

# Summary of Conference

**West African Regional Parliamentary conference, Accra, Ghana  
September 30-October 2, 2002**

## **The role of Parliament in relation to NEPAD, Sustainable Development and HIV/AIDS**

### **1. Introduction**

The conference which consisted of 85 participants from 18 Parliaments in West Africa (including the ECOWAS Parliament) and Europe (including the European Parliament), met in Accra Ghana through the hospitality and courtesy of the Parliament of Ghana and the facilitation of AWEPA.

Discussions revolved around the roles of Parliaments and Parliamentarians in relation to NEPAD as well as the great challenges of poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the new generation of young people.

The conference was of the view that the success of NEPAD hinges on democracy and good governance. African Parliaments, unlike those in Europe and elsewhere, have weak structures, especially the committee system. Therefore Parliaments should be resourced to function as the pillars upon which participatory and enduring democracies can be built and entrenched on the continent. Members of Parliament should be further enabled to exercise their oversight function and to scrutinize budgets.

Delegates were of the view that regional integration ought to be strengthened in order to create a solid foundation for Pan-Africanism. For now, all governments should work towards easing of restrictions on the free movement of people across borders on the continent to enhance socio-economic integration.

Delegates were further of the view that there was insufficient action undertaken to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic and that this ought to be remedied as a priority. Statistics indicate the massive presence of HIV/AIDS but these are conservative estimates of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and this should be taken into account.

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## 2. Mobilization plan

It was the considered view of delegates that the foundation of true parliamentary democracy is the effectiveness and efficiency of the legislature in the discharge of its constitutional responsibilities.

For NEPAD to be the property of the peoples of Africa, Parliaments must be well positioned to partner African governments and their foreign partners to fine tune the NEPAD document for collective implementation. Accordingly, delegates proposed the following concrete recommendations for action:

1. African Parliaments should set up select committees on ECOWAS, the AU, and NEPAD so that these committees can constantly review the NEPAD agenda and programmes in order to make recommendations to the AU and the governments;
2. The NEPAD document(s) together with any amendments or revisions and other relevant material should be made available to all Parliamentarians to enable them to do informed debates on the contents of the document;
3. The NEPAD secretariat should be encouraged to fashion out strategies which can be implemented and which take into account the role and suggestions of African Parliaments;
4. Parliaments should hold periodic public fora or hearings to engender discussions on non-partisan bases so that national interest on developmental issues becomes the rallying point of carrying all the people on board. MPs should be encouraged to consult and mobilize public opinion to support the objectives of NEPAD. Special efforts should be made with respect to civil society organisations, religious organisations, labour, sports and other bodies as well as NGO's which have roots in communities. Advocacy and other NGO's may also be consulted where appropriate;
5. The Committee system of African Parliaments should be strengthened so that they can take up issues relevant to their functions and report back;
6. Regional and sub-regional workshops should be facilitated for constant review of the NEPAD documents in order that all Parliaments can function proactively in fashioning the NEPAD agenda;
7. Parliament must assert its independence as an institution and position itself as an equal partner in governance and also strive to achieve real balance of power and equitable distribution of resources among the three arms of government;
8. Parliaments should work with the Executive arm in seeking common grounds for addressing and managing conflicts and preventing violence on the continent because NEPAD can only succeed in a conflict free environment.

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All Member of Parliaments must contribute and work collectively towards conflict resolution;

9. Even though NEPAD is the brain child of African leaders, the executive must be encouraged to collaborate with their parliaments in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of various programmes under NEPAD;
10. Individual Parliaments should be encouraged to summon the executive, especially cabinet ministers who attend NEPAD meetings, to brief their Parliaments on matters discussed and new outcomes;
11. Parliamentary research groups, including university staff, should be commissioned to organize periodic conferences for MPs to enable them to upgrade their knowledge at various stages of implementation of the NEPAD agenda.

Delegates expressed their profound gratitude to the Parliament of Ghana for hosting the conference and to AWEPA for organizing the conference and encouraged AWEPA to continue to facilitate similar fora for West African Parliamentarians to be involved in and play a critical role in developing the NEPAD process.

Accra, Ghana, October 2, 2002