



## Media Statement

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### **WE MUST CREATE A MORE DYNAMIC CIVIC SPACE IN AFRICA, SAY GOVERNANCE GROUPS.**

"Democracy and positive economic change requires a vibrant civil society and African citizens taking a stand", said Maina Kiai, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly and Association, who opened discussions at a conference about the shrinking space for civil society in Africa.

The conference brought together over 60 leaders of civil society formations, researchers, representatives of pan-African institutions and funding agencies to discuss ways to reclaim civil society space, strengthen participatory democracy and promote development in an environment where increased regulation is restricting civil society participation.

The conference was jointly convened by the Centre for Citizens' Participation in the African Union (CCP-AU), the Midrand Civil Society Support Facility, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), TrustAfrica, and the Southern Africa Trust. It was held in Johannesburg from 21 to 23 November, 2011.

Participants from 32 countries shared experiences and challenges faced by civil society formations at national and regional level. Challenges included the emergence of restrictive legislation, mistrust between civil society and governments, a divided and demobilized civil society in some countries, and intra-civil-society conflict. Discussions on strategies for the way forward focused on the need for deeper connectedness with citizens; stronger advocacy for human rights, especially the rights of minority groups; taking up lobby, advocacy and campaign opportunities offered by the African Union and sub-regional bodies; promoting flexible and responsive funding for democracy and human rights advocacy work in a fast-changing context; strategic and sustained partnerships with the media; and promoting democratised economic growth, avoiding a situation where there is a narrow focus on economic growth at the expense of inclusion and participatory democracy.

A dialogue between civil society groups, the Pan African Parliament, and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights during the conference, addressed the need for civil society formations to form strategic partnerships with these institutions for effective engagement in initiatives that promote citizen participation and the development of the continent.

"African civil society actors are patriots who care about the continent and want to partner with the African Union, its organs and institutions to find solutions to the challenges the continent faces, including the challenge of constricting civil society space in our countries," explained Janah Ncube, Executive Director of the Centre for Citizens' Participation in the African Union (CCP-AU).

The conference concluded by emphasizing the positive contributions of civil society and the need for effective engagement with African governments in line with the Constitutive Act of the African Union, its protocols and other instruments. Participants proposed practical strategies for greater cooperation, including building regional coalitions, to improve the operating environment for organisations working to promote participatory democracy and human rights in Africa.

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