

## **International conference on Governance and Democracy: an African Perspective**

Rwanda held an International Conference on **Governance and Democracy: an African Perspective** on 28-30 June 2012.

The conference was organized to celebrate the 50 anniversary of independence of Rwanda and other most of African countries.

The overall objective of the Conference was to provide a retrospective assessment of democratization and political governance in Africa, the most critical period in the case of Rwanda being the last two decades. It is intended to analyze challenges as well as identify strategic options to improve policies in these areas. The Conference also aims to make an assessment as to where Africa is today in governance and democratization terms.

The Conference was organized by the Government of Rwanda (GoR) through Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government, the National Electoral Commission and the Rwanda Parliament, in partnership with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Commonwealth Secretariat and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

The conference brought together renowned world scholars and policy makers including Nobel Laureate for Literature Prof Wole Soyinka, Hon. Moses Wetangula, Kenya Trade Minister, Prof. Margee Ensign, President of American University in Nigeria, former American under Secretary of State for African Affairs, Dr. Jendayi Frazer, Mrs Geraldine Frazer Mokeleli, Global Governance Practice Director at UNDP, Dr Donald Kaberuka, the President of Africa Development Bank, and Mrs. Masire-Mwamba, Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth among others.

During the exchanges, participants reflected on the continent's 50 years of self-rule, the progress made thus far and the challenges still faced in Africa's quest to establish contextually suitable, inclusive and sustainable democracy and nationhood.

### **The main themes reflected upon and discussed include:**

1. Rwanda and Africa: 50 years of Independence, what lessons learnt?
2. Nation Building, Democracy and Development;
3. African Renaissance: where should Africa and Rwanda be in the next decades?

4. The State, Citizenship and Nation-building in Africa;
5. Elections and Election management in Africa;
6. Measuring governance and democracy in Africa;
7. Media development and Governance;
8. The Contribution of the African Diaspora to social economic Development in Africa;
9. Democratization, regional integration and Africa-West relations;
10. Enhancing partnerships and networking among think tanks and scholars to consolidate governance and democracy on the continent and beyond.

During the conference Rwanda have been appreciated to rebuild their own dignity (Agaciro) through self-reliance, self-respect and developing home-grown solutions to its own problems such as Gacaca that responded to the problem of injustice and genocide; and a consensual form of democracy that responded to identity based misunderstanding of democracy. The role of leadership and institutions was once again highlighted in this process, but citizen participation and engagement need to be more emphasized to make the progress much more sustainable.

### **Recommendations**

The conference came up with some recommendations related to the themes discussed. We identify the more interesting for us as civil society.

Participants called for more investment in research and policy analysis on the continent in order to promote evidence based governance. They expressed also the need of strengthening the continent's mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation. This is because governance indices should be based on factual data with the objective of developing and using actionable indicators to inform policies.

Participants agreed that since Africa is vast, the best form for each country should be drawn from its own contextual conditions, experiences and needs rather than copying and pasting one or the other western form of democracy.

Participants called for the greater participation of the citizens and development of home-grown solutions to advance a form of democracy and governance appropriate for each country.

To consolidate and build strong and viable states, the development of common citizenship is sacrosanct.

Africa has to be weary of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) which currently are largely accountable to their Western Donors rather than their local members and whose main beneficiaries are not local members but the elite; To have strong nations, participants also called for a “strong state”.

Participants called for unifying leaders able to overcome tribal sentiments; political parties ideologically differentiated along socio-economic lines rather ethnic, tribal or religious sentiments and the development of strong and impersonal institutions.

**MUHIRE Hilaire**

**Chairman**

**RIG**