

## African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation 1990

*The late 20th century was marked by widespread recognition of the failures of top-down development approaches, particularly those imposed by external entities such as international financial institutions. Many African countries experienced economic stagnation, social unrest, and political instability because of these approaches. In response, there was a growing consensus among African leaders, scholars, and civil society organizations that sustainable development could only be achieved through popular participation. The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation is a significant document that emphasizes the importance of involving local populations in the development processes within African nations. Adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1990, this charter reflects a commitment to ensuring that development is not merely an elite-driven process but one that actively engages communities at all levels.*

*Questions for consideration: What justifications, both general and specific, do African leaders offer for the adoption of the African Charter for Popular Participation? When they express concern about the serious deterioration in human and economic conditions across Africa during the 1980s, what do they genuinely mean? The Document aims to assert and promote the significance of popular participation; why is this deemed essential? According to the Document, what role does popular participation play in Africa's recovery and development processes? When the African Charter states that popular participation is contingent on the nature of the State and the Government's ability to meet the people's demands, what implications arise from this? Furthermore, how should one interpret the concept of monitoring popular participation in Africa based on established indicators?*

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In Arusha, the United Republic of Tanzania, 1990

### Preamble

The International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa was held, in Arusha, the United Republic of Tanzania from 12 to 16 February 1990, as a rare collaborative effort between African people's organizations, the African Governments, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations agencies, in the search for a collective understanding of the role of popular participation in the development and transformation of the region. It was also an occasion to articulate and give renewed focus to the concepts of democratic development, people's solidarity and creativity and self-reliance and to formulate policy recommendation for national governments, popular organizations, and the international community in order to strengthen participatory processes and patterns of development. It was the third in a series of major international conferences organized by the Economic Commission for Africa in collaboration with the rest of the United Nations system to contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, 1986-1990 (UN-PAAERD). It came as a sequel to the Abuja International Conference on Africa: The Challenge of Economic Recovery and Accelerated Development held in 1987, and the 1988 Khartoum International Conference on the Human Dimension of Africa's Economic Recovery and Development. It is important to note that the initiative for this Conference came from the submission of the NGOs to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of General Assembly on the midterm review and assessment of the implementation of UN-PAAERD in September 1988.

The Conference was organized under the auspices of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Follow-up on the Implementation of the UN-PAAERD at the Regional Level (UN-IATF) and with the full support and warm hospitality of the government and people of the United Republic of Tanzania. The ECA Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic Development and Planning adopted resolution 664 (XXIV) at its twenty-fourth session in which it supported this Conference and urged member states of the Commission, the international community, NGOs and the United Nations system to support and actively participate in it. The Conference was attended by over 500 participants from a wide range of African people's organizations — including, in particular, nongovernmental, grass-roots, peasant, women and youth organizations and associations, trade unions and others — as well as representatives of African Governments, agencies of the United Nations system, non-African nongovernmental organizations, regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations, bilateral donors, multilateral organizations as well as specialists, both from within and outside Africa. .

The Conference was organized out of concern for the serious deterioration in the human and economic conditions in Africa in the decade of the 1980s, the recognition of the lack of progress in achieving popular participation and the lack of full appreciation of the role popular participation plays in the process of recovery and development.

The objectives of the Conference were to

- recognize the role of people's participation in Africa's recovery and development efforts;
- sensitize national governments and the international community to the dimensions, dynamics, processes, and potential of a development approach rooted in popular initiatives and self-reliant efforts;
- identify obstacles to people's participation in development and define appropriate approaches to the promotion of popular participation in policy formulation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes;
- recommend actions to be taken by Governments, the United Nations system as well as the public and private donor agencies in building an enabling environment for authentic popular participation in the development process and encourage people and their organizations to undertake self-reliant development initiatives;
- facilitate the exchange of information, experience, and knowledge for mutual support among people and their organizations; and
- propose indicators for the monitoring of progress in facilitating people's participation in Africa's development.

We, the people, engaged in debate and dialogue on the issues involved over the span of five plenary sessions and 15 workshops during the five-day-long International Conference. In the light of our deliberations, we have decided to place on record our collective analysis, conclusions, policy recommendations and action proposals for the consideration of the people, the African Governments, and the international community.

