



AFRICA DAY

PUBLIC SEMINAR REPORT

'An African Union Government: Towards the United States of Africa'

Co hosted by the Institute for Security Studies and Southern African Trust

Date: Friday 25 May 2007

Chair: Dr Cheryl Hendricks – Head of Southern Africa Human Security Programme – ISS

Speakers:

Advocate George Mukundi – South African Institute for Advanced Constitutional, Public, human Rights and International Law

Mr Prince Mashele – Senior Researcher – ISS

Dr Ozias Tungwarara – Director AfriMap

Dr John Tesha – Executive Director Africa Forum

The seminar brought together about 30 participants from civil society, research and academic institutions, government and diplomatic missions.

Cheryl Hendricks opened the seminar by underlining the significance of Africa Day which commemorates the formation of the Organisation of the African Union and which celebrates Africa's achievements. She observed that in many respects this year we will be reliving the grand debate of the early 1960s with pan-Africanists calling for political and economic integration and moderates calling for a more gradualist approach that gave birth to the OAU. She outlined the stated rationale for a continental government pointing out that a union must be that of African people and not merely states and that integration is said to hold the key to resolving Africa's problems. But, there are obviously many challenges that pose doubt on the readiness of Africa to embark on this institutional arrangement. Hence the current debate with arguments on the one side noting that we should first concentrate on strengthening current AU structures and those on the other noting that we should increase the pace of integration for in our current modus operandi the conditions will never be ripe. This debate is, however, largely taking place amongst African heads of state, yet, it is African citizens who need to be deliberating for it is they who stand to gain or lose the

most, and it is a debate ostensibly carried out for the purpose of facilitating the integration of Africa's people.

George Mukundi gave a historical overview of the Pan African debate, underscoring the motivation for shared historical and cultural values, collective self-reliance, self-sufficiency and political freedom. He observed that Africa has continued to remain poor and divided. The establishment of the African Union in 2002 was meant to accelerate the continent's integration process and to strengthen its shared values and common purpose. But the challenges to continental integration have remained especially with AU member states still holding onto the issue of sovereignty. The contradiction is that it is these leaders who are leading the debate on the formation of a 'United States of Africa.' He noted the challenges to continental unity including; mistrust, economic inequalities, racism and questions of ethnicity. He also pointed out that political leaders are at the moment pursuing the question of integration without involving the general public.

As a way forward he pointed out the need for AU to take tough and courageous decisions and determination to enforce them, to consult and involve all Africans, to strengthen and rationalise the RECs as the building blocks to achieve a Union government, address the recurrent financial constraint on the Union and adopt measured steps that take into account complementarity of political and economic structures.

Prince Mashele made a presentation on *African Union Government: Between Dreams and Reality*. He observed that the debate on the 'United States of Africa' picked up momentum from the 7th African Union Summit in Banjul Gambia in July 2006. At this Summit, a study report on the 'United States of Africa' was presented outlining concrete steps to be taken. Mashele critiqued the proposed road map arguing that there was no way the Pan African parliament would start legislating by 2009. He also questioned the possible contradictions between the powers bestowed on the PAP to legislate and the Assembly as the highest decision making body, adding that without political will nothing would work. He pointed out the divergence in suggestions over the structure of the Union with some suggesting a federal government while others proposing the strengthening of the current structures of the African Union. In conclusion, Mashele observed that in the face of the myriad of problems facing the continent, the current debates on continental integration will neither lead to a 'United States of Africa' nor continental government. He termed it misplaced optimism and mere sensation.

Ozias Tungwarara

Picked up from Prince Mashele's conclusion arguing that as a Zimbabwean, he was attracted to the optimism of continental integration. He observed that the idea of a United States of Africa was good, although there was still work to be done especially in making it resonate with the general public. He observed that

while the proposal for a continental government would have profound implications on the majority of African people, the African Union has not involved them. The civil society too, he observed, have not been effective in mobilising people to participate in the debates. To him, the debate has remained elitist rather than people centred. The civil society's participation has largely been constrained, partly by the lack of cross border networking to pressurise governments on issues of continental interest. The question, he posed is 'what should civil society do in the current scenario? Do they take the 'United States of Africa' debate back to the people for discussion before the Accra Summit or remain in reactionary mode? He also pointed out that the debates on continental integration seem driven by neo liberal economics. He urged for the Accra Summit to be withheld until 'people's' voices have been heard and that civil societies should come up with new options relating to people's engagement and coordinate efforts between civil societies focusing on development and those on politics.

The discussant, John Tesha, observed that it is apparent that the continental landscape has been changing, as evidenced in the occurrence of regular elections and presidents leaving offices peacefully. He pointed out that the discourse on continental integration embodied the message of African solutions to African problems. He agreed with the need for an inclusive process although he observed that the civil societies have a platform at the African Union (ECOSOC). He urged the civil society to make use of available mechanisms and avoid being reactive. He conceded that that 2015 may be too close for political integration and called for gradual and realistic time frames. He also called for advocates of 'structured and inclusive' processes to put out concrete propositions about how that should be done. One critical question, he felt, needs to be pursued is the financial implication of an African Union government.

During the plenary a number of issues were raised. These included the possible immigration challenges that could arise from political integration, a concern with abstract debates that are never implemented, the question of what makes the integration debate necessary at this moment and the argument that the presenters were offering an 'all or nothing solution'. It was suggested that some countries, which are more eager, would probably proceed with the political integration and others join them along the way. Other questions related to differences between North Africans and the rest of the continent, the effect of Alpha Konare's possible resignation from the AU leadership, whether the continental integration process has borrowed from other models such as the Asian model and the argument that civil society could too be considered elitist.

In response

Prince Mashele observed that the current continental integration discourses are motivated by political not economic integration pointing out the challenges of infrastructure. He observed that the question of timeframes should not be a concern given that the EU has been driven by the desire for concrete measures

and not time frames. Mashele also pointed out the disconnection between the North and the rest of Africa as amplified in the NEPAD process and peace keeping missions on the continent. He underscored the need for a functional/sectoral integration e.g. regionally and across certain sectors like infrastructure.

George Mukundi contested the notion that political integration would create migration problems citing examples in West and East Africa, which currently allow for free movement. He observed that the debate on the 'United States of Africa' took impetus with Kadhafi's pronouncements and it appears other leaders have bought into it. He observed that there was no problem with countries borrowing models which work elsewhere provided these models are domesticated and made relevant to their new contexts.

Ozias Tungwarara argued that the debate should not be attributed to an individual but rather be seen in the Pan African paradigm where Africa seeks to address its development challenges. He observed that from the research he has done, it is apparent that there has been little consultation on the proposed African Union government. The ECOSOC platform, he further observed, has been in interim mode all along and he urged for civil societies to create independent spaces for participation in the African Union. He emphasized the need for critical contributions from all the constituencies

John Tesha answered the question of 'why now' with a rhetorical one 'why not now?' He observed that there is no need to question when some countries decide to lead, arguing that it is quite normal everywhere in the world. On the question of civil society participation, he said, he saw no obstacles and observed that it all depended on initiative.

Cheryl Hendricks recapped the debate touching on the main running themes. She said the question on timing should be rephrased to "why only now" since the *raison d'être* for the OAU and AU were to lead us along precisely this path. She concluded by underscoring the need for the debate to be taken beyond the 'blue chip' NGO's to the masses.