

FOCUS

South Africa



Grand Projects – The 7th Session of the Pan-African Parliament

Paper tiger or grain of hope?

The *Pan-African Parliament* (PAP) was established in March 2004. Its objectives are to promote human rights and democracy in Africa, act as a basis for peace, stability, co-operation and development as well as to support economic growth and create a common spirit among African nations. The *African Union* (AU) incorporates 53 member countries. The PAP-Delegates meet two times a year in Midrand, north of Johannesburg, South Africa. The Parliament has currently no legislative authority but advisory and consultative powers. However, this could soon change as the AU plans comprehensive reforms.

„As members of the Pan African Parliament, we are charged with protecting human rights in Africa. We are also responsible for consolidating democracy and ensuring good governance.“

Suzanne Vos, South African parliamentary delegate

More than 250 delegates from 45 member states assembled for the 7th ordinary session of the *Pan-African Parliament* which took place in Midrand from the 7th to the 18th of May 2007. They presented a multi-coloured panorama of the continent – some in fine suits, others in traditional dress or Arabic clothes. The extensive challenges of Africa were discussed over a period of eleven days in an effort to find common solutions.

For the first time in its three-year history the conference was opened by the present Chairman of the AU, the President of Ghana, John Kufour. The President did not only pay his respects to the institution by inaugurating this event but also responded to the criticisms made by PAP-President Hon. Dr Gertrude Mongella. She has demanded an urgent reform of the decision-making processes as well as an extension of the effectiveness of PAP. Kufour announced that comprehensive reforms will be presented at the AU Summit in July 2007 which will take place in Accra, the capital of Ghana. The agenda included among other topics: The *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD) and country studies by the *African Peer Review Mechanism* (APRM) which is a mechanism for critical self-evaluation of African states based on standards of 'good governance'. The Chairpersons of the Permanent Committees for peace and climate presented their most recent reports to PAP. The establishment of a *Union Government of Africa*, a common African government, was high on the agenda. For the first time the parliamentarians, whose powers are restricted, felt there was hope that reform of the AU will result in their positions being strengthened and their role more effective.

The 7th session of the Pan-African Parliament showed how difficult it is for PAP to achieve continent-wide agreement. The delegates were divided almost equally for and against the idea of a common government. Heated discussions concerning the human rights situation in Zimbabwe did not result in any concrete actions.

The precarious situation in Zimbabwe

The main topic on the first day of the Conference was the problematic situation in the AU member country Zimbabwe. The South African delegate, Suzanne Vos of the *Inkatha Freedom Party* (IFP), asked that a

fact-finding mission to be sent into neighbouring Zimbabwe, as a result of extensive media reports of severe human rights violations. Delegates of the Botswana opposition party supported this request. Vos said, "As members of the Pan African Parliament, we are charged with protecting human rights in Africa. We are also responsible for consolidating democracy and ensuring good governance." Vos agreed with John Kufour who demanded rights of decision over and above the principle of sovereignty in "sister nations where domestic policies are, or seem to be, at variance with the principle of respecting and upholding human rights."

Vos' request was strongly criticised by the Zimbabwean delegation headed by Joram Gumbo. Gumbo demanded the motion be rejected and announced that his government would veto it. The Zimbabwean Minister of Foreign Affairs, Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, reacted with extreme anger. It has been a long time since the *Pan-African Parliament* experienced such a heated discussion. There were more than 50 motions waiting to be reviewed so the allotted time for this debate had to be extended. The Angolan delegate, Chivukuvuku Abel Epalanga, claimed that "there was evidently something hidden if this request was opposed so strongly." Eventually, the motion was put to vote. For the first time this was not done by the traditional knocking on the desk but by raising hands to guarantee a correct count. Altogether 149 members voted in favour of sending a fact-finding mission, 20 voted against and 3 abstained. Thus it could be expected that a parliamentary delegation will be sent to Zimbabwe. However, the Parliament's office, which is responsible for forwarding and implementing parliamentary decisions to the *Commission of the African Union*, dampened optimism. The President, Hon. Dr Mongella, requested more time to carefully investigate the proposal before presenting it to the Zimbabwean Government. It is assumed that the delegation will not be sent to Zimbabwe before the next meeting of parliament in November.



