



The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (the 'Forum'), The Research and Advocacy Unit ("RAU") in collaboration with the Office of *Olle Schmidt MEP* are pleased to invite you to a caucus lunch hour meeting to discuss developments on the continent ahead of the proposed Africa-Europe Summit, April 2014. Recommendations from the meeting will also inform Africa's CSO strategy ahead of the Africa-U.S Summit, August 2014.

**Human rights & democratic practice and the contradictions of "realpolitik" in the Joint Africa Europe Strategy
Monday, 17 March 2014, 13:15- 14:45 pm**

European Parliament 1, Avenue du Président Robert Schuman, Strasbourg cedex
ROOM SO.3

This will also be a farewell event for Olle Schmidt MEP, a friend of Zimbabwe & Africa, who retires from active EU politics.

Introduction

Africa will be holding a crucial summit with Europe ("JAES") on 1 and 2 April 2014. The U.S has also followed in the footsteps of Europe by proposing a similar summit in August 2014. Ahead of such crucial summits, there have been unsettling developments on the continent, which calls into question the credibility of both the African Union ("AU") and some sub-regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community ("SADC").

Recently Zimbabwe was elevated both at the Africa Union and within the Southern Africa Development Corporation, with President Robert Mugabe set to assume presidency of both organs in 2015. This elevation comes in the footsteps of a seriously flawed election in Zimbabwe; the current calls for an audit of the elections and Zimbabwe's well-known record of manipulating the SADC, in particular its role in the shutting down of the SADC Tribunal.

The above is symptomatic of a crisis of governance in Africa and this crisis is being triggered by overt and subtle institutional manipulation both at national and regional levels. This crisis of governance and democratic practice, which was witnessed in Zimbabwe, is not an isolated case but is actually a regional problem. In light of this, how should the international community in particular Europe rise to this new challenge within the JAES and other Frameworks?

There is an increasing call among civil society voices that the EU-Africa Joint Strategy should continue to be based on the respect for human rights and democratic principles rather than realpolitik. This issue loomed large at the 2nd Africa-EU Civil Society Forum in Brussels on 25 November 2013 and more recently at the Lisbon Civil Society JAES Conference. While the EU may remain true to its commitment under JAES and other instruments such as the Cotonou agreement, recent developments in Africa indicate otherwise.

Objective of the Side event

The forthcoming Africa-EU and Africa-U.S summits in April and August 2014 respectively should provide the EU and the U.S with an opportunity to reflect on their respective relationships with Africa. The EU in particular is not only providing the bulk of financial aid to African states, but also financially supporting blocs like SADC and the AU. The EU should therefore use these summits as a platform to demand more accountability from individual nations but also from the African regional blocs.

The side event will therefore be an opportunity for concerned parliamentarians to call for respect for human rights and democratic principles to underpin all the Africa-EU cooperation instruments. In particular, the event will be a platform;

- For parliamentarians from the ACP countries, Africa in particular, to share best practice in promoting democratic values in their home parliaments in order to counter the current democratic retreat across the continent.
- Explore how the ACP-EU parliamentarians could use the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement to address these new challenges
- Suggest ways EU MEPs could urgently raise these issues with their respective home governments and for immediate tabling during the forthcoming Summit ("JAES").

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