### **Asserting the Role of Popular Participation**

We are united in our conviction that the crisis currently engulfing Africa, is not only an economic crisis but also a human, legal, political, and social crisis. It is a crisis of unprecedented and unacceptable proportions manifested not only in abysmal declines in economic indicators and trends, but more tragically and glaringly in the suffering, hardship and impoverishment of the vast majority of African people. At the same time, the political context of socio-economic development has been characterized,

in many instances, by an over centralization of power and impediments to the effective participation of the overwhelming majority of the people in social, political and economic development. As a result, the motivation of the majority of African people and their organizations to contribute their best to the development process, and to the betterment of their own well-being as well as their say in national development, has been severely constrained and curtailed and their collective and individual creativity has been undervalued and underutilized.

We affirm that nations cannot be built without the popular support and full participation of the people, nor can the economic crisis be resolved, and the human and economic conditions improved without the full and effective contribution, creativity and popular enthusiasm of the vast majority of the people. After all, it is to the people that the very benefits of development should and must accrue. We are convinced that neither can Africa's perpetual economic crisis be overcome, nor can a bright future for Africa and its people see the light of day unless the structures, pattern and political context of the process of socioeconomic development are appropriately altered.

We, therefore, have no doubt that at the heart of Africa's development objectives must lie the ultimate and overriding goal of human-centered development that ensures the overall well-being of the people through sustained improvement in their living standards and the full and effective participation of the people in charting their development policies, programmes and processes and contributing to their realization. We furthermore observe that given the current world political and economic situation, Africa is becoming further marginalized in world affairs, both geo-politically and economically. African countries must realize that, more than ever before, their greatest resource is their people and that it is through their active and full participation that Africa can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead.

We are convinced that to achieve the above objective will require a redirection of resources to satisfy, in the first place, the critical needs of the people, to achieve economic and social justice and to emphasize self-reliance on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to empower the people to determine the direction and content of development and to effectively contribute to the enhancement of production and productivity that are required. Bearing this in mind and having carefully analyzed the structure of the African economies, the root causes of the repeated economic crisis and the strategies and programmes that have hitherto been applied to deal with them, we are convinced that Africa has no alternative but to urgently and immediately embark upon the task of transforming the structure of its economies to achieve long-term self-sustained growth and development that is both human centered and participatory in nature. Furthermore, Africa's grave environmental and ecological crisis cannot be solved in the absence of a process of sustainable development which commands the full support and participation of the people. We believe in this context that the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socioeconomic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP) — which was endorsed by the twenty-fifth Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) held in July 1989 — offers the best framework for such an approach. We also wish in this regard to put on record our disapproval of all economic programs, such as orthodox Structural Adjustment Programmes, which undermine the human condition and disregard the potential and role of popular participation in self-sustaining development.

In our sincere view, popular participation is both a means and an end. As an instrument of development, popular participation provides the driving force for collective commitment for the determination of people-based development processes and willingness by the people to undertake sacrifices and expend their social energies for its execution. As an end in itself, popular participation is the fundamental right of the people to fully and effectively participate in the determination of the decisions which affect their lives at all levels and at all times.

## **Promoting Popular Participation**

We believe strongly that popular participation is, in essence, the empowerment of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structures and in designing policies and programmes that serve the interests of all as well as to effectively contribute to the development process and share equitably in its benefits. Therefore, there must be an opening up of political process to accommodate freedom of opinions, tolerate differences, accept consensus on issues as well as ensure the effective participation of the people and their organizations and associations. This requires action on the part of all, first and foremost of the people themselves. But equally important are the actions of the State and the international community, to create the necessary conditions for such an empowerment and facilitate effective popular participation in societal and economic life. This requires that the political system evolve to allow for democracy and full participation by all sections of our societies.

In view of the critical contribution made by women to African societies and economies and the extreme subordination and discrimination suffered by women in Africa, it is the consensus of the participants that the attainment of equal rights by women in social, economic, and political spheres must become a central feature of a democratic and participatory pattern of development. Further, it is the consensus of this conference that the attainment of women's full participation must be given highest priority by society as a whole and African Governments in particular. This right should be fought for and defended by society, African Non-Governmental Organizations and Voluntary Development Organizations as well as by non-African Non-Governmental Organizations and Voluntary Development Organizations, Governments, and the United Nations system in due recognition of the primary role being played by women now and on the course to recovery and transformation of Africa for better quality of life.

