

Abidjan, 30th of November 2017

To the Honourable President of the European Commission Jean Claude Juncker and the Chairperson of the African Union Alpha Condé

To the Honourable Chairperson of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki and President of the European Council Donald Tusk

To the Honourable President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani and President of the Panafrican Parliament Roger Nkodo Dang

On behalf of the Joint Steering Committee of African and European civil society organisations, we are writing to you today to strongly condemn and reject the censorship of civil society organisations from the 5th AU-EU summit, taking place in Abidjan, Ivory Coast on the 29th and 30th of November.

We would be doing a great disservice to us all if we did not point out the flaws of this partnership, propose solutions and contribute to turn them into results. Our Steering Group is committed to this by promoting an honest, critical and constructive dialogue with authorities and stakeholders. Our mission is to keep people at the centre of this partnership, by ensuring that it contributes to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Agenda 2063 and the EU Consensus for Development.

We did not come to the summit to undermine any government, but to stimulate and challenge us all. Neither to divide or spread discord, but to bring us together through recognition, understanding and dialogue. We came to Abidjan to propose, not to protest; so that we can contribute to the construction of a more peaceful, just, free and united society. We presented our recommendations in the intercontinental forum of civil society organisations held in July 2017, in Tunis.

Our exclusion sets a sad precedent in the seventeen years of history of this partnership and confirms the worrying trend of shrinking space for civil society. It also shows that this phenomenon is particularly grave in Africa, as dramatically illustrated by the repression of the “Forum Citoyen” celebrated in Abidjan, some days ahead of the summit. We condemn these deliberate attacks to intimidate civil society organisations and silence our voices both within and outside institutions.

For all that, we urge you to mobilise both African and European Member States to ensure that civil society is protected, respected, and allowed to work. We call for the creation of enabling spaces and structured mechanisms for civil society participation in policy shaping, implementing and monitoring. European and African values and priorities have always put civil society at the core of public action, as recognised by the EU consensus for development and the constitutive act of the AU, which refers to the union as “people centred and people driven”. Hence, we call on you to uphold those in your bilateral relations and in all parts of the world, particularly at this crucial moment for civil society’s participation in public life.

We hope that this deplorable incident triggers a firm and joint reaction from both Unions. Because the AU-EU partnership cannot and will never be a people-centred partnership without its organised communities, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, small entrepreneurs, farmers and cooperatives.

We hope this statement serve as an inspiration to build a more fruitful, vigorous and structured dialogue between Africa and Europe so that together, we achieve a more prosperous and peaceful present and future for all.

Thank you very much for reading this letter and we look forward to your response.

EU and AU Steering Committee of civil society organisations