to policy makers as well as civil society organisations. The political declaration acknowledges the new context of the Africa-Europe relationship and asks that the guiding principles agreed upon by all actors will be respected and implemented. This includes mutual accountability, based on honest political dialogue; trust, which can be reached by delivering on promises made; and striving for an equal balance of power. The declaration further requires that new resources be made available to deliver on the partnership, and challenges the officials to truly making it a people-centred partnership. In conclusion it declares that the civil society organisations present at the forum are willing to be a partner in the new relationship, on condition that the requests expressed are delivered upon.

¹ For more information see: <http://www.dialogoeuropafrica.org/>



The forum further recommended African and European civil society to increase their cooperation and develop tools to better share information between the different organisations. Power imbalances between the civil society organisations was also acknowledged and presented as an issue where more work needs to be done.

At the closing session Andrea Maksimovic (SOLIDAR, Belgium) accounted for the results of the conference, and Thomas Deve (MWENGO, Zimbabwe) read the final declaration. David Gakunzi from the North-South Centre expressed hopes about the Lisbon Summit being a turning point where the continents can build a common future, opposite to that of the Berlin conference of 1885. Presentations by Alpha Barry (MP Senegal, and Secretary General of the network of the African Parliaments for NEPAD), and Abel Mabunda (MP Moçambique), highlighted transparency and the importance of involving national parliamentarians in the process, together with civil society. They mentioned that they had had similar discussions as those of the civil society forum. Ana Maria Gomes, an MEP, concluded the discussions by comparing the Joint Strategy and Action Plan to a beautiful Christmas tree, and that it is up to civil society and parliamentarians to make sure that it shines throughout the coming year.

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