Second Retreat of the Panel of the Wise
with Similar Regional Mechanisms
11-12 April 2013
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Institutionalizing the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise):

Contribution to Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance

Concept Note

Introduction

The African Union is convening the Second Retreat of the Panel of the Wise with similar regional mechanisms on 11 and 12 April 2013 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The meeting will bring together the AU Panel of the Wise, AU High-Level Representatives, the Council of the Wise of the Economic Community of West African States’ (ECOWAS), the Mediation Reference Group and the Panel of Elders of the Southern African Development Community’s (SADC), and the Committee of Elders of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa’s (COMESA). Additionally, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development’s (IGAD) Mediation Contact Group, and the secretariats of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the East African Community (EAC), Union of Maghreb States (UMA) and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD) will participate in the Retreat as well as individual mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at various levels (such as national ombudsmen, local councils of elders, pastoralist mediators, etc).

The Retreat is organized in accordance with the recommendations of the First Retreat of the Panel of the Wise with similar sub-regional organs, which took place on 4-5 June 2012 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and which brought together members of the AU Panel of the Wise, Friends of the Panel, similar Mechanisms from RECs, as well as select international mediators. At this meeting, participants agreed on the need to strengthen their relations and bring their Mechanisms under one umbrella and to enable a process of connecting these continental and regional conflict resolution efforts to initiatives undertaken by mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at local/community level. To this end, participants agreed to work together to establish a Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise), so as to promote a bottom-up approach in mediation, collaborate closely on joint activities, cement
their partnership, and expand the ownership of the African Peace and Security agenda to the African People, local communities and governments, civil societies and individuals.

Background

In the past decade, the African Union has prioritized the development of a framework for lasting and sustainable peace and prosperity for the continent. Based on a Pan-African vision, the framework is informed by the principle of non-indifference to violent conflict; popular participation in activities of the Union; responsiveness of Member States to the rights and needs of their citizens; leadership and ownership of the continent of its own affairs. This has been translated into concrete actions to make a difference in the lives of ordinary Africans in the spirit of solidarity and African Renaissance.

As Africa commemorates the Golden Jubilee of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union, considerable progress has been made in the institutionalization of the different components of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA). One core arena of AU activities in which these efforts meet, is that of preventive diplomacy, as well as structural prevention of potential violent conflict. The constitution of PanWise represents a major step forward in this regard.

The AU Panel of the Wise and similar mechanisms at regional level are charged with the responsibility of promoting and maintaining peace, security and stability on the continent, including preventing and managing conflicts, such as election-related disputes by mediating between parties. The AU Panel of the Wise was created in 2002, and became operational in 2008; ECOWAS’ Council of the Wise was created in 1999; COMESA’s Committee of Elders was put in place in 2008; SADC’s Mediation Reference Group and Panel of Elders was established in August 2010; and IGAD is in the process of putting in place a Mediation Contact Group, whose responsibilities will be similar to those of the AU Panel of the Wise.

Cognizant of the need for collaboration and coordination of efforts in the context of APSA and the increasingly prominent role of the AU and the RECs in the maintenance of peace, security and stability, the above institutions have since their inception gradually and systematically taken concrete steps to strengthening their relations and enhancing their capacity to collectively address the scourge of conflicts on the continent. These efforts took a concrete shape at the Retreat of the AU Panel of the Wise held from 4-5 June 2012 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, where the above-mentioned institutions reflected on opportunities and challenges of collaboration, cooperation and coordination of efforts, including regular exchanges of information on activities pertaining to the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability; enhanced coordination of activities; the implementation of joint programmes; as well as initiatives aimed at identifying concrete opportunities for future collaboration.

Moreover, at the Ouagadougou Retreat, these institutions agreed to establish a Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise) – an umbrella network bringing together these various mechanisms, the Union’s High-Level Representatives and Special Envoys, the Friends of the Panel, and individual mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at various levels – with the aim of enabling them to work on joint activities and cement their partnership, on one hand, and that between the AU and RECs at large.
It is therefore timely to convene a Retreat where the above-mentioned institutions and high level individuals engaged in mediation will agree on the modalities for the functioning of the PanWise, a step which will allow for its institutionalization within the African Union framework and the consideration of and endorsement by the Peace and Security Council.

