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REPORT ON THE NEW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN AFRICA AND ASIA

REPORT ON THE NEW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN AFRICA AND ASIA

The Sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, which was held in Abuja on 30 and 31 January 2005, heard a Report by the President of the Republic of South Africa on progress made in the preparation of the Africa-Asia Summit slated for April 2005. At the end of discussions on this subject, the African Union was urged to get fully involved in the event. To this end, the Summit stressed the need for the African Union to assume leadership of the process at the African level to ensure a smooth preparation and the success of the Summit, together with the Co-Secretariat.

In carrying out this mandate, the Commission embarked on a series of initiatives. It first sent a high-level delegation to Pretoria, to brief the authorities of the Republic of South Africa, which is running the Co-Secretariat for the African side, on the state of preparations for the Summit and examine the practical modalities of the Commission's participation in the preparation of the Summit. After this meeting, which enabled the Commission to join in the process, some consultations were organized on 28 February in Jakarta between members of the Co-Secretariat, with the participation of the Commission's representatives so as to further discussions on the preparations for the Afro-Asian Summit. A timetable established at the end of the consultations slated the Ministerial Meeting for 20 April 2005 and the Africa-Asia Summit, on 22 and 23 April in Jakarta. The celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Bandung Conference was also scheduled for 24 April 2005.

Other events programmed on the margins of the Summit included the Trade Fair, the Symposium and Exhibition on New and Renewable Energy Sources, the Meeting between Youths and Women and the Meeting between African and Asian Businessmen. These meetings were held as planned.

This Report gives an account of the organization of the Ministerial meeting and the Summit in which a delegation of the Commission participated and highlights the prospects of the strategic partnership between Africa and Asia.

The Jakarta Ministerial Meeting and Summit

These two meetings were held on the theme "Revitalizing the Bandung Spirit for a New Strategic Africa-Asia Partnership. Some discussions were also held on natural disasters. The debates organized mainly on the New Partnership and its Plan of Action measured up to the great interest generated by the prospects opened up by the Africa-Asia cooperation, in view of the contemporary global stakes and challenges. In the course of the Ministerial Session and the

Summit, more than a hundred speakers intervened to express the importance they attached to this partnership and they tried to provide relevant guidelines.

II. Attendance

The level of attendance at both the Ministerial Meeting and Summit was particularly high. Almost all the States of the two continents were represented there¹. It was deplorable, however, that several African Heads of State and Government did not travel to Jakarta and Bandung. Only about ten of them attended this meeting whose importance cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Most of the African delegations were therefore represented by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs at the Ministerial Session and at the Summit². On the contrary, the Asian leaders responded to the organisers' invitation in their numbers.

Like the delegations of the other organizations in attendance, apart from the United Nations, the Commission's delegation participated in the proceedings as an observer.

III. DEBATES

The debates enabled the various delegations to express their desire for a strong and constant cooperation between Africa and Asia. Generally speaking, the following key ideas were unanimously expressed by participants during the debates:

- Reminder of the importance of the 1955 Bandung Conference that inspired the struggle waged by the peoples of Africa and Asia against colonialism and Apartheid, for the triumph of freedom, equality and justice, and also defined the basic principles for close co-operation between the two Continents;
- Adaptation of the Bandung principles and spirit to the realities of the world today, which has undergone and continues to witness profound transformations and poses increasingly formidable challenges, thereby necessitating collective action more than ever. These challenges consist

¹ The list of delegations had not been published at the time the AUC Delegation was leaving Jakarta. Nevertheless, about a hundred delegations had been registered, including observers.

² For the African side, the registered participants in attendance were the Heads of State and Government of the following African countries: South Africa, Algeria, Botswana, Comoros, Ghana, Malawi, Madagascar, Nigeria, The Sudan, Zimbabwe, Burundi (Vice President) Gabon (First Vice President), Tanzania (Vice President), Lesotho (Prime Minister), Mozambique (Prime Minister), Morocco (Prime Minister) and Swaziland (Prime Minister).

mainly in poverty, diseases, access to markets, reinforcement of multilateralism, the fight against terrorism, promotion of democracy, good governance and human rights;

- The necessity to give substance to the New Partnership that should embrace the political, economic and socio-cultural fields and involve, in addition to the State institutions, all the segments of society, particularly the private sector, the civil society, women, youths, etc;
- Investment, trade, debt, sharing expertise, education, environment, digital divide, were among the guidelines/areas suggested, inter-alia, for the materialization of the partnership;
- The New Partnership should also help to resolutely promote the two continents in the vast globalization movement which, incidentally, some Asian countries have joined in with relative success, not only to give it a human aspect, but also and especially to ensure that the 4 billion men and women making up the population of the two continents enjoy the opportunities and advantages offered by globalization;
- Establishment of Follow-up Mechanisms. In general, it was proposed that the existing mechanisms – regional and sub-regional organizations – should be used so as to give concrete expression to and accelerate the implementation of the New Partnership between Africa and Asia. A number of Afro-Asian initiatives were cited to this end, particularly TICAD, the China-Africa Forum and the India-Africa co-operation. It was however recognized that these initiatives should be co-ordinated and sustained by an integration process benefiting all countries of the two continents, so as to guarantee greater coherence and thus avert duplication.

Results of the Ministerial and Summit Meetings

The Ministerial and Summit meetings adopted the following documents:

- Joint Ministerial Declaration on the Plan of Action for the New Strategic Partnership between Africa and Asia (adopted by the Ministerial Meeting).

