

DRAFT
**PERMANENT FORUM OF ARAB-AFRICAN DIALOGUE
ON DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

At the initiative of the Social & Human Sciences Sector of UNESCO a Permanent forum of Arab-African Dialogue on Democracy & Human Rights was launched in Cairo in 2005. After 3 sessions, the work was discontinued by UNESCO. IMAGINE AFRICA INSTITUTE is now proposing to relaunch it in its programme series if South-South cooperation.

Pierre Sané, Président of Imagine Africa Institute

1. “ Léopold Sédar Senghor defined Africanity as the encounter and the symbiosis between negritude and Arab identity since our populations are interwoven and share a long common history. ” **President Abdou Diouf**

2. As said by President Abdou Diouf, Léopold Sédar Senghor actually defined “Africanity” as the encounter and symbiosis between negritude and “arabité” (Arab identity). Why? Because our populations are interlinked: they share a long and common history through commercial exchanges, movements of peoples, religion, etc. Because also there is territorial continuity: we are neighbours. Further, our Presidents and Ministers know each other and meet on a regular basis in the framework of several fora. Economic

cooperation has been significantly strengthened and development aid continues to be generous.

But civil society organizations – parliamentarians, researchers, journalists, human rights defenders, human rights commissions – do not know sufficiently each other and have no permanent space for joint reflection and dialogue.

3. Democratic progress in our respective regions needs constantly to be consolidated and States must be encouraged to improve human rights regimes. Nevertheless, external pressure in itself is not sufficient and may even be counterproductive. We have to go at our own pace, but not too slowly since our populations are asking for democracy and expect their

rights to be respected. If we are to guarantee social peace and economic development, we need to liberate the creative energies of our peoples which can only blossom in an environment freed from terror and misery. All these crucial reasons lead us to regard as indispensable the creation of a sustainable, structured partnership between Africa and the Arab region based on concerted decisions.

This partnership would be a kind of agreed union around democracy and human rights, which could lead to a strengthened involvement of the different actors working on these issues.

Where the idea came from

4. The idea of a Forum of Arab-African Dialogue on Democracy and Human Rights came as a result of three International Conferences on Democracy and Human Rights organized since 2005 by the National Council for Human Rights of Egypt and UNESCO. Held in Cairo, these high-level meetings, whose objective was to discuss and reflect on human rights and democracy with a view to achieving these ideals in Africa and in the Arab region, gathered representatives of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI), governments, diplomats, international experts and members of international, regional and non-governmental organizations. To these were also associated the International Organisation of La Francophonie, the League of Arab States, the African Union, ISESCO and the Office of the

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

5. The first Cairo conference, which took place in 2005, focused on democracy and human rights in the Arab region. It gave rise to a rich debate on the nature and prospects of democracy and human rights, particularly in view of the new challenges affecting this region. Emphasizing the indivisibility of democracy and human rights, participants recalled that “no democracy can be built on the basis of discriminations” and that “liberty, justice, equality of rights, citizenship and democratic participation of all in the democratic exercise of power, are fundamental principles of any democracy” (Cairo Declaration 2005).

6. The second Cairo conference, which took place in 2007, focused on democracy and human rights in the Africa region. The main objective of this meeting was to provide space for reflection and debate on the role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) in Africa particularly in the promotion and implementation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and to raise awareness of the necessity for the Charter’s prompt ratification and the dissemination of its contents among governments and populations, in order to make it a truly functional international instrument for the promotion of democracy.

7. The third Cairo conference, which took place in 2008, focused on democracy and human rights both in Africa and in the Arab region. Its aim,

at the conclusion of the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, was to take stock of the achievements of the Declaration from the perspective of the challenges that stand before both regions. The creation of a **Forum of Arab-African Dialogue** was decided on this occasion. Its main objective was to strengthen the ties between relevant actors and to provide a permanent space for dialogue and exchange of their experiences, lessons learned and best practices in the promotion and protection of democracy and human rights.

8. This Permanent Forum of Arab-African Dialogue on Democracy and Human Rights, initiated by the National Council for Human Rights of Egypt with the support of UNESCO, was thus a desire for encounters and exchanges around a shared bridge: that of the democratic state and human rights, understood as complementary, universal and integrated concepts.

9. The relaunching of the Forum will be all the more opportune that the recent international crisis of the financial and economic system requires to rethink in a renewed and thorough way the impact of such an upheaval on the consolidation of democracy and human rights.

10. Similarly the trajectories of the Arab spring and recent development in Sub-Saharan Africa (Burkina-Faso, Nigeria) need to be reflected upon to continuously strengthen the road to democracy.

11. Geographical, cultural and religious proximity will certainly facilitate the

sharing of experiences and best practices while reinforcing the interactive links between the relevant actors as well as between the countries that share a number of common challenges.

