



Regional Integration Under Scrutiny at the African Union Symposium

By Jeggan Grey-Johnson

In his opening comments to participants attending Sunday's opening session of the African Union Symposium, Amara Essy, Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity, urged delegates to learn from past lessons as they begin to discuss new ways to build Africa's common future. "It behooves us all to draw lessons of the past to build an African Union that is strong and effective," he said.

The daylong symposium, which was attended by more than 400 people, was convened to give the OAU an opportunity to detail the status, process and objectives of the establishment of the African Union,

Secretary General Essy's words of warning could not have been better understood. As delegates and presenters alike stepped to the microphone to share their concerns about the African Union's capabilities, as well as challenges in their ambition to not only talk integration, but also implementation in as little time as less than a year from now.

Charles C. Soludo, an economist raised some tough questions concerning practicality. His concerns were described in the form of bridging the gaps. "We have a lot of bridges to build to get to the other side of this continent," he said.



Former OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim and ECA Executive Secretary, K.Y. Amoako

to obtain input from a range of stakeholders, and to consolidate consensus on the road ahead.

The symposium was scheduled to take advantage of the opportunity to discuss the recently proposed African Union with the broad spectrum of stakeholders who have gathered in Addis to attend Third African Development Forum (ADF III) which officially opens today under the theme, "Defining Priorities for Regional Integration."

The symposium offered a view of the divergent views on the African Union (AU) and the issues involved with regional integration, the various concerns and opinions were the recurring theme through out the daylong discussion by delegates from around the African continent.

There were questions about the African Union's ability to function as an entity that can consolidate and bring into being the much-trumpeted need to "integrate" was high on the agenda of both presenters and delegates.

The discussions highlighted the various views that exist when discussing this issue of regional and continent-wide integration; views that are as diverse as varied as the cultures that bind the continent together.

Ambassador Sam Ibok, director of Political Affairs for the OAU expressed the sentiment that the concept of integration needs to be looked at carefully. If this is done, he said, then perhaps the AU will "emerge as the strongest effort toward integration."

Still others question the political will of African leaders. Asked a delegate, "When will African leaders be prepared to work with the people, instead of the other way round?"

The fear of establishing a Union of States of Africa just to be "in with the times" is at least, for the moment, being evaluated based on its probability rather than its possible outcomes.



OAU Secretary-General Amara Essy

However, Mr. K.Y. Amoako, Executive Secretary of the ECA, believes that there is a momentum toward integration. But stopped short of basking in his confidence by pin pointing past attempts by African leaders to integrate Africa.

"This is at least the fourth time that African leaders have set out very ambitious agendas for integration, and each time, the results have fallen far short of the expectations," he said. "If this time, regional integration is to succeed to the point that we become a true community

of nations and economies, we had better be sure, that the designs truly meet the needs of customers."

The customers are waiting and wondering when, if ever, the idea of integration as perceived by the AU will come into being. After all, it was forty years ago that a generation of African leaders felt that they had achieved the dream of 'One Africa One People' - right here in the Capital city of Ethiopia. But it was to take four decades before the debate was to be tabled again in the same place, on the same issues, but by a different generation.

Transport is key to integration

By Norbert Ouendji

Experts from about 40 African countries met 2-3 March at UNCC, Addis Ababa, to discuss the state of transport and communications in Africa.

The meeting, which focused on road and airport security, and on current postal service issues, was preparatory to the Twelfth Conference of African Ministers of Transport and Communications, to take place on 6 March, parallel to ADF III, which begins on Monday.

At the opening session, Ms. Lalla Ben Barka, Deputy Executive Secretary of ECA, pointed out that one of the most important goals of the meeting was evaluation of the Second United Nations Decade for Transport, covering the period 1991-2000 (UNTACDA II).

Although she acknowledged that a great deal remains to be done, Ms Ben Barka expressed appreciation for the efforts already made by various countries and for the Regional Plan for transforming transport in Africa. During the deliberations, most of the participants said they were getting impatient with waiting for the changes announced in official declarations but which were never implemented.

Last Saturday, Mr. Hamadou Hachim Koumare, Transport Team Leader at ECA, stressed that, "We are convinced, as are a good number of other Africans, that infrastructure is one of the key elements of integration. We have not given up hope that solutions will be found to the problems that still exist".



The African Union: Is it more than Utopian Pan-Africanist Hot Air?

On Sunday, more than 400 delegates from different disciplines attended the African Union (AU) Symposium to share different perspectives on how the dream of the continent's founding fathers could become a reality.

Symbolically, the Symposium was held in Africa Hall, the very place where, nearly 40 years ago, leaders met to sign into being the Organization of African Unity, whose demise is imminent as the African Union's star is set to rise.

At the core of yesterday's discussion were issues of peace, security, humanitarianism and human rights, economic integration, and the institutions, capacities, requirements and relationships of the African Commission, which will be the secretariat of the AU.

Many questions hang over the establishment of the AU. Is it realistic or is it simply a political construct designed to further the ends of certain would-be leaders? Whatever happened to the Abuja Treaty process and the African Economic Community? Why does Africa want to rush headlong into a Union when the conditions, policies and institutional frameworks in the continent's countries and sub-regions simply do not exist? How can Africa's people own the AU when in reality it is a closed process driven by Heads of State, with little room for participation by different stakeholder groups? Is the discussion on the proposed African parliament, African Central Bank, and other organs of the AU backed up by credible thinking and planning, or is it simply utopian Pan-Africanist hot air?

These issues, among others, will dominate the debate during the Third African Development Forum (ADFIII) which begins in earnest today.

It is unrealistic to expect ADFIII to come up with answers to all of the questions raised above. Still, the Forum will certainly raise difficult questions that the African leaders who gave life to the AU may be willing to answer at their summit in Pretoria in June.