Climate change, conflicts and international relations

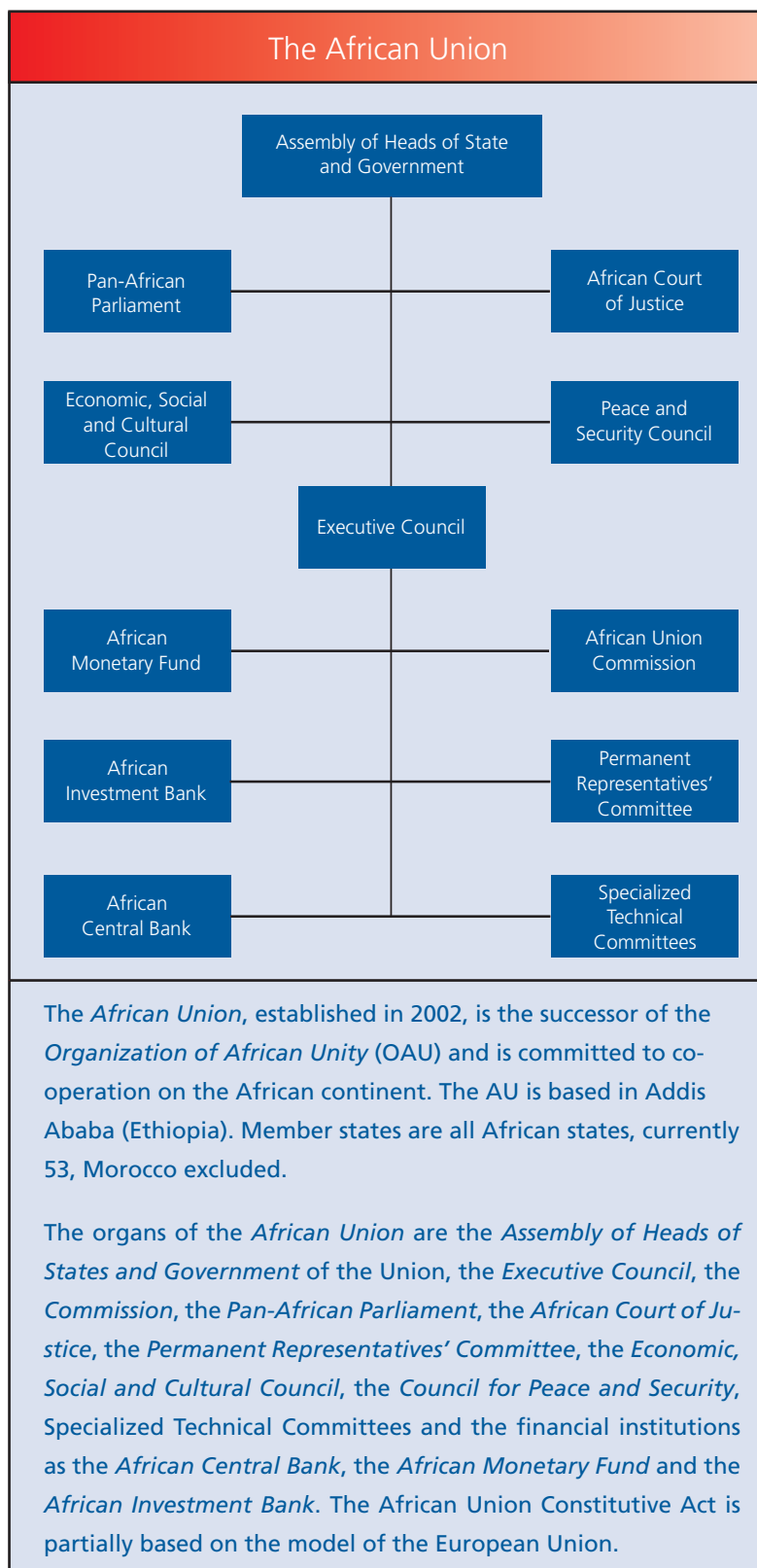
The *African Union* was censured because no solutions regarding poverty have been introduced – despite the high economic growth rate of the region – and it has failed to support numerous regions in crisis. The *Pan-African Parliament's* principal task is to implement the objectives and principles of the *African Union*. It was decided in 2004, at the Founding Conference in Addis Ababa, to establish ten permanent committees to deal with the different areas of day-to-day living in Africa. At the 2007 conference the chairpersons of the *Committee on Rural Economy, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment* and the *Committee on Co-operation, International Relations and Conflict Resolution* presented their reports.

Climate change is becoming more and more problematic on the African continent. Lake Chad is drying out, the snow on Kilimanjaro has shrunk and extreme weather situations are increasing. The Committees predict an increase in poverty, hunger and conflicts. “We never used to have malaria in the highlands where I’m from, now we do,” reports Mwanicha Okioma, Chairman of the *Environmental Committee* and member of the Kenyan parliament, “planes used to take people through Kilimanjaro to see the snows, now it’s only at the very top.” Studies by the UN-*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) show that in the north and northwest of the continent droughts will increase whereas the centre and the south of Africa will have more rain than usual. Above all, they foresee the rising of ocean-levels, droughts, floods and other extreme weather phenomena such as heavy storms, tsunamis and tropical cyclones.

