

To: Permanent Representatives of EU member states to the European Union

Brussels, 30 November 2020

Subject: Engaging civil society in the future EU-Africa partnership

Dear Madam / Sir,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) European Civil Society group, which brings together European civil society platforms and organisations around the implementation of the JAES. Since 2008, we have maintained an on-going dialogue with the EU institutions.

We are addressing this letter to you **ahead of the meeting between the Leaders of the European Union and African Union on 9 December**, which will pave the way for the adoption of a renewed partnership between the two continents during the EU-AU Summit in 2021.

Civil society plays a critical role in promoting democracy and good governance, peace, and wellbeing, as well as in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will be key objectives of the future EU-Africa partnership. EU member states, by signing the European Consensus on Development, have committed to promote civil society space, thereby to strengthen CSO voices in the development process and to advance political, social and economic dialogue. However, civil society is facing increasing hostility globally and we are witnessing a shrinking space for action, both in Europe and in Africa. The current COVID-19 pandemic is further limiting the possibility for civil society organisations to participate and contribute to the political processes. In this regard, we stress the importance of the future partnership between EU and Africa recognising civil society as a crucial actor, with a commitment to protect and promote civic space as a precondition for building more inclusive and democratic societies.

CSOs have a crucial role in upholding and achieving the universal values and cross-cutting themes for EU engagement, affirmed in the Strategic Agenda and Council Conclusions of 30 June and 15-16 October 2020. These include non-discrimination, equal rights and equal opportunities for all, gender equality and women's empowerment, youth inclusion, education and skills, social, environmental and economic sustainability, good governance and the rule of law. In recent months, civil society in Africa and Europe has proven time and again its relevance as a crucial actor to support those most in need – even in areas where public institutions are largely absent. Without civil society involved in all parts of the process leading to the summit next year, developing a revised AU-EU Strategy that is based on the needs and perspectives of the people on both continents will be difficult.

In addition, the months leading to the AU-EU summit in 2021 offer an opportunity to involve civil society at all levels of political and policy dialogues. We call on the European Union to organise meaningful and timely consultations with civil society, from both continents, to hear their views and recommendations on the future EU-Africa partnership.

Moreover, we believe that the successful development of a people-centred partnership will highly benefit from a continuous exchange with civil society: we regret the EU did not systematically and regularly involve civil society in the past months around the future EU-Africa partnership and ahead of the EU-AU Leaders' meeting on 9 December. This is why we call on the EU to regularly engage

with civil society during the months ahead of the summit in 2021, to ensure their voices are heard and taken into account when the EU and the AU will shape their future relationship.

A specific space should also be granted to civil society during the summit next year, making sure their recommendations will be heard by African and European leaders.

We remain confident that European leaders will show the ambition to agree on a future EU-Africa partnership that recognises civil society as a key partner for building a sustainable future in both continents.

Yours sincerely,

The JAES European Civil Society Steering Group

Concord Europe

Climate Action Network Europe

European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP)

Africa-Europe Diaspora Development Platform (ADEPT)

ACT Alliance EU

Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung (DSW)

Forum for Equitable Development - Slovenia

Wetlands International European Association

Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid NGOs (VENRO)