

## **5<sup>th</sup> Retreat of the Association of Senates Shoora and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World, Source du Nil Hotel, Bujumbura, Burundi Final Communiqué**

Following the invitations received from the General Secretariat of ASSECAA and from the President of the Senate of Burundi, the 5<sup>th</sup> Retreat of the Association of Senates, Shoora and Equivalent Council in Africa and the Arab World was held at the Source du Nil Hotel, Bujumbura, Burundi, from the 29<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2013.

The Retreat which was themed "**Afro-Arab Cultural Renaissance: Contributions of Parliaments in Cultural Exploration, Preservation, Promotion and Development**" was attended by delegates from the following Senates/Councils:

1. Majliss Al Ouma of Republic of Algeria
2. Majliss Shoora of Kingdom of Bahrain
3. Senate of Republic of Burundi
4. Senate of Republic of Congo Brazzaville
5. Senate of the Republic of Namibia
6. Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
7. House of Counselors of Morocco
8. National Council of the Provinces of South Africa
9. Majliss al wilayat of Sudan
10. Majliss Shoora of the Republic of Yemen
11. Senate of the Republic of Zimbabwe

The Retreat was officially opened on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2013 at 10:00 a.m. with a speech from the Secretary General of ASSECAA Mr. Abdulwasie Yusuf Ali in which he thanked all participants for making it to the meeting irrespective of their very busy schedules. He explained that in as much as African and Arab Countries are blessed with natural resources, they are also rich in cultural diversities that serve as catalyst for more robust cooperation between the two regions and such cultural riches must not be allowed to die.

He further called on the meeting to discuss extensively on how to revive African and Arab cultures in order to make sure that we retain our identities.

In his welcome speech, the president of the Senate of the Republic of Burundi who also was the immediate past chairman of the Association, H.E. Mr. Gabriel NTISEZERANA expressed appreciation to participants for choosing to come again to

Burundi after their visit for the last conference of the Association. He told the participants to feel at home in Burundi and that the Senate of Burundi will do all it can to make their visit a memorable one.

He stated that seeking to revive our cultural heritages is a worthy course and parliamentarians can lead this process to success. He however added that any effort made must be consistent and serious.

Inaugurating the meeting, the current Chairman of the Association H.E Ali Bin Saleh Al Saleh, who was ably represented by Sheikh Dr. Khalid AlKhalifa wished the gathering fruitful deliberations. He reminded the retreat that all humans are products of their cultures and therefore are non-existent without their cultures. He called on legislators to endeavour to make laws towards cultural renaissance, inform the people they represent and improve oversight functions over their different agencies charged with cultural affairs to improve the values that we place on our cultures.

After a short break, the meeting resumed with the presentation of work papers tailored towards the theme of the retreat "**Afro-Arab Cultural Renaissance: Contributions of Parliaments in Cultural Exploration, Preservation, Promotion and Development**"

Two papers were presented on the first day with Prof. Dr. Yusuf Mohamed Abdullah of the University of Sana'a discussing "the role of cultural heritage in underpinning understanding among nations". He described culture as an "intellectual and moral activity springing from deepest and most profound human feelings, an activity that keeps abreast of time from which it derives an ability to move on".

He further said that cultural diversity should be a driving force for development not just in terms of economic growth, but also in terms of leading a consummate intellectual, sentimental, moral and spiritual life as enshrined in international conventions on culture, which provide a solid ground for reinforcing cultural diversity.

He also stated that it is incumbent upon Arab and African nations to prevent their beliefs from melting away into any other cultures and to keep their values from fusing into other traditions.

According to him, the shining glory that had vanished in the past would not return except if we keep abreast with the dynamics of the age and stick to our well-

ingrained legacy. Cultural legacy occupies a vital place in all countries as it represents their cultures and civilizations, helps connect the citizens with each other, grants them a sense of belonging to common origins and noble goals.

The second paper of the day titled "Afro-Arab cultural renaissance: the role of parliaments" was delivered by Dr. Aloys Misago of the University of Burundi. He traced the history of the contact between Black Africa and the Arab world dating back to at least 2000 years of our era. According to him the reasons for this relationship were mostly those of religion and trade.

He further stated that geography, history and socio-cultural ties provide a strong base for Africa and Arab World to build a community, but, ultimately, this building should find its pulse and its main roots in the fact that the Arab and African countries share a socio cultural background and occupy the same position in the international division of labor, namely a peripheral position. Afro-Arab parliaments must take concrete steps to build a real Afro-Arab community based on equality, mutual benefits and mutual sympathy.

During the afternoon session, participants were given the opportunity to present what their different parliaments have been doing towards the promotion of their cultural heritages in their different countries.

It was gathered that senates and council members of the Association have made efforts through their standing committees on culture in overseeing the different agencies saddled with the responsibility of promotion and maintaining of cultural values and antiquities. Agencies and other departments of culture have been encouraged in different ways ranging from favourable legislations to allocation of sufficient funds in their budgets to enable them perform successfully. There have also been occasions when under-performing agencies were sanctioned and had their chief executives removed.

Parliaments have also engaged in public enlightenment campaigns, educating the public on the needs to maintain who they are and hold on to the values that make them strong.

It was also discovered that some legislators have not been able to do much as a result of lack of mandate in that domain and paucity of funds as they are poorly funded.