Just as Rome was not built in a day, neither will the AU. The important thing is by the end of this week, a substantive process will have taken place and a detailed consensus arrived at after open debate among different stakeholders.

The outcomes of ADF III will be difficult to ignore.

Key issues from the African Union Symposium

By *Bénédite Walter*

The African Union Symposium which took place on Sunday as a prelude to the Third African Development Forum (ADF III) provided an opportunity to clarify the status, process and objectives of the establishment of the African Union (AU).

The symposium, which was hosted by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and facilitated by the Inter Africa Group (IAG), offered the following key points:

- **Vision:** The African Union (AU) is a political, economic and social project. These elements can not be separated. Africa's integration must proceed at the level of economic integration and political unification.
- **Values:** The African Union (AU) should be based on a set of core values including constitutional rule in African states, good governance, peace, democracy and respect of human rights.
- **Process:** The process itself should involve democratic participation and stakeholder involvement notably through formalising the civil society organisations (CSOs) linkages with the African Union (AU) structures (Observer Status, access to AU summits); Enabling the involvement of stakeholders through the Economic, Social and Cultural Council to be created; Developing links with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); Enhancing partnerships with the private sector and the regional and sub-regional organisations.
- **Institutions:** The African Parliament, which is to be based upon direct elections, should be established as soon as possible. The African Court of Justice will be a core institution for the promotion of human rights and will be the Supreme Court of Africa. The Economic, Social and Cultural Council is to serve as a consultation mechanism for liaison with stakeholders.
- **Financing:** The African Union (AU) should investigate new mechanisms for financing to avoid complete dependence on the dues of Member States.
- **Pitfalls:** The African Union (AU) needs to clarify the role of the Regional Economic Communities (RECS) and the New Partnership for

Africa's Development (NEPAD) with respect to the AU.

- **Gender:** The African Union (AU) institutions should meet the Beijing commitment of a minimum 30% representation of women.
- **Youth people:** The African Union (AU) should create a consultative Youth Council, bringing together national youth councils to ensure the participation of young people in the process of the AU.
- **Peace and security:** The African Union (AU) will seek harmonisation and coordination with the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECS).
- **Human rights:** The African Union (AU) constitutive Act should incorporate all human rights instruments adopted by the OAU and ratified by African states.
- **Citizenship:** The African Union (AU) will move towards a common African citizenship.

Enjoying the Sights and Sounds of Addis Ababa

By *Maria Thundu*

Spending a day or two, a weekend or perhaps a whole week?

If time permits, take advantage of your visit to enjoy the sights and sounds of the city. Emerging from the confines of the meeting conference rooms, you will note there's a great deal of activity going on around you –from the streets teeming with people from all walks of life enjoying the weather, watching the cars go by and going about their daily routines.

Whether your interests run the gamut from adventurous and involved or whether you prefer doing the simpler things in life you will find something to entertain you in Addis.

This culturally diverse and unique city offers more than a person can fit in a single day, and with a bit of time and bit more energy, it's certainly worth the effort to see as much as you can.

Days can be filled with trips to historical sites such as **Selassie, Trinity Cathedral**, which is one of the city's main landmarks. It boasts a large dome, making it even more striking in appearance. The **National Museum** is also a must-see. It houses historical artifacts including "Lucy", the skeleton of a girl who lived 3.2 million years ago and was found in Ethiopia, and is now considered a national treasure.

There are more cafes, luxury shops, and grocery stops on every corner and curve of the city than one can imagine. And that's not all.

Food is a big part of Addis life, as it contains various restaurants and eateries. Eating in Addis can literally be like a trip around the world through cuisine.

There's Chinese at the *China Bar* and *Shanghai* restaurants, French at *Les Arcades, Le Petit Paris* and *Lauberge*, Italian at places such as *Le Jardin* and *Don Vito* and American at *Blue Tops* and *Burger Queen* – just to name a few.

Authentic Ethiopian food, however, is a delicacy worth trying no matter what. The flavors of the sauces, all different in taste and texture are great compliments to "injera."

If shopping is a great pastime, then time will be well spent at **The Merkato**, an extremely vibrant and lively open-air market. It is the one place in which getting lost would not exactly be disastrous as there is so much to see and do. All kinds of items can be found here, ranging from food items to clothing, shoes and house wares. It's like a giant shopping dream and must be experienced by all.

Souvenir and gift shop owners are always welcoming to a customer who knows how to bargain. So take your walking stick and enjoy a trip to some of the best jewelry and trinkets that the town has to offer, especially those found along the famous Churchill Road.

Addis Ababa is best viewed and experienced by foot and by taking local transportation, which is in abundance, although caution must be taken. Too much of a good thing is only too good around here and the sheer enjoyment of the surroundings can transport a single person to a whole new world.

Travel around the city must be taken with some kind of advisory. Although it is exciting and enjoyable to traverse a new environment, it is always wise to bring along someone who knows his or her way around town.

The month of March holds many, many events and fun-filled activities to satisfy even the hardest to please person. There are numerous art museums and of course, everybody loves a good party.

Here are some events taking place this month:

- **The St. Patrick's Day Charity Ball** will be held in the Lalibella Ballroom at the Sheraton Addis on 9 March 7:00 p.m. Tickets are 350 EB a person and all proceeds go to the Medical Missionaries of Mary Center (a local NGO that assists people with HIV/AIDS).
- Two nights of reggae entertainment await you on 9-10 March at 7p.m. and 4p.m. respectively. Dance the nights away at Island Spice Restaurant in Bole. Food and drinks available, a bar included. Live bands on stage and DJs. Tickets are 20 EB for adults and 10 for kids.

The *ADF News* is produced by a team of independent African journalists working with the ECA Communication Team

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Printing: Documents Reproduction Unit, ECA.