



East African Legislative Assembly, Arusha, Tanzania; May 26, 2015: The Civil Society in the region under the aegis of the East African Civil Society Organisation Forum (EACSOFF) is keen to take collaboration with the East African Legislative Assembly a notch higher. Consequently, linkages between both organisations are expected to be strengthened following the development of a collaboration framework.

EACSOFF officials late last week paid a courtesy call on the EALA Speaker, Rt. Hon Daniel F. Kidega and presented the proposed collaboration framework. The delegation was led by the EACSOFF Secretary General, Zaa Twalengei.

In attendance were EACSOFF General Council Members, Ms. Janet Munyoki (Kenya), Mr. Aimable Mwananawe (Rwanda) Mr. Isaie Nizigiyimana (Burundi) Ms. Asha Aboud (Zanzibar, Tanzania) representatives of GiZ and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) as well as key staff of the EACSOFF Secretariat.

The EALA Speaker noted that the EAC Treaty had placed a premium on the role of the civil society in the integration process.

“We are keen to work more closely with the civil society. This is not a favour but a responsibility. My Office shall thus critically look at the proposed framework, propose amendments and see how we can link up together more effectively ”, Rt Hon Kidega said.

The Secretary General of EACSOFF, Zaa Twalengei, said as the anchor of the civil society, EACSOFF was committed to ensuring EALA’s work is ‘felt on the ground’.

“Under the envisaged collaboration, EACSOF hopes that an institutional structure with clear linkages at national and regional level shall be established and that with it, a fora for continuous dialogue between the parties will also be realized ,” Mr Twalengeti remarked.

The areas of engagement include participation in the EALA Plenary Sessions and in the annual regional meetings such as the Inter-Parliamentary Relations Seminar (Nanyuki Series), engagement with EALA National Chapters and the establishment of an annual CSO-EALA (Speaker’s) Forum where ideas and best practices are exchanged.

At the moment, there is a Consultative Dialogue Framework (CDF) in place with the EAC. However according to the EACSOF Secretary General, Zaa Twalengeti, one such Organ, where public input is necessary but which is not currently captured by the CDF structure is with the EALA.

“This exclusion arises from the fact that the CDF revolves around the EAC Secretary General’s Office ”, he adds.

On its part, EALA has in discharging its representative role, held several public fora and outreach activities in the Partner States in a bid to connect with the citizens of East Africa and hear their voices in the integration agenda.

A Governing Council Member from Burundi, Isaie Nizigiyimana called for concerted efforts to ensure calm is restored in Burundi noting that the civil society and the media need to be free to carry on with their mandate.

“The situation on the ground is neither good nor healthy at the moment”, Nizigiyimana said. *“We hope peace shall prevail soon ”,* he added.

Jane Munyoki, Council Member, Kenya, said the proposed civil society-EALA relationship

would boost policy and legislative initiatives. She stated that civil society was keen to contribute to research and thus enhance the work of the regional Assembly.

Aimable Mwananawe from Rwanda said the role of civil society in strengthening integration was vital as envisaged and provided for under the EAC Treaty.

EACSOE is recognized as the apex body for civil society in the region. The EAC Treaty (under Articles 127, 128 and 129) underscores a structured involvement of the Private Sector and the Civil Society in the integration process.

At its 19th meeting, the EAC Council of Ministers directed the EAC Secretariat to “formalize the forum provided for under Article 127(4) of the Treaty with a proposal on Rules of procedure to guide the participation of the Private Sector and Civil Society and other interest groups.” **(Report Ref: (EAC/CM 19/Directive 27)**

This formed the commencement of efforts to develop a structured framework for dialogue with Civil Society and the Private Sector. Initial efforts involved convening of an experts group by the EAC Secretariat.

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For more information, contact

Bobi Odiko,
Senior Public Relations Officer,
East African Legislative Assembly.
Tel: +255-27-2508240
Fax: +255-27-2503103,
Cell: +255-787-870945 +254-733-718036.
Email: BOdiko@eachq.org
Web: www.eala.org