

ORGANIZATION OF
AFRICAN UNITY
SECRETARIAT
P. O. Box 3243



ADDIS ABABA

ORGANISATION DE L'UNITE
AFRICAIN
SECRETARIAT
B. P. 3243

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Seventeenth Ordinary Session

Addis Ababa - June 1971

CM/392

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PAN-AFRICAN NEWS AGENCY (PANA)



The establishment of a Pan-African News Agency is one of the oldest and most cherished projects of our Organization. Resolution "B" of 25 May 1963 adopted by the Constituent Assembly of OAU refers to it in terms that should be recalled. The keystone of Pan-African information structures, the Pan-African News Agency is considered as a means to remedy the "lack of information media in Africa"; through it, it is hoped that there will be better understanding among the African peoples.

More than ever, this is the right time to take up the project of establishing PANA now when the forces of disintegration are taking the offensive in our continent and when the most subtle and disparaging campaigns against Africa are increasing.

After the decision had been taken at the Summit to establish PANA, what more was needed to forge ahead?

First of all, it was necessary to determine the technical, financial and personnel needs of the future agency; this was the task tackled by the African experts duly mandated by the Second Session of the OAU Cultural and Scientific Commission meeting in Lagos (Nigeria) from 26 to 29 January 1965 (Resolution EDC/Res.11 (II)).

Two consecutive meetings held in Addis Ababa from 6 to 8 December 1965 and from 2 to 5 February 1966 enabled those experts to produce a voluminous document, the broad outlines of which remain valid.

This document which was distributed to the Council of Ministers under reference CM/105 reviews the many aspects of the project one after the other: structures, political control, financing and functioning of the future Pan-African News Agency, submitted for the consideration and approval of the Sixth Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers in February 1966 in Addis Ababa, this document was thought to be too ambitious by a number of delegations.

Indeed, considering the inadequacy of the telecommunications network in Africa, the Sub-committee of Experts in charge of drafting document CM/105 had adopted radio-teletype as a means of telecommunications among African States - a practical means in the circumstances, certainly - but at a prohibitive price: 4.5 million US dollars.

The Council of Ministers had to adjourn sine die the discussions on this matter though it is very vital to the very future of our Organization.

Only through the perseverance and dedication of the members of the Union of African News Agencies did the project re-emerged in the Council of Ministers.

Supporting the views of the UANA, the 13th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers recommended the immediate convening of a meeting of Ministers of Information and Telecommunications who would be the only competent authorities to work out a solution that would be both effective and inexpensive.

This meeting was, however, subject to complementary technical studies which two sub-committees of the UANA were to undertake. Despite their efforts, these two sub-committees were not able to accomplish their assignment successfully since a number of Member States failed to supply the information that they had requested.

The information concerned two basic aspects of the project:

1. the telecommunications network between Member States on the one hand and between each Member State and foreign countries, on the other;
2. the rates for telex services, telephone and telegraph between Member States on the one hand and between individual Member States and foreign countries, on the other.

To date, 26 Member States have supplied the UANA with the above information.

The difficulties encountered by the UANA in attempting to accelerate the project have led its President to suggest to the Union Members to hand it over to the OAU General Secretariat - a Pan African structure par excellence in a position to inspire general adherence and put it on the road to success.

A copy of the letter from the President of the UANA is attached herewith.

It is essential that the present session of the Council of Ministers reconsider this important question of PANA with a view to formulating the long-expected directives.

The General Secretariat could thus, with the assistance of OAU Member States, UANA and ITU, bring up to date and complete the technical studies for submission to the meeting of African Ministers of Information and Telecommunications who will be called upon to take a firm decision on the establishment of a Pan African News Agency.

The development, since 1966, of the telecommunications network in Africa as a result of direct links by telex, co-axial cables, telephone links, by using high frequency radio waves (INCOMPEX system) or indeed, links through satellites make it possible to consider the establishment of PANA in a new light. The project has henceforth become feasible from both the technical and financial points of view. If well managed, the Pan African News Agency could even become profitable within a very short period.

Union of African News Agency

P.O. Box

Union des Agences d'Informations
Africaines

B.P.

530

Tel. 12756

Telex 21068

Telex Address:

ETHNA

Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa, 12 October 1970

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Dear Colleague and Friend,

In accordance with the decision taken during the extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee of UANA held in Addis Ababa from 29 to 30 April 1970, a meeting of technical sub-committee comprising the representatives of Cameroon, Tunisia and Ethiopia was scheduled to take place from the end of July to August 1970 in Geneva. This meeting which was to finalize the technical documents submitted to the Conference of African Ministers of Information with a view to establishing a Pan-African News Agency did not take place at the scheduled time since a number of Member States had not replied to the questionnaire addressed to them in May 1970.

This latest delay coupled with previous difficulties experienced by the PANA project could not, you will agree, lead to optimism.

To save the project to establish PANA from the deadlock to which it seems to be heading, allow me to suggest to you that this pan-African project simply be entrusted to a pan-African body, that is to say, the OAU General Secretariat which, in accordance with the wishes of the leaders of our continent, would at one and the same time, have the authority and the means needed to bring the task thus assigned, to a successful end.

Hence, the OAU General Secretariat would, for a start, have to compile the necessary data to bring up to date and complete the technical survey of PANA.

In the second phase when all working documents shall have been prepared, the General Secretariat could then convene the meeting of African Ministers of Information and Telecommunications in accordance with resolution CM/187 (XII).

I should be grateful, therefore, if you would inform me by cable or telex if possible, of your opinion and observations regarding my suggestions which, in the present circumstances, is the only possible way to make progress in the project to establish PANA, one of the oldest and most cherished plans of our Union.

Please accept, Dear Colleague and Friend, my fraternal consideration.

ZEWDE RETTA

President

Copy to: Mr. ABDENNOUR ABROUS,
CHIEF OF INFORMATION SECTION OAU
ADDIS ABABA.



1971-06

Progress report on the Pan-African News Agency (PANA)

Organization of African Unity

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