

Recommendations ahead of the European Council regarding the EU-AU Summit

Now that the 6th European Union (EU)-African Union (AU) Summit has been scheduled to take place on 17-18 February 2022 CONCORD, the European Confederation of development NGOs and its members would like to flag a number of serious concerns. Throughout the course of our longstanding, ongoing dialogue with the EU institutions and with African civil society partners in the EU-AU partnership framework, we have consistently advocated for a people-centred partnership and achieving transformational results for all. A key element to this is a meaningful engagement with civil society.

A people-centred EU-AU Summit

Currently, Europe and Africa are faced with several ongoing crises: the climate and biodiversity crisis, a crisis of defending basic human rights, democracy and civic space, and the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic consequences, which have reversed many human and sustainable development gains. Existing inequalities and fragilities have been exacerbated and new challenges are arising in a wide range of interconnected sectors. These challenges highlight the urgency for a fair, just and green partnership between the EU and Africa. Building resilient and peaceful states and societies that respect human rights and planetary boundaries, reduce poverty and inequalities, including gender inequality and gender-based violence, and secure equal opportunities and universal access to social protection, healthcare, education and nutritious food, to mention a few objectives, should be at the core of the future partnership between the EU and Africa. Ensuring that the upcoming Summit and its outcome address these challenges in a systemic manner is critical to achieving transformational results.

To do so and to build and co-create a new type of partnership based on equality, a people-centred approach which focuses on human development and respects and enforces human rights is much needed. By contrast with the October 2021 Joint Communiqué from the EU-AU Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting in Kigali, in the future EU-AU partnership, EU and African leaders should include human development and human rights as a fundamental stand-alone priority for strengthened cooperation, as they are the prerequisite for sustainable development and for all other strategic priorities.

A comprehensive, ambitious plan to advance human development and environmental and social justice should be developed as a concrete outcome of the EU-AU Summit. The plan should rely on three pillars: addressing structural inequalities, including gender inequalities; strengthening links and coherence across policy sectors (e.g. education, health, food, social protection, trade, digitalisation); and meeting ODA commitments.

Meaningful engagement with civil society

We welcome the references in the Joint Communiqué to the value of ensuring an active engagement with civil society organisations. However, consultation in the lead-up to the Summit is sorely lacking, despite there having been one meeting with some CSO representatives before the Ministerial Meeting in Kigali. EU and African leaders have been silent on the matter of ensuring the active participation of civil society in the partnership between the EU and Africa, both ahead of and during the EU-AU Summit and as part of the

implementation of the partnership itself. This demonstrates a blatant incoherence between discourse and actions.

If the EU is committed to create a collaborative, equal and sustainable partnership, each of its institutions and services, without exception, must reach out to civil society and listen to its recommendations; it is civil society that represents the voices of those who are often the most marginalised *and* the most impacted by decisions that EU and AU leaders take.

We urge EU and AU leaders to follow up on the commitment in the recent Communiqué by agreeing to establish institutional and operational structures and mechanisms for meaningful civil society participation in policy processes. This should include concrete proposals on information-sharing, consultation, transparency, and open dialogue.

It is critically important that EU institutions and services and Member States involved in the preparation of the EU-AU Summit hold a formal consultation, in a timely manner, with those European and African civil society organisations that are eager to contribute to the preparation of the Summit's outcome. Since it will feed into the political process ahead of the EU-AU Summit, it is also essential that the European Council place a people-centred approach and ensure meaningful engagement with civil society at the core of the Council Conclusions, which will be adopted at the meeting on 16 December.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