### People's Role

We want to emphasize the basic fact that the role of the people and their popular organizations is central to the realization of popular participation. They have to be fully involved, committed and indeed, seize the initiative. In this regard, it is essential that they establish independent people's organizations at various levels that are genuinely grass-root, voluntary, democratically administered, and self-reliant and that are rooted in the tradition and culture of the society so as to ensure community empowerment and self-development. Consultative machinery at various levels should be established with governments on various aspects of democratic participation. It is crucial that the people and their popular organizations should develop links across national borders to promote cooperation and interrelationships on sub-regional, regional, South-South and South-North bases. This is necessary for sharing lessons of experience, developing people's solidarity, and raising political consciousness on democratic participation.

In view of the vital and central role played by women in family well-being and maintenance, their special commitment to the survival, protection and development of children, as well as survival of society and their important role in the process of African recovery and reconstruction, special emphasis should be put by all the people in terms of eliminating biases particularly with respect to the reduction of the burden on women and taking positive action to ensure their full equality and effective participation in the development process.

Having said this, we must underscore that popular participation begins and must be earnestly practiced at the family level because home is the base for development. It must also be practiced at the workplace, and in all organizations, and in all walks of life.

### Role of African Governments

We strongly believe that popular participation is dependent on the nature of the State itself and ability of Government to respond to popular demand. Since African Governments have a critical role to play in the promotion of popular participation, they have to yield space to the people, without which

popular participation will be difficult to achieve. Too often, the social base of power and decision-making are too narrow. Hence the urgent need to broaden these; to galvanize and tap the people's energy and commitment; and to promote political accountability by the State to the people. This makes it imperative that a new partnership between African Governments and the people in the common interest of societal and accelerated socio-economic development should be established without delay. This new partnership must not only recognize the importance of gender issues but must take action to ensure women's involvement at all levels of decision-making. In particular Governments should set themselves specific targets for the appointment of women in senior policy and management posts in all sectors of government.

We believe that for people to participate meaningfully in their self-development, their freedom to express themselves and their freedom from fear must be guaranteed. This can only be assured through the extension and protection of people's basic human rights and we urge all Governments to vigorously implement the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Convention No. 87 concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

We also believe that one of the key conditions for ensuring people's participation throughout the continent is the bringing to an end of all wars and armed conflicts. The millions of African refugees and displaced persons are those with least opportunity to participate in the determination of their future. We urge Governments and all parties to Africa's conflicts, domestic and external, to seek peaceful means of resolving their differences and of establishing peace throughout Africa. In situations of armed conflicts, we uphold the right of civilians to food and other basic necessities and emphasize that the international community must exercise its moral authority to ensure that this right is protected.

We cannot overemphasize the benefits that can be reaped if, with the elimination of internal strife or inter-country conflicts, the resources spent on defense were to be redirected to productive activities and social services to the people. As rightly noted in the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation, "it is not difficult to imagine what it would mean to social welfare in Africa, with all its positive multiplier effects, if a saving can be achieved in defense spending and nonproductive expenditures". We believe that our Governments can make such savings and we call upon them to do so urgently.

We are, however, aware of certain situations, particularly for the Frontline States which continue to face the destabilization acts of apartheid South Africa. This destabilization results in a debilitating diversion of resources that would otherwise have been used to meet critical basic needs of the people in these countries.

### **Role of the international community**

We call on the international community to examine its own record on popular participation, and hereafter to support indigenous efforts which promote the emergence of a democratic environment and facilitate the people's effective participation and empowerment in the political life of their countries.

We also call on the United Nations system to intensify its effort to promote the application of justice in international economic relations, the defense of human rights, the maintenance of peace and the achievement of disarmament and to assist African countries and people's organizations with the development of human and economic resources. We also call on the United Nations system to implement its own decision to have at least 30 percent of senior positions held by women. Special efforts are needed to ensure that African women are adequately represented at senior levels in United Nations agencies, particularly those operating in Africa.

## Popular Participation in Development

On the basis of the foregoing, we lay down the following basic strategies, modalities and actions for effective participation in development.

### At the level of Governments

1. African Governments must adopt development strategies, approaches and programmes, the content and parameters of which are in line with the interest and aspirations of the people, and which incorporate, rather than alienate, African values and economic, social, cultural, political and environmental realities.

