



Press release: Centre for Human Rights and Mzalendo Trust in partnership with Parliamentary Network Africa (PNAfrica) host Civil Society Engagement on the workings of the Pan-African Parliament for the East African Community

The Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, and Mzalendo Trust in partnership with Parliamentary Network Africa (PNAfrica) hosted a two-day civil society engagement on the workings on the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) for the East African Community. This forum was held on Monday 25 and Tuesday 26 April 2022, in Nairobi, Kenya. The forum focused on developing networks for increased engagement between civil society in the East African region and the Pan-African Parliament.

The forum began with a welcome address delivered by Dr Nkatha Murungi, Assistant Director of the Centre for Human Rights based in the Law Faculty of the University of Pretoria (UP). Ms. Caroline Gaita, Executive Director of Mzalendo Trust, the host organisation for this engagement, followed with welcome remarks to the organisations present. The Centre for Human Rights and Mzalendo Trust in partnership with the Parliamentary Network Africa (PNAfrica) sincerely appreciated the distinguished speakers and participants drawn from various civil society organizations including the Civil Society Parliamentary Engagement Network (CSPEN) and Open Government Partnership (OGP) umbrellas, academia and Parliamentary journalists.

The objective of the forum was guided by the concern that despite the potentially crucial role they can play in the activities of the PAP, civil society organisations (CSOs) still know very little about this institution; and that for most CSOs, the African Union (AU) and the PAP in particular, are largely invisible and inaccessible. The discussions were guided by the need to explore ways of engaging with the PAP and to raise awareness about the importance of transparency and accountability in the operations of domestic and regional parliaments in Africa. Discussions were also guided by the need to identify gaps and challenges relating to civil society engagement with PAP, devise effective strategies to address these challenges and to establish best practices of engagement with the PAP.

The speakers and participants acknowledged that despite the provisions of Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union principle on participation of the African people in the activities of the union; in reality, the people are disconnected from the Union and its institutions. In the same manner that CSOs hold their domestic government organs accountable; CSOs should also serve as watchdogs over the organs of the AU. CSOs recognize the opportunities to engage with Parliaments through continuous public participation by way of petitions and memoranda, and inputting on legislative business. While there are spaces for engagement by Civil Society in the affairs of the Union and its institutions such as the AU summits, the African Governance Architecture (AGA) platform and open sessions, there have been challenges to engagement by CSOs such as access, including deliberate efforts by governments in obstructing engagement.

The civil society organizations and their representatives present call upon the following institutions, groups and communities to address the following:

a) The African Union

- I. Should ease Civil Society access to its various institutions by reviewing policies in place that hinder access such as the eligibility criteria for membership and observer status.
- II. Should disseminate information on its upcoming meetings in a timely manner to enable meaningful engagement of the people and Civil Society Organizations.
- III. Should ensure timely and easy access to information on its decisions and other critical documents for example, by uploading key documents on its websites.

b) The Pan African Parliament

- I. Enhance its visibility and ensure the wide dissemination of information on its structures and mandate, to facilitate for increased understanding and meaningful engagement by African citizens.
- II. Parliamentary information should be made proactively available, and such information should be able to be reused with limited restrictions.
- III. Should put in place standards and policies for proactive publication of its roles and functions as well as information generated through legislative processes.

c) National Parliaments

- I. Understand their roles so that they can meaningfully represent their nationals at the regional parliaments
- II. Ratify the Malabo protocol

d) Civil Society Actors

- I. Empower national grassroots organizations and build their capacities to engage with the Pan-African Parliament
- II. Recognize their critical role as a bridge between citizens and the institutions of the African Union including the Pan-African Parliament.
- III. Build rapport with the Economic, Social & Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) which was formed to provide an opportunity for African (CSOs) to play an active role in contributing to the AU's principles, policies, and programmes including continuously engaging with the respective CSO representatives.
- IV. Call upon their governments to ratify the Malabo Protocol which, among other benefits, will allow individual members to run for the Pan-African Parliament, which would be a positive step in democratic governance.
- V. Work jointly and maintain multi stakeholder platforms and structures such as the CSPEN for engagement-formalizing engagements.
- VI. Should come up with innovative ways to engage with the Pan-African Parliament and other structures of the African Union including embracing hybrid ways of conducting and attending meetings.

- VII. Develop an independent index to monitor and evaluate the work of the representatives.
- VIII. Understand the Pan-African Parliament legislative calendar and how they can influence it.
- IX. Understand how representatives are nominated so that they can influence such processes.
- X. Develop an accountability scorecard for the Pan African Parliament and the national representatives to regional parliaments.
- XI. Work with the media in developing communication strategies including leveraging on the African Parliamentary Press Network (APPN)

e) The Media

- I. Invest and engage in the coverage of proceedings of the Pan-African Parliament and other business of the African Union. Media houses should put in place measures to have dedicated personnel working on this.
- II. Highlight the work of the Pan-African Parliament on the media so that citizens are aware of the business conducted.

f) The people of Africa

- I. Introspect on our role in the realization of the values of the African Union and the visions and aspirations of Agenda 2063 through meaningful and effective engagement.
- II. Demand accountability from our representatives

The Centre for Human Rights, Mzalendo Trust and the Parliamentary Network Africa (PNAfrica) undertake to continue spearheading conversations on the Pan African Parliament and commit to continuing to collaborate and engage with various stakeholders from across the continent to draw lessons and best practices in engaging with the Pan-African Parliament.

The engagement concluded with reflections from participants on specific focus areas that civil society actors can improve on to further engagement with the Pan-African Parliament and similar initiatives.

There were 58 participants in attendance from several African countries including Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

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