

## **ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL (ECOSOCC)**

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**Venue:** Accra, Ghana

### **ECOSOCC engages civil society on democracy and institutional resilience**

The African Union Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) successfully held the 3rd Annual Citizens' Forum in Accra, Ghana, from July 18-19, 2024. This year's forum, themed "Democracy and Institutional Resilience," was a central event in the #ECOSOCC20 Commemoration activities, marking two decades of ECOSOCC's engagement with the African populace.

The genesis of the Citizens' Forum can be traced back to its inaugural event in Lusaka in 2022. This significant gathering marked the beginning of what has now evolved into a flagship annual event under the auspices of ECOSOCC. The initial forum focused on Unconstitutional Change of Government (UCG) in Africa, setting the stage for an inclusive platform where civil society organizations, stakeholders, and citizens could engage in meaningful dialogue on pressing governance issues. Since its inception, the Citizens' Forum has grown in scale and impact, becoming a cornerstone of ECOSOCC's engagement with the African populace.

H.E. Moussa Mara, Former Prime Minister of Mali, opened the Forum by discussing the importance of effective governance frameworks.

"Africa can build resilient communities that thrive on diversity and mutual respect, strengthening social cohesion, trust, democratic governance, economic stability, and sustainable development. Embracing this paradigm is crucial for achieving an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, where everyone contributes to and benefits from collective progress. As we commemorate this two-decade milestone, let us facilitate the sharing of policy contributions and capacities, fostering collaborative efforts towards our continental development agenda by consolidating practical recommendations and incorporating lessons learned over the last two decades of ECOSOC's existence. We can effectively build our future development plan. In conclusion, let us honor this legacy by reaffirming our commitment to the African citizenry," he said.

As ECOSOCC commemorates its 20th anniversary, the 2024 Citizens' Forum aligned with the broader #ECOSOCC20 celebrations. This event facilitated critical discussions and highlighted the role of civil society in shaping Africa's democratic future. By hosting exhibitions and side-events, the forum underscored the vital contributions of African CSOs, reinforcing their importance in promoting transparency, accountability, and sustainable development across the continent.

## **ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL (ECOSOCC)**

Mr. Khalid Boudali, Presiding Officer of ECOSOCC, emphasized this in his opening remarks and highlighted the shared pursuit of liberty, justice, and equality.

“Our gathering today symbolizes a profound commitment to fortifying democracy as representatives of civil society, NGOs, and members of the diaspora. We have a very important role to implement, engaging, sensitize, and brainstorm on policies and decisions that shape the trajectory of our nations and our continent. It is in our collective efforts that we can transform aspirations into tangible realities, ensuring that democracy is not a promise, but a life experience for all,” he said.

The overall objectives of the Forum included promoting democratic governance, enhancing institutional resilience, fostering trust between people and institutions, tackling illicit financial flows (IFFs) towards a coordinated and coherent African response to IFFs, corruption and natural resources management, and leveraging digital governance and innovation.

In his opening remarks, Mr. William Carew, Head of the ECOSOCC Secretariat, emphasized the importance of empowering CSOs to improve governing institutions.

“Democracy is not just about structures and institutions, it is also about the spirit that informs those institutions. As we go about our deliberations over the next two days, let us remember to look beyond the mere frameworks of democracy and embrace the values, ethics, and spirit that breathe life into our institutions. Let us remember, that true democracy is not stagnant, it evolves, adapts, and thrives in the principles of inclusivity, transparency, and accountability,” said Mr. Carew.

Ms. Souad Aden-Osman, Executive Director for Coalition for Dialogue on Africa and the AU High Level Panel on IFFs, highlighted the importance of institutional resilience and financial resources. “Without tools and financial support, we waste a lot of time dealing with inefficiencies that reduce our ability to produce quality outputs. Without financial support, we cannot retain talent and that hampers our ability to innovate,” she said.

Mr. Oliver Röpke, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, stressed the importance of democracy for civil society engagement.

“Democracy is the backbone of civil society engagement. Both Europe and Africa face similar challenges, making this dialogue essential. In June, we had already the pleasure of welcoming Presiding Officer Boudali in Brussels during an expert hearing aimed at gathering input for our opinion. We are keen to continue our collaboration with ECOSOC on this initiative. A second meeting of the study group is scheduled for autumn, followed by the adoption of the opinion by our external relations section, and

## **ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL (ECOSOCC)**

we will keep the ECOSOC fully engaged throughout this process,” said Mr. Oliver Röpke.

The 2024 Forum produced a comprehensive outcome document that captures the forum's deliberations and provides a strategic roadmap for advancing democratic governance and institutional resilience across Africa.

Key expected outcomes include:

- Strengthened democratic practices.
- Institutional resilience frameworks.
- Restored trust in governance.
- Effective measures against illicit financial flows.
- Innovations in digital governance.
- Engaged civil society.

### ***#ECOSOCC20 Commemorations***

As part of the #ECOSOCC20 commemorations, a gala dinner was held on July 17<sup>th</sup> and featured an awards ceremony recognizing the contributions of various organizations, ECOSOCC members, and partners who have significantly impacted ECOSOCC's 20-year journey.

The gala dinner was graced by: H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat (Chairperson of the African Union Commission); H.E Prime Minister Moussa Mara (Former Prime-Minister of Mali (2014-2015) & Member of Club de Madrid); H.E. Timothy Kabba (Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Republic of Sierra Leone); Mr. Khalid Boudali (Presiding Officer, ECOSOCC); Dr. Onyekachi Macaulay O. Kalu (Chairman, Secretary General, AU6th Region/ ECASR); Mr. Oliver Röpke (President, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)); and Barrister Akere Muna (Presiding Officer, ECOSOCC First Permanent General Assembly).

Partners also held various side events and exhibitions as part of the ECOSOCC20 commemorations. These activities provided additional opportunities for engagement, networking, and showcasing the diverse contributions of stakeholders to ECOSOCC's mission and vision over the past two decades.

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### **About ECOSOCC**

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) was established in July 2004 as an Advisory Organ composed of different social and professional groups of AU Member States. The mandate of ECOSOCC is to contribute, through advice, to the effective translation of the objectives, principles and policies of the African Union into concrete programmes, as well as the evaluation of these programmes.

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