

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



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AFRICA DAY 2012

Conclusions of the meeting of the incoming and outgoing Bureaux

Tuesday 31st of January 2012

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1. The incoming and outgoing Bureaux of the Group of African Ambassadors in Brussels met on the 31st of January 2012 at the Permanent Mission of the African Union in Brussels to exchange views on various factors relating to the celebration of Africa Day, on 25 May 2012, as per a long standing tradition.

I. Date and venue of the reception and cultural activities

a) Date

2. The AU Permanent Mission recalled that the 25th of May 2012, Africa Day, will coincide with the meeting of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly to be held from 23 to 30 May in Denmark, among other activities scheduled on the programmes of the African Ambassadors, Members of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors. Hence, the Mission suggested that the activities for the celebration of Africa Day be organised before or after that period to ensure that Ambassadors can participate. The following dates were then proposed:

- Between 21 and 24 May 2012
- 31st of May 2012 (Reception and cultural activities)
- 6 June 2012

b) Venue

3. The AU Permanent Mission also recalled that at the meeting of the incoming and outgoing Bureaux held on 18 January 2012, it had been agreed that another venue (Ex. Reception halls of local city authorities) should be sought for the reception, as an alternative to the "Palais des Colonies" because of the symbolism of colonisation attached to the place.

4. The Mission informed the meeting about its current contacts with some local authorities (Communes) including, in particular, the Brussels Town Council through Mr Bertin MAMPAKA who is Deputy Mayor in charge of Sports, Parks, Environment and International Solidarity. It added that Mr MAMPAKA is of Congolese origin and as such, has contacted the Mission on a number of occasions to express his willingness to cooperate with the AU Mission and through it, with the Group of African Ambassadors in Brussels. He has also had an opportunity to discuss the matter with the African Union Chairperson on the occasion of his latest visit to Brussels last September. His Secretariat has assured the Mission that the Deputy Mayor will address the request most favourably. He has promise to give his answer to the Mission within a short deadline.

5. The Mission further added that the reluctance expressed regarding the organisation of the reception at the Palais des Colonies has indeed been raised in the past. However, the venue did not change, mainly because it is the only place in Brussels which accommodates the contribution of national dishes by Embassies, to display

their country's cooking culture as agreed by the African Group and to enhance Africa's image which is the aim of the ceremony.

6. The following agreed conclusions were drawn after the exchange of views:

- To wait for the Deputy Mayor's response before taking a final decision on the venue. It is however necessary to overcome the apprehensions referred to above on the symbolism of colonialism attached to the Palais des Colonies. Organising an African ceremony in such a place does not in any way boost the adepts of colonialism given that Africa has demonstrated its anti-colonialism sufficiently by fighting against it and winning the battle; the continent has proved enough that it can live comfortably with all aspects of its past history, including slavery and the colonial era. It is therefore better to nurture memories than focus on their upheavals. The Group should therefore rather activate itself to foster a name change of the Palais des Colonies. In conclusion, the Palais des Colonies should not be abandoned as a possible venue for the organisation of the reception to celebrate Africa Day because the alternatives being sought do not necessarily meet the main requirement which is to give the reception the African touch needed for such an event.
- The choice of the date is in relation to the venue. The periods during which Ambassadors have commitments out of Brussels should however be avoided.

II Date and theme of the Conference to be organised for the event

a) Date

7. It was agreed that the date of the Conference would depend on the date of the reception to ensure that all the activities for the celebration of Africa Day take place in the same breath, as per the tradition.

b) Theme

8. The AU Permanent Mission suggested to the meeting that a theme which would make the African Union and its action better known be selected, rather than the one proposed by the AUC (Boosting intra-African Trade) which may be too technical. Furthermore, the Mission intends to organise a conference on the EPA negotiations at the beginning of May. Such an opportunity can be used to discuss the issue of the share of intra-African trade in world trade.

9. In the exchange of views which followed, the meeting agreed to keep the theme proposed by the Commission given that it is under it that Africa Day is celebrated throughout the world. Furthermore, it will give the African Group, the partners and the European public opinion an opportunity to be better informed about Africa's notable ambitions and progress in as vital an area as its development.

10. The AU Mission was requested to find ways and means of constituting a panel of qualified experts to introduce the theme.

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