Africa has the lowest emission of greenhouse gases. Members of Parliament and experts called for urgent action by the industrialised countries to redress the damage which has already been caused so far from their own regions. “Changes in climate and dumping of waste in Africa by Western countries have a dramatic effect on securing sufficient food supplies and the health of the African people”, reports Babagana Ahmadu, Director of the *AU-Commission for Agricultural Development*. Ahmadu related an incident from the Ivory Coast where a Russian ship dumped hundreds of tons of toxic waste

into the harbour of Abidjan. “This problem is generated by countries in the West and we are asking them to help us tackle its impact. It is beyond our means to address this problem in Africa because we lack the technology and the financial capability,” he added.

Equally alarming was the report of the *Committee of Co-operation, International Relations and Conflict Resolution*. The situation in Darfur, Sudan has not



changed, chaos is prevailing in Somalia and stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Ivory Coast has not been secured.

The *Pan-African Parliament* demanded the Ethiopian government urgently to withdraw from the conflict in neighbouring Somalia and marked the situation as “doomed to failure.” The parliamentarians accused Addis Ababa of benefiting from the Islamic uprising in order to receive support from the USA; they criticised the AU for not sending their own peace mission to Somalia. The efforts of the international community to solve the conflicts in Darfur were marked by the Parliament as “unclear and ineffective” and, therefore, it was suggested to send another fact-finding mission to this region. Furthermore, the delegates wanted an end to ad hoc missions of election-observers and instead a permanent authority within the *African Union* to effectively end conflicts such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Weaknesses

A big weakness of the *Pan-African Parliament* is not so much its cultural heterogeneity but its lack of efficiency. The *Executive Council* as well as the *Commission* of the *African Union* does not regard PAP and its recommendations as very relevant. Like the majority of legislatures in African countries the continental parliament lacks sufficient influence because the executive is too strong. Furthermore, it does not have sufficient funds to carry out its functions. The president presented a list of requests drawing urgent attention to outstanding payments by the *Commission* as well as by individual member-countries. In the past year only \$3 million instead of the promised \$5,5 million for the budget had been received. In the current year, \$3 million is outstanding with the result that the committees cannot carry out their tasks effectively.

The *European Parliament* supported the requirements of its African counterpart. Both parliaments are busy working on a “Joint Strategy for Africa” which will be discussed at the EU–Africa summit to be held in December 2007 in Lisbon. The leader of the European Delegation, Michael Gahler, and PAP President, Gertrude Mongella, pointed out that it will be important to give not only the governments but also the legislatures an opportunity to speak during the upcoming summit.

The AU should support PAP to develop strategies for individual countries by adequately funding it. “One cannot have democratic institutions on paper and prevent them from working in practice by keeping them on a shoe-string budget,” stated Gahler to the *African Parliament*. The first draft of the new strategy of the *European Commission* in 2005 was criticised

by Gahler because it lacked the influence of the two Legislatures and showed European dominance. The *European Commission* and the two Parliaments will now work out a Joint Strategy in co-operation with the *African Commission* and the Governments. At present, the European and African Parliaments disagree about Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe’s participation in the Summit but Gahler and Mongella hope to obtain a decision by December.

Consultative Dialogue with civil society

The dialogue between national, regional and continental institutions in Africa is considered insufficient and so is the incorporation of civil society within all sections of the *African Union*. Therefore, the *Pan-African Parliament* inaugurated a Consultative Dialogue with African civil society organisations under the theme of “Building Effective Mechanisms for Civil Society Engagement with Pan African and Regional Institutions”. For the first time representatives of PAP and non-governmental organisations met in Midrand. How to improve dialogue between civil society and PAP on subjects like NEPAD, APRM, the proposed *Union Government of Africa* as well as the tasks of PAP’s *Permanent Committees* were discussed. Initially it has been decided that this will be the task of the *Economic, Social and Cultural Council* of the *African Union* and that the civil community should present their suggestions to this body, but Bheki Moyo, AU-expert from Senegal, noted that “some contributors at the conference felt that the Council was under-resourced



Gertrude Mongella, since 2004
President of the African Union

and did not have the capacity.” It is not clear whether the *Pan-African Parliament* will be able to change this despite the good results achieved from co-operating with numerous non-governmental organisations. Dr. Gertrude Mongella commented that this consultative dialogue between civil society and PAP was a “historic moment for democracy in Africa” and points out that there should be no competition between the two bodies but rather they should work together in a complementary way. She also declared that the prevailing mistrust between PAP and civil society is totally inappropriate and has to be overcome.