The meeting however thanked those that have done their best to revive cultural heritages and encouraged those that have not done enough to take it up now.

The second day of the meeting started with the presentation of the paper "**towards a common strategy for a culture of peace in Africa and the Arab World**" presented by Ms. Tigist Yeshiwas Endgaw of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University. According to the UN General Assembly, "a culture of peace consists of values, attitudes and behaviours that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, human rights, tolerance and solidarity". It is also consistent with the "principles that reject violence, prevents conflicts, solves problems through dialogue and guarantees exercise of all rights and allows full participation in the process of development of their society".

The Presenter further stated that a culture of peace has been transferred to Africans and Arabs in a form of ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. From one place to another, it is largely influenced and in considerable instances replaced by a 'culture of war'. Although the two regions are peace loving and detest wars, they have recently found themselves engulfed by a 'culture of war'. This is so because while an overwhelming majority of the public favours peace and benefits from it, a minority that benefits most from culture of war and chaos appears to be dominant and dictate its wishes.

She advised that the achievement of peace requires cultural transformation at the level of society in values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviours through rigorous peace education in its formal and informal ways.

The retreat was concluded with the presentation of a proposal for the enhancement of Afro-Arab cultural identity prepared by the General Secretariat and intended for participants to make their inputs towards enriching the proposal.

It seeks to educate and document the cultures of the two regions to make sure that they are not lost. It sheds light on the Afro-Arab cultural and civilization component and attempts to project the areas of interplay between the two civilizations as well as the prospects of reviving and entrenching it in a way that serves the interests of both parties and achieve their objectives of raising the profile of their cultural and civilization identity among the cultures of the civilized world.

**After discussions, the participants adopted in principle the proposal to be implemented and mandated the secretary General for further reflection on it. In addition, they acknowledged the promised support by the Republic of Yemen to the project.**

## **Resolutions:**

After fruitful deliberations and contributions of participating delegates the meeting hereby resolved as follows:

1-That there is need to emphasize the principles of dialogue among conflicting rivals as the only effective means to resolve all disputes and achieve the culture of peace in the two regions.

2 -That the Afro-Arab Cultural institute based in Mali be reactivated in such a way that enables it boost Afro-Arab cultural cooperation.

3-That Arab and African governments be urged to:

a) Develop curricula in such a way that reflects the importance of culture, cultural communication and rapprochement and inculcates cultural values , knowledge into the minds of youths.

b) That Studies and scientific research centers be urged to encourage cultural researches that focus on common denominators between Arab and African cultures.

c)That concerned authorities should assume the responsibility of preserving Afro-Arab cultural heritage against any sabotage and/or destruction by enacting relevant legislations, and that parliamentary standing committees should exercise their oversight functions to ensure that such laws are fully implemented, while enlisting the help of UNESCO as well as the Arab League's Education, Science and Culture Organization (ALESCO).

d) That Afro-Arab ministers of culture be urged to revitalize positive communication with cultural institutions and unions in the two regions in such a way as to promote institutional work, cooperation and cultural integration, while utilizing the major strategies on cultural renaissance, which were laid out by the African Union. Chief among these is the action plan on culture and renovation for 2008 and the Charter of African Cultural Renaissance for 2006.

e) That ASSECAA's member countries liaise with civil society organizations on both sides to boost cultural cooperation and exchange experiences in a manner that reflects positively on the enhancement of cultural communication and understanding.

f) That cultural institutions and film-making be encouraged in order to bring to the fore the issues of common interests in the two regions , especially as visual messages are more effective and attractive than the audio and print media.

g) That universities and scientific research centers in the two regions be encouraged to project Master and PhD dissertations on historic, linguistic and cultural issues, provided that such theses be exchanged between Arab universities and their African counterparts.

h) That Afro-Arab governments be urged to encourage travel agencies and transport means to offer the necessary facilities that would attract tourists and enhance tourist activities in a way that achieves cultural communication between the two regions.

4- That women's organizations in the two regions be encouraged to exchange views and experiences in a manner that ultimately achieves the empowerment of women on both sides.

5- That Afro-Arab governments be urged to enhance the principles of equality, justice, equity, and transparency in their respective countries with the aim of alleviating poverty, boosting the culture of peace and achieving social and economic development.

In conclusion, the Retreat expresses immense gratitude to the Republic of Burundi for the generous hospitality and warm reception accorded to delegates in such a way that makes this august meeting a success.

- The meeting pays tributes to His Majesty Hamad Bin Eissa Al Khalifa, the Kingdom of Bahrain, for establishing the Arab Court for Human Rights, which is currently headquartered in Manama, Bahrain.

-The meeting highly commended the efforts that are still being exerted by the Yemeni government in terms of supporting the Association and providing it with all essential facilities to enable it effectively fulfill all the noble tasks assigned to it.

- The meeting also expresses tremendous gratitude to the General Secretariat of the Association for its genuine efforts at the organization of this very successful event, as well as at the preservation, promotion and development of Afro-Arab cultural heritage. The General

Secretariat was also very successful in terms of picking out the experts who presented the work-papers during the meeting.

-The meeting also expresses profound gratitude to all participants for their effective contributions, hoping that a more effective retreat will be held in the future.

**General Secretariat of ASSECAA**

**Friday, November 30, 2013**