2. We strongly urge African Governments to promote the formulation and implementation of national development programmes within the framework of the aforesaid aspirations, interests and realities, which develop as a result of a popular participatory process, and which aim at the transformation of the African economies to achieve self-reliant and self-sustaining people-centered development based on popular participation and democratic consensus.

3. In implementing these endogenous and people-centered development strategies, an enabling environment must be created to facilitate broad-based participation, on a decentralized basis, in the development process. Such an enabling environment is an essential prerequisite for the stimulation of initiatives and creativity and for enhancing output and productivity by actions such as:

- extending more economic power to the people through the equitable distribution of income, support for their productive capacity through enhanced access to productive inputs, such as land, credit, technology, etc., and in such a manner as to reflect the central role played by women in the economy;
- promoting mass literacy and skills training in particular and development of human resources in general;
- greater participation and consensus-building in the formulation and implementation of economic and social policies at all levels, including the identification and elimination of laws and bureaucratic procedures that pose obstacles to people's participation;
- increasing employment opportunities for the rural and urban poor, expanding opportunities for them to contribute to the generation of output and enhanced productivity levels and creating better marketing conditions for the benefit of the producers; and
- strengthening communication capacities for rural development, mass literacy, etc.

Small-scale indigenous entrepreneurship and producers' cooperatives, as forms of productive participatory development, should be promoted and actions should be taken to increase their productivity.

Intensifying the efforts to achieve sub regional and regional economic cooperation and integration and increased intra-African trade.

### At the level of the people and their organizations

- To foster participation and democratic development, the people and their organizations should:
- Establish autonomous grass-roots organizations to promote participatory self-reliant development and increase the output and productivity of the masses.
- Develop their capacity to participate effectively in debates on economic policy and development issues. This requires building people's capacity to formulate and analyze development programmes and approaches.
- Promote education, literacy skill training and human resource development as a means of enhancing popular participation.
- Shake off lethargy and traditional beliefs that are impediments to development, especially the customs and cultural practices that undermine the status of women in society, while recognizing and

valuing those beliefs and practices that contribute to development. Rural and urban people's organizations, such as workers, peasants, women, youth, students, etc. should be encouraged to initiate and implement strategies to strengthen their productive power and meet their basic needs.

- Concerted efforts should be made to change prevailing attitudes towards the disabled so as to integrate them and bring them into the mainstream of development.
- Create and enhance networks and collaborative relationships among peoples' organizations. This will have the effect of social involvement capable of inducing social change.
- Support strongly and participate in the efforts to promote effective sub regional and regional economic cooperation and integration and intra-African trade.

#### At the level of the International Community

We also call on the international community to support popular participation in Africa by:

- Supporting African countries in their drive to internalize the development and transformation process. The IMF, World Bank and other bilateral and multilateral donors are urged to accept and support African initiatives to conceptualize, formulate and implement endogenously designed development and transformation programmes.
- Directing technical assistance programmes, first and foremost, to the strengthening of national capabilities for policy analysis and the design and implementation of economic reform and development programmes.
- Fostering the democratization of development in African countries by supporting the decentralization of development processes, the active participation of the people and their organizations in the formulation of development strategies and economic reform programmes and open debate and consensus-building processes on development and reform issues.
- Allowing for the release of resources for development on a participatory basis which will require the reversal of the net outflow of financial resources from Africa to the multilateral financial institutions and donor countries and their use for development purposes and for the benefit of the people.
- Reducing drastically the stock of Africa's debt and debt-servicing obligations and providing a long-term period of moratorium on remaining debt-servicing obligations in order to release resources for financing development and transformation on a participatory basis.
- Ensuring that the human dimension is central to adjustment programmes which must be compatible with the objectives and aspirations of the African people and with African realities and must be conceived and designed internally by African countries as part and parcel of the long-term objectives and framework of development and transformation.
- Supporting African NGOs, grass-roots organizations, women's and youth organizations and trade unions in activities such as training, networking and other programme activities, as well as the documentation and wide dissemination of their experiences.

#### At the level of NGOs and VDOs

The African and non-African NGOs and VDOs have an important role in supporting recovery and development efforts and popular participation initiatives and organization in Africa. They are urged to take the following actions:

- African NGOs and voluntary development organizations and their partners should be fully participatory, democratic, and accountable.

