

STATEMENT ISSUED BY PARTICIPANTS DURING THE AFRICA REGIONAL PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

HELD ON 6TH SEPTEMBER 2023

We, the participants attending the Africa *Regional People's Assembly* online on this Wednesday, September 6th, 2023, representing civil society organizations from across Africa to discuss shared concerns about pressing social justice issues on the continent, hereby jointly make the following calls to African governments, the African Union, the United Nations, and the international community:

1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): We acknowledge the ongoing efforts by individual countries towards achieving the SDGs. However, we are concerned about the lagging progress in Africa, where a majority of countries are falling behind, with less than 8 years left until the 2030 target year. We call on governments to prioritize adequate budget allocations and other necessary resources for socioeconomic sectors, develop effective policies, and promote regional cooperation to accelerate progress, especially as outlined in SDG 17. Emphasizing the principle of *Leaving No One Behind*, we urge governments to embrace inclusive and sustainable development that benefits all segments of society, including marginalized groups.

2. Pandemic Preparedness: We express concern about Africa's vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic due to limited vaccine production, with the continent producing less than 1% of the vaccines it requires. To enhance preparedness, we urge African governments and the African Union to strongly support the WHO's public-centered mRNA Technology Transfer initiative which can promote sustainable local vaccine production. If successful, this initiative shall provide solution to other deadly and neglected tropical diseases that are mainly found in Africa and to which big global pharmaceutical companies do not attach any economic value to invest in research or drug manufacturing. We further call for governments to secure a market share for vaccines produced through this initiative by allocating sufficient budgets for procurement. Additionally, we encourage African governments to participate more actively in the ongoing conversations on development of a Global Pandemic Treaty and while at it also emphasize equitable vaccine distribution mechanisms.

3. National Debt Challenge: We are alarmed by the unsustainable levels of national debts in many African countries, hindering resource allocation to critical socioeconomic sectors and undermining poverty reduction, SDG attainment, and overall development. Over 21 African countries are nearing catastrophic levels of high debt distress. These substantial public loans also pose threats to national sovereignty and independence as they are guaranteed by major national institutions and key infrastructure. We propose the establishment of a comprehensive debt relief framework for highly indebted nations, including innovative financing mechanisms. We advocate for a fair global financial system that ensures equitable access to development financing for all countries. Moreover, we recommend the creation of a practical and binding mechanism, under the African Union, allowing public participation in the process of contracting national loans that exceed certain thresholds, frequencies, or purposes to enhance public accountability beyond taxation for loan repayment.

4. Social Protection: We commend the African governments' collective commitment, under the AU, in adopting the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Citizens to Social Protection and Social Security* on February 6, 2022. However, only 15 out of 54 countries have so far ratified this Protocol. We urge all remaining countries to do so without delay and to establish national policy frameworks to operationalize the protocol, ensuring that all citizens can be shielded from frequent socioeconomic shocks.

5. Climate Change: Climate change is already disrupting individual livelihoods and national economies, particularly affecting vulnerable communities. Without effective management, it will continue to hinder poverty reduction, SDG achievement, and overall development. We call upon the UN to encourage developed countries, the largest carbon emitters, to honour their commitments in providing financing for climate change mitigation and adaptation in African and other developing countries as previously agreed upon during international Climate Change conferences. Commitments should be measured by more actions and less talk. We also urge the UN to establish an effective mechanism to promote, monitor, and discourage countries from failing to honor their commitments.

6. Peace and Security: Sustainable development can only thrive in an environment of stable peace and security. Africa faces growing challenges of national insecurity, primarily driven by armed cross-border terrorist groups exploiting religious motivations, particularly in the Sahel region. We emphasize that terrorism is an international threat that requires collective action beyond the borders of affected countries. We call on the international community to join hands with affected countries, sub-regional initiatives, and the AU to address this challenge and its root causes, particularly poverty, which contributes to the recruitment of impoverished youth into unlawful activities. Additionally, we urge the international community to provide genuine and unconditional support and solidarity to African countries experiencing civil unrest, such as Guinea, Mali, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon, to strengthen their national democratic governance institutions that are accountable to their citizens. The usual and quick application of economic sanctions against these countries has greater negative impact to the poor more than it has to the intended rulers. We call upon the AU to provide balanced and visionary leadership to realize these aspirations of the African people.

End

