PROPOSED topic of conference:

*Diasporan Africans as the Sixth Region of the African Union: Roles, Expectations and Responsibilities in Building Pan-Africanism in the 21st Century*

A CALL FOR PAPERS
“Our continent gives us the second largest land stretch in the world. The natural wealth of Africa is estimated to be greater than that of almost any other continent in the world. To draw the most from our existing and potential means for the achievement of abundance and a fine social order, we need to unify our efforts, our resources, our skills and intentions.” Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, p. 216.

“… no one can stand in the way of the inevitable destiny of the African peoples but the African peoples themselves.” Amy Ashwood Garvey.

“Slaves dared to dream of freedom. Colonial subjects dared to dream of independence. If you have a dream you must keep it alive.” Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem 30 November 2007.

“You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. In this case, it comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future. It took the madmen of yesterday for us to be able to act with extreme clarity today. I want to be one of those madmen. We must dare to invent the future.” Thomas Sankara

“African unity and solidarity are no longer mere dreams; we must now embody them in concrete decisions.” Patrice Lumumba

“Always bear in mind that the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone’s head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children.” Amilcar Cabral.

I. BACKGROUND:

In July 2002 in Durban, South Africa, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) underwent a metamorphosis into the African Union (AU). An unprecedented act of the new continental institution was the adoption in July 2003 of the AU Constitutive Act, as part of the *Protocol of the Amendment to the Constitutive Act of the African Union* which “invite (s) and encourage (s) the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the Africa Union.” In addition the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) Status Article (5) states that, “African Diaspora organisations shall establish an appropriate process for determining modalities for elections and elect twenty (20) CSOs to the ECOSOCC General Assembly.” The annual Assembly and Executive Council decisions have reiterated the AU desire for the Diaspora to join the AU. The former OAU failed to
forge an institutionalized relationship with people of African descent outside of the African continent by calling them to assist in Africa’s development.

Therefore the AU has made an unprecedented step in embracing the children of the Diaspora as part of the African continent. The ECOSOCC has designated 20 members from the Diaspora to occupy seats within ECOSOCC. They are allocated on the following basis: approximately 4 will come from the USA, 4 from South America/Brazil, 4 from the Caribbean, 4 from Europe, 3 from Central America and 1 from Canada. In March 2005 several members of the Diaspora were present at the Interim ESCOSOCC meeting in Addis Ababa as non-voting observers.

Since 2002, the AU and other parties have organised various events including regional conferences and developed structures and institutions to aid the interactions and work of Africa and its Diaspora. This was supposed to culminate in a Diaspora Summit in 2008 in South Africa which was postponed. The event will now be held in 2012. As part of this process the Africa Institute of South Africa has developed this Diaspora project which will include a call for papers covering various themes including those identified for discussion during the 2012 summit. Once the draft papers have been prepared they will be the foundation for an international conference after which they will be re-worked for publishing as a book. This document will hopefully be ready before the 2012 Diaspora Summit where it will serve as a working document.

The focus of the proposed conference is to explore the role of Diasporan Africans as the Sixth Region of the AU in the last 7 years (i.e. since the AU declared the Diaspora a Sixth Region). The other five regions comprising the African Union (AU) are:

- West Africa
- East Africa
- Central Africa
- Southern Africa
- North Africa

The African Diaspora can be located in the following regions:
Consequently there is no single Diaspora but Diasporas. The context in which this proposed conference must be located in, is a long rich legacy between the African continent and Africans in the Diaspora. Africans in the Diaspora have played leading roles in the struggle for justice against racial oppression and exploitation throughout the history of slavery, colonialism, as well as during the national struggles for liberation on the African continent. They continue to play an instrumental role in the current development of the continent in a myriad of contributions.

II. “THE TIES THAT BIND”1 AFRICAN DIASPORANS & CONTINENTAL AFRICANS

People of African descent or what Ali Mazrui characterises as “Africans of the blood” (i.e. Africans born outside of the African continent) are linked by the umbilical cord of slavery and the experience of racism born out of slavery and formal colonialism, to “Africans of the soil” (i.e. Africans born on the soil of Africa). 2 People of African descent played a critical role in building the movement for Pan-Africanism as Magubane outlines in his pioneering scholarly work The Ties That Bind African-American Consciousness of Africa (1987).

The Pan-African was a movement initiated by the desire of slaves and freed slaves in the Caribbean, North, South and Central America, to return to the motherland. Several free men and women and some who became known as maroons in the Caribbean set up communities. In Central and South America they were known as palenques and quilombos. These communities that fiercely preserved aspects of the transported African culture, including language, food, music, dance, rituals and traditions whilst adapting it over time to local conditions of the New World.

