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**Keynote Address, Delivered by Mr. Joseph Chilengi,
ECOSOCC Presiding Officer, to ECOSOCC to the
1st Extra-Ordinary Session of the Standing Committee of the
2nd ECOSOCC Permanent General Assembly, 11-14 August
2015, Nairobi, Kenya**

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It is with great pleasure that I welcome my colleagues in the Standing Committee, the Director CIDO and members of the Secretariat, representatives of Departments of the AU Commission, distinguished delegates from the African Civil Society community, invited guests, participants, Ladies and Gentlemen to this very important meeting.

This meeting is conceived purely at a technical level to review the outcomes of the recent AU Summit held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 7-15 June 2015 and challenges arising from it, issues associated with our mandate as a key policy organ of the AU and other internal management and related policy and administrative issues that will have bearing on our performance and orientation. Our overall thrust effort would be geared towards promoting transparency and good governance and enabling the consolidation and development of ECOSOCC as an efficient institution of the African Union.

In this regard, I submitted the Report adopted by the ECOSOCC Standing Committee at its 1st Ordinary Session held in Khartoum, Sudan, in June 2015 to the 27th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the Union and 25th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union in Johannesburg South Africa from 7-15 June 2015. I am happy to note that it was well received. Indeed, Council commended our activities in the period under review from January to June 2015 and praised both the Arab Democratic Republic of Egypt and the Republic of Sudan for hosting important ECOSOCC meetings as part of this process. Moreover, on the strength of that commendation, Council encouraged ECOSOCC in its efforts, in collaboration with the Commission, to mobilize all national and regional CSOs and grassroots organizations to facilitate their constant interaction as well as the establishment of National Chapters of ECOSOCC within Member States to gradually achieve a people-centered framework in line with the Agenda 2063 Framework. Council further urged ECOSOCC as an Advisory Organ of the Union and, in consultation with the Commission, AU Organs and Member States, to pursue actively a harmonized mechanism and clear criteria for the granting of consultative and observer status to CSOs in Africa.

There are two ways to measure this decision. First is that it recognized and applauded the work we are doing so far, accepted that we are on the right track and urged us to continue to accelerate the pace of our efforts accordingly. Second, the additional responsibilities that the Executive Organs gave us responded to the issues and demands raised in our report as worthy of official sanction and gave us the responsibility to lead the process of their resolution.

The third significant issue mentioned in our report to the Summit focused on the issue of structural reform of AU Institutions. We wanted the process to be more inclusive and not just Commission-centered. We also wanted an increase in the profile of people-centered institutions rather than their decline. The AU Summit recognized that it remains work in process. The PRC underlined the need for careful reconsideration and

the people-centered nexus of the Constitutive Act has been enhanced with a higher profile for CIDO and ECOSOCC. Even so, we must remain vigilant and alert on this process and ensure that its drivers give proper recognition to the fact that a people-centered orientation is the major underlying factor behind the transformation of OAU into AU. Any process of institutional reform must be guided by this fact. Moreover, such a process must be constitutional and ethical and guided by corporate principles and procedural correctness. The context in which changes are proposed and made must be guided by the values of association of the African Union and the imperatives of its development and integration agenda.

Beyond the dictates of the June summit, we have other responsibilities bestowed by the January Summit of the Union in Decision EX.CL/Dec 769 (XXVII) particularly as regards the need to conduct by-elections in Member States that are not yet represented or underrepresented in ECOSOCC to allow for greater representativity with the Union.

Dear Colleagues and Members of the Standing Committee,

I am happy to observe that work has already commenced in earnest on this score. The Credentials Committee under the leadership of Mrs. Nagwa Metwally met in Maseru, Lesotho, from 26 June to 1 July 2015 and established a framework for action which the Secretariat is currently transforming into a sensitization plan that would be carried out between September to December 2015. Concurrently all ECOSOCC meetings also have a sensitization component. As such a sensitization meeting with Kenyan CSOs will be held in the afternoon of 14 August 2015. All sensitization exercises will place focus on finalizing election processes, informing and mobilizing CSOs to support activities and programs of the AU, with special focus emphasis on the prosecution of the AU Strategic Vision, Agenda 2063.

The January Summit also emphasized the need for operationalization of Sectorial Clusters as main operational mechanisms of ECOSOCC. Cluster leaders in general have made strenuous efforts to establish linkages with relevant AU departments and to develop collaborative programs. Significantly, efforts have been made to increase ECOSOCC and Cluster profiles by participation in several important forums that we will review later this afternoon. The interactive process has had beneficial efforts but has also faced challenges. Line Departments of the AU have laid emphasis on the need to establish working clusters beyond the Chairperson with which they can have truly functional relationships such that when activities are to be organized, ECOSOCC can mobilize CSOs within clusters to support the process. This is a very important requirement that we need to address positively in this meeting. Activities of cluster chairpersons are important and valuable but cannot substitute for Clusters which must be formed and organized as prescribed by Article 11 of the ECOSOCC Statutes.

There have also been challenges regarding effective interface with the principals of AU departments and, where interfaces have occurred, minor elements of friction which is to be expected in the foundation of such relationships. To improve the process of collaboration, the element of ECOSOCC-AU department collaboration has been given a pride of place in the preparation for this meeting. Thus we have invited focal points of the different Departments to make presentations regarding the agenda and interactive

nexus so that we will emerge from here with the agenda for collaboration already established in a manner that will facilitate an integrated plan on the way forward.

Honorable Members of the Standing Committee,

It is important that ECOSOCC as an Organ of civil society lives by the rules it prescribes for those in the public governance arena. We have to lead and show by example and, in particular, avoid the pitfalls of the 1st ECOSOCC General Assembly. This ECOSOCC is making a name for itself and it must conduct itself in a manner befitting of its claims. Thus we shall also examine administrative and policy issues that are relevant to sustain our effective operations. We will receive and discuss a presentation on AU Financial Rules and Regulations to guide our implementation strategy and the Secretariat will also be required to educate us about related processes. Our purpose here is to get a common understanding that will prevent missteps and organic problems.

There are two final areas of concern in our work program. First is that of partnership with regions of the world, with specific emphasis on AU-EU CSO Intercontinental Consultation and Forum. We shall receive, from the Partnership Unit of the AU, a presentation on the wider partnership framework to locate ECOSOCC responsibility in this context and address the current particular demands of the Africa-EU partnership which is pressing. Another area of concern is ECOSOCC relationship with the African Diaspora with emphasis of the very useful work of the ECOSOCC Special Adviser on the Diaspora, Ms Evelyn Joe and plans for an AU/ ECOSOCC Diaspora Summit in Washington DC in October 2014. There are also issues regarding the developmental options of the ECOSOCC Secretariat.

In sum therefore, our agenda is crowded and we have a full plate for our consideration in the course of this meeting. The time frame of four days has been set aside to ensure that we have both the time and opportunity to address them fully and emerge with necessary and essential outcomes.

I urge all colleagues here to participate fully in this process and give their utmost to ensure that this ECOSOCC General Assembly will set the pattern for others to follow and establish itself as a pace setter in the family of AU Organs.

A Luta Continua.