



INTEGRATION MUST BE UNDERPINNED BY CORE VALUES, ADF PARTICIPANTS SAY

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ADDIS ABABA, 5 Mar 2002 (IRIN) - The conclusion last year of an agreement to form an African Union was a significant step towards fostering integration in Africa, but integration needs to be underpinned by values that guarantee the welfare of the continent's people, participants in the Third African Development Forum (ADF III) have said.

"Africa's integration should be based on a set of core values held in common," they said in the draft report of a Symposium on the Africa Union. These values include a commitment to "constitutional rule, peace, democracy and respect for human rights", according to the report, which was prepared for the Forum.

The forum has been organised by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The theme of the forum, chosen in connection with the coming on stream of the Africa Union is "Defining Priorities for Regional Integration".

Integration ought to foster a number of public goods, uppermost among which is peace and security, something that underpins every economic and social aim, ECA Executive Secretary Kingsley Amoako said at Monday's opening session of the forum. Peace and security, he added, was a major theme of the forum, which ends on Friday. Many other challenges face the integration effort. These, he said, included rolling back HIV/AIDS and food security.

The need for Africa to tackle HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases was also pinpointed in the draft report of the symposium, which was held on Sunday. African countries, it said, "must coordinate their efforts to overcome HIV/AIDS", which "has far-reaching consequences for the capacity of African institutions, the resilience of its social fabric, and the governance of its societies".

Accelerating Africa's political and socioeconomic integration is the aim of the African Union, whose constitutive act entered into force in May 2001.

[The AU Constitutive Act replaces the Charter of the OAU. However, the Charter remains in operation for a transitional period of one year (11 July 2001 to 10 July 2002). This transitional period was established to allow the OAU to take the measures needed to transfer its assets and liabilities to the Union.]

Discussing the contours of integration, identifying the challenges it poses and proposing ways to deal with them are the main elements of the forum, whose participants include government officials, business people and civil society representatives.

The results are to be presented to heads of state of the African Union, when they hold their first summit around mid-year.

One of the challenges, former ECA Executive Secretary Adebayo Adedeji said, was linked to the instability that plagued many African countries, and which had transformed millions of Africans into refugees and displaced persons.

"The pursuit of economic integration must go hand in hand with the pursuit of political stability at the national level and, at least, dynamic political cooperation ... at the subregional and regional levels," he said on Tuesday.

"The people in the region must have shared visions, shared values and a shared social economy in which the welfare of the people and the community is paramount and the transformation process is socially just, politically participatory and culturally vibrant," Adedeji said.

The integration effort has so far been in the hands of governments, participants noted. Civil society and the private sector needed to be involved with governments in discussions aimed at shaping policies on what integration steps need to be taken, Amoako said.

"And we need mechanisms to involve a wide range of non-governmental groups in ongoing policy dialogues at the supranational level," he said.

Other issues of Amoako raised concerned peace and security, public health, and research; how to make regional integration efficient; how to assure adequate finance; and determining the best pace and sequence of tasks towards integration.