- African NGOs, voluntary development organizations and grass-roots organizations should develop and/or strengthen institutional structures at the regional, subregional and national levels, ... to bring them together.
- African NGOs and voluntary development organizations should broaden the dissemination of successful African popular participation and grass-root experiences throughout the continent and the exchange of experience thereon to create a multiplier effect and sensitize policymakers.
- The International Conference on Popular Participation is clear in its recognition of the value of the contribution of grass-roots organizations and NGOs to Africa's development and demonstrates that effective dialogue between governments, NGOs and grass-roots organizations is essential and valuable. This conference recommends that national fora be established to enable honest and open dialogue between African Governments, grass-roots organizations and NGOs in order that the experience of grass-roots participatory development informs national policymaking.
- Non-African NGOs and voluntary development organizations should give increased support and target their operations within the framework of national economic strategies and reform programmes aimed at transforming the structures of the African economies with a view to internalizing the development process and ensuring its sustainability with a particular focus on the human dimension and people's participation.
- Non-African NGOs and voluntary development organizations should give due recognition to African NGOs and participatory, self-reliant development initiatives launched by African grass-roots organizations.
- Non-African NGOs and voluntary development organizations should utilize African expertise to the maximum extent possible with regard to their development work in Africa and advocacy and campaigning work at the international level.
- Non-African NGOs should strengthen their advocacy work internationally and in their home countries and with regard to bilateral donors and the multilateral system, closely monitoring their response to the African crisis and holding donor governments and agencies accountable for their policies and actions. In particular, non-African and African NGOs should formulate a programme of action geared towards their fullest participation in the end-term review of UN-PAAERD.
- Cooperation and dialogue between African and Non-African NGOs and voluntary development organizations should be strengthened to increase the effectiveness of their interventions at the community level and the building of greater understanding on the part of international public opinion of the real causes of the African socio-economic crisis and the actions that are needed to deal with its root causes.
- Non-African NGOs acknowledge that their influence as donors is often detrimental to ensuring genuine partnership with African NGOs, voluntary development organizations and grass-roots organizations and affects the enabling environment for popular participation. In that context cooperation in all its forms must be transparent and reflect African priorities.
- African and non-African NGOs and voluntary development organizations should, in addition to their traditional humanitarian activities, increasingly provide support for the productive capacities of the African poor and for promoting environmentally sound patterns of local development.

#### At the level of the media and communication

- The national and regional media should make every effort to fight for and defend their freedom at all cost and make special effort to champion the cause of popular participation and publicize activities and programmes thereof and generally provide access for the dissemination of information and education programmes on popular participation.



- Combining their indigenous communication systems with appropriate use of modern low-cost communications technology, African communities and NGOs, voluntary development organizations and trade unions and other mass organizations must strengthen their communication capacities for development. Regional and national NGOs should participate in the assessment of Africa's Development Support Communication Needs to be carried out under the auspices of the United Nations Steering Committee and the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force in UN-PAAERD.

#### At the level of women's organizations

In ensuring that the participation of women in the development process is advanced and strengthened, popular women's organizations should:

- Continue to strengthen their capacity as builders of confidence among women.
- Strive for the attainment of policies and programs that reflect and recognize women's roles as producers, mothers, active community mobilizers and custodians of culture.
- Work to ensure the full understanding of men, in particular, and the society in general, of women's role in the recovery and transformation of Africa so that men and women together might articulate and pursue appropriate courses of action.
- Implement measures to reduce the burden carried by women through: (a) advocating to the society at large, including central and local government levels, the importance of task sharing in the home and community, especially in the areas of water and wood fetching, child rearing etc.; (b) promoting the establishment and proper functioning of community-based day care centers in all communities; and, (c) striving to attain economic equality by advocating the rights of women to land and greater access to credit.
- Women's organizations should be democratic, autonomous, and accountable organizations.

#### At the level of organized labour

Trade Unions should:

- Be democratic, voluntary, autonomous, and accountable organizations.
- Initiate, animate and promote mass literacy and training programmes.
- Organize and mobilize rural workers in accordance with ILO Convention 141, which African Governments are strongly urged to ratify.
- Defend trade union rights, in particular the right to strike.
- Assist in the formation of workers' cooperatives.
- Assist in organizing the unemployed for productive activities, such as the establishment of small- and medium-scale enterprises.
- Give special attention to effective and democratic participation of women members at all levels of trade unions.
- Promote workplace democracy through the call for the protection of workers' rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and participatory management.

