



**Media release
For immediate release
19 May 2009**

African Parliamentarians set for greater collaboration with civil society

A consultative dialogue aimed at fostering a closer working relationship between civil society and the Pan African Parliament (PAP) will be held on Africa Day, 25 May 2009, at Gallagher Estate in Midrand, South Africa. Organised jointly by the Southern Africa Trust, TrustAfrica, and the PAP, the dialogue takes place during the 11th Ordinary Session of PAP being held from 18 - 29 May 2009.

The objectives of the dialogue are to promote stronger citizens' voice and participation in Africa's integration process including the transition of PAP into a legislative body and to review the changing ways in which different African countries respond to the emergence of diverse civil society organisations on the continent. The dialogue will also increase awareness and knowledge of PAP processes amongst African civil society organisations and promote sustained engagement between PAP and civic groups in Africa.

"Until recently, there has been limited understanding and participation of civil society organisations in the Pan African Parliament sessions. This dialogue therefore presents an opportunity for civil society to make the best use of the opportunities that are opening up for increased coordination amongst various civic groups to interact with the parliament and government institutions in the continent, so that there is a more coherent effort amongst all social partners to overcome poverty on the continent", says Jennifer Chiriga, Civil Society Capacity Building coordinator at the Southern Africa Trust.

Chiriga noted that, "citizen participation in policy development is crucial for effective governance, poverty reduction, and development. When people participate in decisions that affect their lives, they take responsibility and feel accountable for those decisions. In turn, they are more likely to cooperate with others to strive for a unified, peaceful and prosperous continent".

She also said that, as PAP moves from its position as a consultative and advisory body to the legislative arm of the African Union, there needs to be increased engagement with key civil society stakeholders if it is to be an effective agent for change.

According to the organisers, this dialogue will not only strengthen the already existing mechanisms for civil society engagement but also consolidate the establishment of the Midrand Civil Society Support Facility which has been set up as a mechanism to stimulate and support more effective civil society engagement with the PAP and other Midrand-based pan-African institutions such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), in order to strengthen governance and facilitate socio-economic development to overcome poverty.

Members of Parliament from various PAP committees and a wide spectrum of civil society organisations from across the continent are expected to participate in the dialogue.

About the Southern Africa Trust

The Southern Africa Trust is an independent, regional, non-profit agency that supports deeper and wider regional engagement to overcome poverty in southern Africa. It aims for the poor to have a better say in shaping policies to overcome poverty in southern Africa. For more information please visit www.southernafricatrust.org

About TrustAfrica

TrustAfrica is an independent foundation that strives to secure the conditions for democracy and equitable development throughout the continent. Led by Africans, TrustAfrica convenes dialogues, catalyzes ideas, and provides grants and technical assistance to organisations working to advance these goals. For more information please visit www.trustafrica.org

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