

Your Excellencies,

The Hon. Speaker of the Pan-African Parliament, Ambassador Dr. Gertrude Mongella

The Hon. Chairperson of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, Hon. Mr Patrick Baloyi,

Honourable Members of Pan-African Parliaments and Regional Parliamentary Bodies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured to be afforded the opportunity to make a short statement at this important gathering. To us as Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (or Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation or FES as we are most widely known) it is of great satisfaction, that this type of exchange among Regional Parliamentary Bodies, as well as between Regional Parliamentary Bodies and the Pan-African Parliament now seems to have become a regular feature, after FES – at the time in partnership with EALA, the East African Legislative Assembly, - had helped to initiate the first of its kind in May 2004 – and I am adding here another workshop to the history books - with the Workshop in Masai Mara, Kenya on “*working structures and the role of regional parliaments in integration efforts in Africa*”.

Masai-Mara was the first-ever gathering where members of the different regional parliamentary bodies could learn from each other. A comparative exercise

- about the role of the assemblies in their respective regional integration processes
- about their relationship with the executive branches of regional governance
- about the respective processes of electing or appointing regional MPs,
- about their powers and functions with regard to lawmaking, oversight and holding the executive branches in the regions accountable,
- but also about other practical programmes undertaken by the regional legislative bodies in order to deepen parliamentary democracy and human rights in the African sub-regions.

I personally participated in the subsequent “*Roundtable on the Interface between Regional Parliamentary Assemblies and the Pan-African Parliament*”, organised jointly by SADC-PF and FES in Lusaka in August 2005.

It was in Lusaka, that for the first time the relationship between the different tiers of parliamentary democracy in Africa, namely national, regional and continental, and their respective roles in advancing the integration of the African continent, were high on the agenda and actually at the centre stage of the debates. Mechanisms and modalities for a complementary relationship between the Pan-African Parliament and the Regional Parliamentary Bodies were touched upon, albeit not yet in the depth required for a stable and co-operative future parliamentary architecture in Africa. These discussions were then left for other meetings to follow. Thankfully the Pan-African Parliament with the support of GTZ took up the challenge by organising these consultative fora between the continental and the regional parliamentary bodies in Arusha last year, the current seminar and so on.

Why I am mentioning all this? I am not mentioning it mainly to show that we are part of the “good guys”, but I say this because there is a tendency – and this is not just a feature of parliamentary conferences – that we become repetitive, forget what we have already been discussing and sometimes trying to reinvent the wheel, when there is no need to. This is largely an observation based on yesterday’s discussions. Some of the information given yesterday, some of the the issues raised are already there, if you look at the report of the Lusaka conference (which also contains a synopsis of Masai Mara in the form of a comparative analysis of powers and functions of RPBs in the annexe, but surely also in the Arusha document). So, the point I wanted to make here is that we *should try to build upon what we have in order to make progress.*

2. My next remarks deal with *focus and harmonization*. When we first received information about this seminar, the information said that this seminar would mainly deal with the harmonization of approaches and structures between different tiers of parliamentary bodies, continental and regional in particular. We were also informed that the seminar would largely do so by concentrating the discussion on harmonization thematically, limiting it to discussions around the AU agenda on governance, democracy and human rights.

Now, from the first day’s discussion my feeling is that the issue of focus must be addressed somehow in the future, if the intention is to come up with concrete results and practical solution of how to move forward. Hence, this second point is very much linked to the first one.

3. Finally, my last point deals with the overarching issue of harmonization. Now, yesterday we had a very informative input on the advantages and disadvantages of different instruments for the harmonization of laws, like treaties, protocols, uniform acts, model laws and so on. At the same time, in one

of the presentations we got the recommendation to start harmonizing where we can harmonize, move where we can move. I found that a very interesting and valuable suggestion, which merits consideration, as far as I am concerned.

As long as PAP and RPBs don't have law-making powers the discussion of how to harmonize laws is interesting but maybe not terribly practical. But if one perhaps started to look at the current powers, functions and mandate of the PAP and RPBs, where supranational parliamentary bodies only have limited powers of making recommendations, of moral suasion, if you like, I am sure one will find areas of parliamentary intervention where harmonization of experiences and approaches can be hugely beneficial to each of the stakeholder involved and avoid duplication, conflict and confusion.

Harmonization it that sense should be based on best practice. And best practice wherever you can find it. A good practice based approach to harmonization is one that is neither a complete top-down approach or "harmonization from above" – nor a complete bottom-up one, but one where the agenda is negotiated and experience that is out there, is valued for what it is worth. One example of existing good practice would be, for instance, the SADC-Parliamentary Forum's "*Norms and Standards for Elections*". This experience could easily be emulated by others and form the core of a harmonized continental parliamentary position on democratic elections and election observation. Similarly, the principles developed in this region for *election coverage by national broadcasters*, in my opinion, is something that others could look at, learn from or emulate. Again, on the issue of gender policies, this region has a lot to offer.

With this few personal remarks I want to conclude by thanking the organisers of this event from PAP, SADC-PF, the Botswana Parliament and our colleagues from the German technical co-operation for having made this meeting possible and for hosting us in these beautiful surroundings. I hope that this gathering will add value to all the previous meetings by coming up with suggestions on how the Pan-African Parliament and the regional legislative bodies can meaningfully work together, learn from each other and contribute to furthering the agenda of the African Union on good governance, transparency and accountability, of peace and security, of democracy and human rights across the continent – from Darfur to Laayoune – from Abidjan to Harare.

I thank you very much for you attention. Merci bien pour votre attention. Muíto obrigado pela atenção!