



CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS EXPRESS DISCOMFORT OVER AFRICAN UNION

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The process of setting up the African Union (AU) has caused some discomfort among African Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the Inter African Group (IAG) said.

A one-day regional pre-ADF III symposium aimed at discussing challenges for the African Union was held yesterday at the African Hall of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

Mr. Abdul Mohammed, Special Representative to OAU/ECA and Chairperson of IAG said on the occasion that the formation of the Union cannot be regarded simply as "business as usual".

Mohammed said "The Union is an arrangement between states, and as such it is inevitably a sovereign process. The rush to formalize the Union and set up its basic institutions, and the exclusion (for the most part) of processes of wider consultation makes many suspicious about the quality and sustainability of the process."

"The African Union agenda is ambitious and we have no illusions that it can be achieved quickly. Prioritization and a focus on ensuring that each task is delegated to the institution that can do it best should be our watch word," said Abdul.

Abdul also indicated that building the AU demands visionary and capable leadership at national level, and leadership of the regional institutions themselves.

He noted that since Africa is still seeking what works in terms of making peace and making peace sustainable, regional peace and security is an essential foundation for the Union.

Mohammed also noted that the OAU is struggling financially because many of its members are deep in arrears. He asked how the AU with its much more ambitious

structures to was to be financed and whether it was likely that African governments will dip into their meager budgets for constructing a new bureaucracy.

The AU is expected to be launched by July 2002.

In related news, the 3rd African Development Forum (ADF III) organized by ECA is scheduled to be officially opened this evening by Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

The four-day forum will be held under the theme "Defining Priorities for Regional Integration".(ADF3)

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