12. The new Forum will be **interregional**, in that it will gather two geographical regions and fall into a framework of South-South cooperation. This Forum will also be **plurithematic**, in that it will address issues of common interest to the two regions and this in line with the general concern of reinforcing and renewing the conditions of democracy and human rights. Finally, the Forum will be also **multi-partner**, as it gathers several key actors, such as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI), parliamentarians, the academic community, researchers' networks, UN Agencies, regional organizations and other civil society actors.

The challenge for the Forum will be to foster the ownership, through dialogue, by the relevant actors, of all normative instruments and the modalities of their application in order to optimize democracy and human rights in the two regions.

The Forum's objectives

13. Conceived as a space for dialogue to rethink the conditions of democracy and human rights in Africa and in the Arab region, the main mission of the Forum is to:

- Undertake high-level research and studies, organize dialogues and formulate policy recommendations in

the fields of democracy and human rights;

- Contribute to the promotion and strengthening of the process of democratization, the rule of law and the respect for human rights;
- Strengthen Arab-African relations and institutional, academic and civil society cooperation

14. To this end, it will pursue several **specific goals**:

- Act as a forum of exchange and debate based on the results of research on human rights and democracy, with a view to advancing strategies and action plans;
- Enhance legislative cooperation, so as to promote citizens' political, economic and social rights;
- Increase the awareness by decision-makers and political actors of the necessity for the participation of women in political, legislative, social, economic and cultural processes;
- Develop strategic proposals in the fields of democracy and human rights, addressed to regional institutions, such as the League of Arab States, the African Union, the Arab Inter-parliamentary Union, the Pan-African Parliament, etc., and aimed at creating a strong synergy between partners of the two regions (National Human Rights Institutions, researchers, NGOs, etc.);
- Foster inter-regional and intra-regional dialogue with a view to effectively influencing international institutions (notably the Bretton Woods institutions);
- Support, through partnerships and networks, the contribution of civil

society to the foundations of democracy and respect for human rights;

- Encourage innovative ways of thinking for the promotion of an integrated approach going beyond the strictly local level;
- Promote advocacy activities for the application of normative frameworks and decisions adopted by regional institutions, and the reinforcement of existing mechanisms and national institutions in the fields of democracy and human rights.

15. The Forum's functions and structure

In order to achieve its objectives as elaborated before, the Forum will take on the following **functions**:

- Defining the issues related democracy and human rights in Africa and the Arab region, taking into account regional and international agendas;
- Reinforcing and/or establishing research networks;
- Producing academic references and tools of analysis, and ensuring their dissemination;
- Producing policy briefs to the attention of decision makers;
- Undertaking advocacy activities aimed at stakeholders.

16. The Forum will develop the following **activities**:

- Thematic dialogues: round tables, seminars, keynote lectures, etc.;
- Dialogues between homologues: sessions of parliamentarians, of National Human Rights Institutions, of

NGOs, of researchers on democracy and human rights, etc.;

- Elaboration of working and follow-up documents for the different meetings;
- Communication of the results of the Forum, particularly through a Website.

17. The Forum will have the following **structure**:

The **Assembly** of the Forum, composed of the following actors:

- National Human Rights Institutions, government bodies dealing with human rights and other relevant national authorities
- Human rights NGOs, both national and regional
- Universities and research centres
- National Parliaments
- Media
- Regional and international organizations
- Others (opinion leaders, experts, etc.)

18. The **Steering Committee**, elected by the Assembly of the Forum for a period of two years, meets at least once per year in order to define the Forum's general orientations; to prepare its annual meeting including the choice of themes, the special guests and the expected results; and to decide on membership and fees. The Committee also undertakes advocacy activities addressed to decision-makers, as well as fund-raising activities.

19. The Steering Committee (2009) was composed of representatives of the following institutions:

- National Council for Human Rights of Egypt
- African Union (AU)
- Arab Transitional Parliament
- International Organisation of La Francophonie
- International Panel on Democracy and Development (IPDD)
- League of Arab States (LAS)
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),
- Pan-African Parliament
- UNESCO
- National Commissions/Institutions for Human Rights from Western Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, Northern Africa and the Middle East.

20. The **Honorary President** of the Forum will continue to be H.E. Mr Abdou Diouf, former Secretary General of La Francophonie and former President of Senegal.

The **President** is H.E. Mr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, President of the National Council for Human Rights of Egypt and former Secretary-General of the United Nations and President of Imagine Africa.

The Forum's **Permanent Secretariat** will be now assumed by Imagine Africa Institute in Dakar (SENEGAL) with a partner to be identified in the host country.

The **languages** of the Forum will be Arabic, English and French.

The initial costs for the finalization of the proposal are estimated at 55 000€.