Union Government of Africa

Although small initiatives have helped the *Pan-African Parliament* (PAP) to progress and to gain attention, the institution is hoping for substantial reform. And this year again there will be new expectations. In July 2007 the Heads of State and Government of the AU will meet in Ghana to elect a new Commission and to discuss reform of the AU’s institutions. At this occasion it is also intended to establish a *Union Government of Africa*. The head of the PAP *Committee for International Relations, Co-operation and Conflict Resolution*, Al Hadj Diao Kante, mentioned a time span of eight years. This idea, however, is not a new one and has always failed. Already at the Summit of 2005 in Abuja more concrete steps were proposed but only more reports followed.

This subject was nevertheless discussed intensively by the parliamentarians who requested the Council of the AU to consult with PAP before taking concrete steps. “A common government cannot be established only by signature”, commented Mahama Dramani, a delegate from Ghana. “The public have not been involved in the AU’s conversation about continental governance,” Janah Ncube, from the *African Agency of Co-operation and Development* remarked, and threatened that “we cannot have a United States of Africa without citizenship.”

The non-governmental organisation, Oxfam, called the plans for a common government “the start of a great debate” that would affect how Africa engages the rest of the world in matters relating to defence, foreign and trade policy.” However, it would be advisable to discuss beforehand the possibilities of a common government

to implement the establishment of human rights, prosperity and justice. Many parliamentarians regarded the project as unrealistic and requested rather the removal of obstacles regarding regional integration. The most important regional alliances, the *South African Development Community* (SADC) and the *Economic Community of West African States* (ECOWAS) have not yet succeeded in achieving a free trade agreement and a customs-union.

Therefore PAP asked the *African Union* to specify the idea about a common government and granted a mandate to parliamentary president, Gertrude Mongella, to represent the interests of the legislature strongly. “The heads of state must re-examine the decision-making procedures within the African Union, adhere (to) and respect the protocol and mandate of the *Pan African Parliament* and properly define the decision making process,” said Mongella, “and to stick closer to the mandate of the *Pan-African Parliament*.” She is hoping that the urgent demand for reforming PAP can be connected to these new plans and that an *African Parliament* based on the model of the *European Parliament* will be established one day so that it may eventually pass binding laws and establish improved unity between the member states.

The *Pan-African Parliament* is frequently criticised as a superfluous debating club. But skeptics should take into consideration how long it took the *European Parliament* to develop. A union of national representatives had been in place since 1952 but only in 1979 was the *European Parliament* elected directly and only since 1992 is it allowed to take part in passing laws within the “common decisions procedure”. With this in mind the development of the *Pan-African Parliament* should be viewed in a different light. Its development should be looked at with patience and its prospects should not be undervalued. In May 2007 the *Pan-African Trust Fund* was established to collect financial contributions to support the tasks of PAP from companies and international organisations. The guest of honour, Nelson Mandela, praised the *Pan-African Parliament* as a guide in transparency and democracy and pleaded for support. The German Bundestag was among the first donors: Vice-President, Susanne Kastner (SPD) personally handed over a cheque of \$500 000. ■

Editorial

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Authors of this number

Dr. Werner Rechmann, Jérôme Cholet

Editor

Dr. Werner Rechmann

Layout & Design

Andreas Dorner

Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung

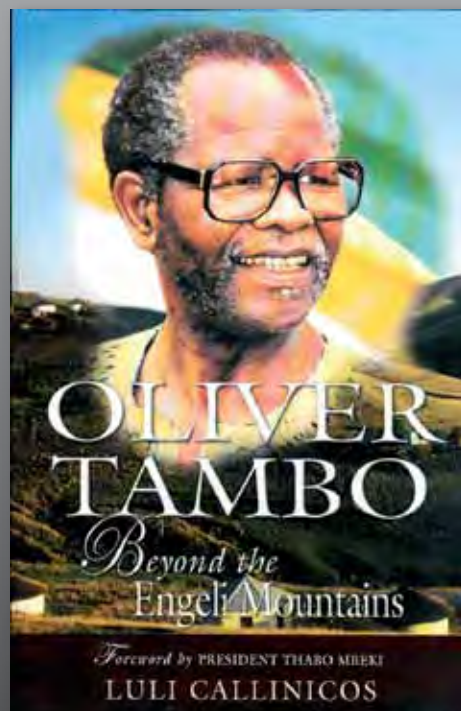
Johannesburg Office
34 Bompas Road, Dunkeld West
Johannesburg, South Africa
P.O.Box 412664, Craighall 2024
Phone: +27(0) 11-341 0270
Fax: +27(0) 11-341 0271
Email: fokus@fessa.co.za
Web: www.fessa.co.za



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Oliver Tambo
Luli Callinicos

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