

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL (ECOSOCC)

Press Release No: 001/2025
Venue: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Date: February 11th, 2025

ECOSOCC hosts CSO pre-Summit Symposium on the 2025 African Union Theme of the Year

The African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) hosted its Civil Society Pre-Summit Symposium ahead of the 38th AU Summit, bringing together Civil Society Organizations, policymakers, International NGOs, scholars, and youth to discuss the 2025 African Union's Theme of the Year: "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations."

The theme highlights the enduring impact of colonization, trans-Atlantic slavery, and systemic discrimination on global inequality and Africa's underdevelopment.

The reparations agenda aims to address historical injustices while tackling contemporary issues like systemic racism, economic exclusion, and Africa's marginalization in global decision-making. It represents a call for unity among Africans and the African diaspora to advocate for justice, equity, and redress.

The symposium, organized in partnership with Amani Africa, Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Council, Reform Initiatives, TrustAfrica, FEMNET, Pan African Lawyers Union, Stop the Bleeding Campaign and Tax Justice Network Africa, provided a platform to deliberate on the historical and contemporary significance of the reparations agenda.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Mr. Khalid Boudali, ECOSOCC Presiding Officer, highlighted the collective responsibility in advancing the reparations conversation.

"We understand that the success of the reparations' agenda hinges on the active participation of civil society. This is why we have elevated today's symposium from a side-event to a central feature of the AU's calendar," he said.

Mr. William Carew, Head of Secretariat - ECOSOCC, underscored the importance of citizen participation in shaping the reparations agenda.

"Reparations are about more than just compensation; they represent a commitment to restoring cultural identity, empowering communities, and fostering sustainable development. As citizens, we are the heartbeat of this continent. The reparations agenda must be on the lips of every African," he said.

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Dr. Ebrima Sall, Executive Director of TrustAfrica, highlighted the Stop the Bleeding Campaign, which raises awareness of illicit financial flows (IFFs) and their impacts on the African continent. He emphasised on how illicit financial flows are draining resources that belong to Africans and that Africa must take decisive steps to stop the losses and restore the wealth stolen from the continent.

Giving a keynote address, Mr. Brian Kagoro, Managing Director, Programs at Open Society Foundations, provided a compelling historical context for reparations. He said that despite African achievements, like the wealth of Mansa Musa of the Mali Empire, colonial narratives deliberately erased and devalued African contributions.

“Justice demands acknowledgment, restoration of dignity, and compensation for historical and ongoing losses,” he stressed. “This conversation is not about victimhood. It’s about reclaiming and holding both colonial powers and internal leaders accountable; and memory is a tool for redemption and a terrain of struggle that we must own.”

Building upon the historical context of reparations, Dr. Solomon Dersso, Executive Director of Amani Africa, referenced African literature and historical lessons to illustrate the importance of memory and accountability stating, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

The intersection of the reparation’s agenda and the rights of women and girls is a crucial area that necessitates collective action. ; addressing this often overlooked dimension of reparations, Ms. Eunice Musiime, Executive Director of Akina Mama wa Afrika, declared, “There is no reparative justice without gender justice!”

She said women and girls have endured multiple layers of historical and ongoing injustices and pointed out that the reparations agenda should prioritize addressing gender-based violence, economic inequality, and educational gaps if true justice is to be achieved.

The symposium also featured Ms. Eldana Samuel, a 16-year-old member of the Ethiopian CSO Council, who called on African youth to engage actively in the reparations discourse.

“The African youth hold a critical position in the reparations agenda. It is our right and responsibility to raise our voices and demand justice for our ancestors while forging a path for future generations. Let us rise together, advocate for our rights, and ensure the narrative of reparative justice becomes a cornerstone of our journey towards empowerment, healing, and prosperity,” she said.

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In his remarks, Mr. Terefe Degeti, Executive Director of the Ethiopian CSO Council, emphasized the importance of the 2025 AU Theme of the Year. He expressed the Council's wish to work closely with ECOSOCC and other partners to push the agenda forward, highlighting the critical role that CSOs could play in that regard,

The event concluded with a call for ongoing collaboration among civil society actors, policymakers, and citizens to advance the reparations agenda. ECOSOCC announced that it would continue to host consultations and dialogues throughout the year to ensure that citizen voices remain at the centre of this critical discourse.

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Media Contact:

Ms. Carol Jilombo | Senior Communications Officer | AU ECOSOCC Secretariat, Lusaka, Zambia.

E-Mail: Jilomboc@africa-union.org

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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