#### At the level of youth and students and their organizations

Considering the centrality of the youth and students in Africa's population and the recovery and development process, the following actions should be taken:

- Preparation and adoption of an African Charter on Youth and Student Rights to include the right to organize, education, employment and free and public expression.
- The full democratic participation of youth and students in African society requires immediate steps by Government, popular organizations, parents and the youth themselves to eliminate the major impediments to youth participation, such as frequent bans on youth and student organizations, police brutality against unarmed protesting students, detention and harassment on campuses, dismissal from studies and the frequent and arbitrary closure of educational institutions.
- Youth, students, Governments, and the international community must join forces urgently to combat growing drug trafficking and drug abuse. We also urge Governments to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Illicit Trafficking of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.
- The advancement of youth participation in development also requires the protection of Africa's minors against forced military service, whether in national or insurgent/rebel groups.
- African youth and students should organize national autonomous associations to participate in and contribute to development activities and programmes such as literacy, reforestation, agriculture, and environmental protection.
- Student and youth organizations must also strive to be democratic, accountable, voluntary and autonomous and should coordinate their activities with workers', women's and peasant organizations.
- National youth and student organizations should take urgent steps to strengthen and further democratize existing pan-African youth and student organizations to make them play their roles more effectively in Africa's development process.

### **Monitoring Popular Participation**

We proclaim the urgent necessity to involve the people in monitoring popular participation in Africa on the basis of agreed indicators and we propose the use of the following indicators, which are not necessarily exhaustive, for measuring the progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the Charter.

- The literacy rate, which is an index of the capacity for mass participation in public debate, decision-making and general development processes.
- Freedom of association, especially political association, and presence of democratic institutions, such as political parties, trade unions, people's grassroots organizations and professional associations, and the guarantee of constitutional rights.
- Representation of the people and their organizations in national bodies.
- The rule of law and social and economic justice, including equitable distribution of income and the creation of full employment opportunities.
- Protection of the ecological, human and legal environment.
- Press and media freedom to facilitate public debate on major issues.
- Number and scope of grass-roots organizations with effective participation in development activities, producers and consumers cooperatives and community projects.
- Extent of implementation of the Abuja Declaration on Women (1989) in each country.
- Political accountability of leadership at all levels measured by the use of checks and balances
- Decentralization of decision-making processes and institutions.

We are convinced of the imperative necessity to follow-up and monitor the implementation of this Charter and to report periodically thereon on progress achieved as well as problems encountered. we accordingly recommend at the national level a follow-up mechanism on which representatives at high

level of Government, trade unions, women's organizations, NGOS, VDOs (voluntary development organizations), grassroots and youth and student organizations will be members.

At the regional level, we propose a joint OAU/ECA Regional Monitoring Machinery on which also, in addition to representatives of these two organizations will be representatives of the network of •organizations named above. This regional monitoring group will submit biennial progress reports on the implementation of the Charter to the ECA Conference of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU.

## Conclusion

- This Conference has taken place during a period when the world continues to witness tumultuous changes in Eastern Europe. Even more dramatically, this Conference has taken place during the very week when Nelson Mandela's release has exhilarated all of Africa and galvanized the international community.
- There is an inescapable thread of continuity between those events and our Conference; it is the power of people to effect momentous change. At no other time in the post-war period has popular participation had so astonishing and profound an impact.
- History and experience both teach that this world never works in compartments. The forces of freedom and democracy are contagious. Inevitably, and irresistibly, popular participation will have a vital role to play on the continent of Africa and play that role we will.
- It is manifestly unacceptable that development and transformation in Africa can proceed without the full participation of its people. It is manifestly unacceptable that the people and their organizations be excluded from the decision-making process. It is manifestly unacceptable that popular participation be seen as anything less than the centerpiece in the struggle to achieve economic and social justice for all.
- . In promoting popular participation, it is necessary to recognize that a new partnership and compact must be forged among all the actors in the process of social, political, and economic change. Without this collective commitment, popular participation is neither possible nor capable of producing results. We, therefore, pledge to work together in this new partnership to promote full and effective participation by the masses together with Governments in the recovery and development process in Africa.
- We, the people here assembled, have no illusion that the Charter will be embraced overnight by all of those to whom it is directed. But we are confident that this document is an indispensable step on the road to everything we would wish for the people of Africa.

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*Done at Arusha, the United Republic of Tanzania, 16 February 1990*