**Objectives of the Retreat:**

The Retreat accordingly aims to:

i. Examine current challenges to peace and security in Africa and assessing emerging threats to peace and security;

ii. Reflect on lessons learned and best practice in preventive response to emerging threats at local, regional and continental levels, including initiatives to address impunity, justice, national reconciliation and peace, unconstitutional changes of government, effects of conflicts on women and children as well as other conflict management and resolution initiatives by the AU and the RECs;

iii. Promote experience-sharing and reflection on recent practical collaboration between the AU Panel of the Wise and Similar Mechanisms at the RECs, the Union’s High-Level Representatives and Special Envoys, the Friends of the Panel, and mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at local/community level on conflict prevention and mediation efforts;

iv. Agree on the modalities for the functioning of the PanWise in line with the conclusions and recommendations of the June 2012 Ouagadougou Retreat for institutionalization within the African Union framework and consideration of and endorsement by the Peace and Security Council;

v. Contribute to the definition and Adoption of a PanWise Joint Work Programme/Plan of Action, including concrete joint activities in the various areas agreed to.

**Expected Outcomes**

The following are the expected outcomes of the Retreat:

i. Enhanced understanding of conflict prevention opportunities for the various actors (individuals and institutions at local, regional and continental levels) engaged in mediation and conflict prevention initiatives;

ii. Agreement of the modalities for the functioning of the PanWise in line with the conclusions and recommendations of the June 2012 Ouagadougou Retreat for institutionalization within the African Union framework and consideration of and endorsement by the Peace and Security Council and related RECs’ organs;

iii. Adoption of a PanWise Work Programme/Plan of Action, including concrete activities in the various areas agreed to.
The Retreat

The Retreat will be held over two days and will consist of plenary panel presentations as well as working group sessions. Panel presentations will be conducted by eminent persons, including AU and RECs decision-makers, members of the Panel of the Wise, the Friends of the Panel and similar mechanisms at the RECs, and mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at local/community level, as well as academics and practitioners. Panel presentations will be followed by Q&A sessions and discussions in order to enable delegates to engage fruitfully with the panelists.

Panel presentations and discussions will be structured around the following three key sessions:

1. **Mapping the Peace and Security Situation in Africa and Assessing Emerging Threats to Peace and Security in the Context of the OAU/AU Anniversary.**

   This session will provide an overview of the peace and security on the continent and map out emerging peace and security threats with a view to exploring two interrelated sets of issues: on the one hand how to plan, structure and conduct better preventive and mitigation approaches; on the other hand, to strengthen our understanding and preparedness as regards emerging security threats by providing a “horizon scanning” opportunity to panelists and delegates.

2. **Joint Conflict Prevention and Mediation Activities in the context of the APSA: Experience sharing and lessons learned on recent collaboration between AU Panel of the Wise and Similar Mechanisms at the RECs, the Union’s High-Level Representatives and Special Envoys, the Friends of the Panel, and mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at local/community level.**

   This session will share and reflect upon recent experiences of conflict prevention efforts by the AU Panel of the Wise and similar Mechanisms at the RECs. The focus will be on lessons learned from recent practical collaboration between AU Panel of the Wise and Similar Mechanisms at the RECs, the Union’s High-Level Representatives and Special Envoys, the Friends of the Panel, and mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at local/community level with a view to reflecting on the practical dimensions of deeper collaboration and joint action and provide an initial discussion of priorities to be included in the PanWise framework and the Joint Work Programme/Plan of Action.

3. **Modalities for the functioning of the PanWise and adoption of the PanWise Joint Work Programme/Plan of Action.**

   This session will comprise an initial round table presentation by the AU Panel of the Wise Secretariat and invited speakers on the PanWise framework and the PanWise Plan of Action in line with the conclusions and recommendations of the June 2012 Ouagadougou Retreat, followed by two break-out sessions which will allow for delegates’ further exploration, refinement and input to the modalities of functioning of the PanWise and ideas on a Joint Work Programme. The AU Panel of the Wise and SADC Secretariats will capture all contributions made during the break-out sessions and circulate a draft “Modalities for the functioning of the PanWise” and a draft “PanWise Work Programme/Plan of Action” for consideration by Members of the Panel of the Wise, Friends of the Panel and similar Mechanisms at the RECs.
Participants

Participants to the Retreat will be drawn from the AU (including the AU Commission, Panel of the Wise and Friends of the Panel of the Wise, the Union’s High-Level Representatives and Special Envoys), Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (including AMU, CENSAD, COMESA, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD, and SADC), and mediators and institutions engaged in mediation activities at local/community level, as well as the United Nations, Governments, AU mediation partners, and experts and high level personalities with a mediation profile.