



INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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The 7th AU Continental Forum of Election Management Bodies urges Member States to Support the Strengthening of EMBs' Institutional Resilience

The 7th African Union (AU) Annual Continental Forum of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) which was convened on the theme, "Building Resilience of Election Management Bodies to Safeguard Democracy in Africa", was concluded on a high note with consensus for the strengthening of EMBs. The meeting, which was held from 14 to 15 November 2022 in Maputo, Mozambique, called for more EMBs' resilience in responding to emerging and persistent multi-risks and emergencies to manage elections in conformity with international and continental democratic normative standards.

During the two-day discussions, Amb. Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, underlined the AU's commitment to providing technical assistance to Member States' EMBs, urged for inclusive democratic institutions with more women in leadership of EMBs and underscored the imperative for the increased participation of women and youth in AU, regional and other election observation missions in Africa. Commissioner Bankole noted, "This Forum is the only umbrella electoral practice engagement platform on the continent. It is an integral part of the African Union's overall strategy on electoral assistance to the Member States in line with the mandate bestowed upon us under Chapter Seven of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance" and called on EMBs to "key into the Malabo and Accra Declarations which prioritized robust response to insecurity, deepening democracy and collective security."

Commissioner Bankole also paid tribute to women chairpersons of EMBs in Africa. There are seven female chairpersons of electoral commissions on the continent: Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Namibia, Somalia and Zimbabwe. Lessons emerging from the experiences of women chairpersons of African electoral commissions pointed to the need to develop professional and psychological stamina buttressed by solid legal frameworks and a change of societal mindset to overcome socio-cultural and political barriers to women's leadership in election management.

One of the salient lessons from the Forum was that building resilience of EMBs is reflexive; it demands deliberate and sustained efforts by EMBs and their collaboration with other stakeholders. For instance, in preparation for the future ecological effects of election management, lessons emerging from organizing elections during the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters point to the need for a collaborative approach to electoral-risk management.

One of the policy proposals made during the Forum was to develop a strategy for sharing non-sensitive electoral materials among EMBs to cut down the cost of elections. In this light, the Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA), as well as Regional Economic Communities' networks of electoral commissions, were urged to coordinate critically in sharing non-sensitive electoral materials among electoral commissions on the continent. Moreover, given the increasing cost of elections on the back of pressing economic challenges, which have contributed to shrinking economies on the continent, electoral commissions were urged to adopt sustainable cost-cutting measures in the management of elections to keep up with the changing economic times.

In her closing remarks, on behalf of the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Ms Patience Chiradza, Director for Governance and Conflict Prevention, reiterated the African Union Commission's commitment to supporting EMBs through technical assistance, with the resources available, in line with the mandate bestowed upon the AU by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The AU will produce and disseminate a policy brief on the institutional resilience of EMBs based on proceedings of the Forum to serve as a reference for African EMBs.

The EMBs Forum preceded the 10th Meeting of the General Assembly of the Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA), which was held on the 16th of November 2022. The Chairperson of the National Electoral Commission of Mozambique was elected as the new President of the AAEA General Assembly. The General Assembly explored ways to expand its membership through sensitization of other African EMBs as well as making the AAEA more effective in responding to the needs of EMBs. In keeping with the regional rotation principle, it was agreed that the next edition of the EMBs Forum and General Assembly will be hosted by the Republic of Benin in 2023.

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