This document defines the main areas/pillars of the Partnership, namely, political solidarity, economic cooperation and socio-economic relations.

The political component focuses mainly on peace and stability – which the regional and sub-regional mechanisms should assist in promoting – as well as democracy, human rights, the fight against terrorism, transnational crime and corruption, promoting the United Nations reform for enhanced multilateralism and ensuring the greater participation of African and Asian countries in the global decision-making process.

In the economic sphere, the following key areas of cooperation were identified: fostering an international economic environment that could afford African and Asian countries greater capacity for competition so that they benefit from the globalization process, poverty alleviation, debt, financial cooperation; trade, investment, technical assistance; food security; protection for intellectual property; promoting cooperation between small and medium-scale enterprises, reduction of the digital divide, research, joint exploration of the Indian Ocean and institution of a Forum for African and Asian Businessmen.

Finally, **in the socio-cultural sector**, there was emphasis on contacts between peoples, dialogue between civilizations, promoting common understanding of diverse cultures, promoting the role of youths, gender equality, education, science and technology, control of pandemic diseases, promoting the role of the media, establishment of a university network with libraries, research institutes and centres of excellence, environmental improvement, better management and preservation of biodiversity and the establishment of a preparatory mechanism for emergencies and an early warning system, concurrently with the efforts being made to offer an appropriate response and reduce natural disasters.

- **Declaration on the New Strategic Partnership between Africa and Asia (NSPAA)**

This Declaration was adopted by the Summit. It stipulated the cardinal principles underpinning the New Strategic Partnership between Africa and Asia, recalling the achievements and principles of the 1955 Bandung Conference, which should be an inspiration for the NSPAA. The Declaration institutionalised the NSPAA process through the convening of a Summit of Heads of State and Government every four (4) years, a meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs every two years,, as well as sectoral Ministerial meetings and other technical meetings when necessary. Furthermore, a Bussinessmen's Forum will take place every four years on the margins of the Heads of State and Government Summit.

Finally, the Declaration indicated that the NSPAA would be conducted through a triple interaction: the inter-governmental forum, sub-regional organizations and interaction between the peoples, particularly the private sector, intellectuals and the civil society.

- **Joint Declaration by African and Asian Leaders on the Tsunami, Earthquakes and other Natural Disasters.**

The Summit also adopted this Declaration which reiterated the African and Asian leaders' determination to establish a strategy and appropriate mechanisms for managing natural disasters and reducing their effects.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Jakarta meeting was successful. Africa took active part in the event even though the continent's participation at the highest level fell short of the expectations. The Ministerial meeting and the Summit laid the political foundations of the NSPAA and also defined the principal orientations and operational procedures at the political, economic and socio-cultural levels. The way is therefore cleared and it is now a question of resolutely taking the course of action leading to the achievement of the objectives defined by the African and Asian leaders, of which the first consists in developing the peoples of Asia and Africa who constitute 73% of the world population.

The importance Africa must give to the NSPAA and the continent's interest in the Partnership should measure up to the major contemporary challenges and stakes that the Jakarta meetings so pertinently identified. Besides, Africa should certainly make the most of a cooperation privileged by the immense progress achieved by the developing countries of Asia.

The question now is how can this new partnership be properly managed for the attainment of the objectives and what role is the African Union expected to play in this exercise? The Jakarta meetings gave an initial answer to the first question in recommending the utilization of state and non-governmental (private sector) mechanisms at regional and sub-regional levels. We should get down to this task as soon as possible by organizing meetings that would help in defining the practical modalities of the Afro-Asian cooperation.

To this end, it is worth recalling that the strategic partnership between Africa and Asia assumes a triple dimension:

The Inter-governmental level that provides for an Africa-Asia Summit every four (4) years, a ministerial meeting preceded by a meeting of experts every two or three years, and sectoral ministerial meetings on an ad-hoc basis;

- The regional level, with meetings of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs);
- The civil society level. It was in this context, that a meeting between African and Asian Businessmen was held in April, in Jakarta, on the margins of the Africa-Asia Summit. The objective is to establish the Afro-Asian strategic partnership within an appropriate and concrete institutional framework.

It is also worth pointing out that, unlike Africa, Asia does not have a continental organization comprising all the States of the continent. For the time being, it is the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) that is playing the pivotal role at the Asian level. The Asian side has taken some initiatives to

try and involve another Asian Forum designated as the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) which comprises 25 countries. The possibility could be examined through interaction with this Forum in order to pave the way for a broader partnership. The ultimate objective is to establish an institutional framework grouping all the African and Asian States.

For its part, the African Union should assume the leadership role and also serve as Coordinator at least at the African level. It appears that for one reason or another, the continental organization has not yet succeeded in assuming this function. In Jakarta, the African Union participated as an observer. Some consultation with the Co-Chairmanship but particularly with the African side is strongly recommended so that the Union is given the opportunity to accomplish the mandate conferred on it by the Assembly of Heads of State at the Sixth Ordinary Session. This consultation should be conducted in collaboration with the Permanent Representatives' Committee, through its Sub-Committee on Multilateral Cooperation.

In concrete terms, a meeting could be organized at the earliest convenience among the three parties, namely, the South African Co-Chairmanship, the Permanent Representatives' Committee and the Commission, with a view to defining the role of each of the parties.

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