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Elements within these African diaspora communities – in Canada, the United States, Central and South America and the Caribbean felt a deep attachment to Africa. Some denied this spiritual and ideological connection and sought to integrate into the dominant European Spanish, Portuguese, French and British cultural mindset and aspirations. Those Africans who were ideologically committed to Africa believed in a responsibility to the African continent and to the upliftment of Africans on the continent itself. Among them were proto-Pan-Africanists such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, from St Thomas in the Virgin Islands. He was part of a group of West Indian missionaries from Codrington College in Barbados who visited Rio Pongo in Guinea in the 1850s. John B. Russwurm was a Jamaican who emigrated to Liberia in 1829 and later became governor. There were several resettlement schemes or “back-to-Africa” schemes in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the 19th century whereby Africans from Bahia, northeastern Brazil, the West Indies and Nova Scotia sought to return to the motherland in voluntary and self-financing immigration.

Robert Campbell, a Jamaican joined the African-American Martin Robinson Delaney in 1829 and they embarked on a two-man expedition, the Niger Valley Exploration Mission in Nigeria. Arthur Barclay was a Barbadian who emigrated to Liberia with 346 Barbadians. Benito Sylvain was a Haitian who lived in France for many years and journeyed to Ethiopia in the 1890s, participated in the historic 1900 Pan-African conference in London with the Trinidadian barrister, Henry Sylvester Williams. The latter emigrated to South Africa in 1903.

Similarly, in the United States several African-Americans made concerted efforts to return to the African continent. Among them were Paul Cuffee a half-Indian, half-black African Boston merchant who made efforts to arrest the slave trade in Sierra Leone. Cuffee wanted to help Africans in Sierra Leone to build a viable economy based on local products and in 1815 took a group of 40 African-Americans to this British colony. This is one example of the commercial links that Diasporan Africans as early as the 19th century sought to build with the African continent.

Marcus Garvey, who never set foot on African soil, (and not for lack of trying), was denied entry. However, Garvey founded and led the largest Pan-African movement in
history, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) that boasted approximately 1, 120 branches in over 40 countries around the world by 1925. Garvey was a revolutionary catalyst in the awakening of a Pan-African consciousness among colonized disenfranchised Diasporan Africans and Africans on the continent itself; he reconnected them spiritually, ideologically and economically to the future and fate of the African continent. Garvey’s tremendous contribution via his newspaper and magazine *The Negro World* and *Black Man* respectively; the business enterprise of his Black Star shipping line; his Negro Factory Inc, stimulated the growth of Africans in the Diaspora i.e. in the USA, Cuba, the Caribbean and on the continent itself, particularly in West and South Africa, to assert racial pride and organise against colonial oppression through the establishment of organisations such as political associations, churches, newspapers, African businesses and trade unions.

In the twentieth century, this profound ideological commitment to Africa was continued and manifested when the psychiatrist from the former French-held Caribbean colony, Martinique, Frantz Fanon worked in the psychiatric department called Blida-Joinville in Algiers in 1953. Three years later he resigned from his position on the grounds that it was impossible to cure with psychiatry the psychic wounds that were a direct consequence of the continued oppressive colonial system. He went to join the (Front de Liberacion Nacional) /the National Liberation Front of Algeria (FLN) in its struggle against French colonial rule. Fanon is exemplary for not only for his seminal texts, *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin White Masks* but for the fact that he was an African committed in thought and action to the liberation of African people.

A Caribbean nation that has honourably sacrificed its men in selfless heroism for Africa is Cuba. Over 300,000 internationalist Cuban combatants, many of them Afro-Cubans such as Harry Villegas in addition to 50,000 Cuban civilians assisted Angola in defeating the South African Defence Force, aided by the rightist forces of Jonas Savimbi, Mobutu Sese Seko and Washington in Cuito Cuanavale between 1987-88. The role the Afro-Cubans and white Cubans played in this battle is exemplary of their commitment to international solidarity with Africa and was critical in the liberation of southern Africa. It is imperative to also remember the contributions of Afro-Cubans

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who have not only contributed in terms of soldiers but also in saving lives through the thousands of Cuban public health workers who have worked in Angola, Ethiopia, Guinea and other African countries.

It is against this specific historical context that we must re-evaluate the roles, expectations and responsibilities of Diasporan Africans who are committed to consolidating Pan-Africanism in the 21st century. In what ways can they continue to assist in the economic, technological, democratic reconstruction and transformation of an economically strong and united Africa?

Outside of the African continent, Brazil has the largest population of people of African descent (90 million in a total population of 185 million). However, African-Latinos or “Afro-Latinos” are to be found in large numbers in Columbia where they total 10 million in a total population of 44.3 million; in Venezuela they make up 5 million in a total population of 26 million; in Peru they make up 3 million in a total population of 27 million. People of African descent are to be found in lesser numbers in Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala and in Uruguay. Therefore, the majority of people in the South are people of African descent who are often living in poverty both outside the African continent and on the continent itself. Since Africa is a continent abundant in natural wealth, with much of this wealth being untapped, the objective of unity is paramount in order to harness the economic wealth and skills of Africans in the interest of its people – as opposed to these resources continuing to be siphoned off to foreign interests.

III. SOME THEMES FOR WRITING PAPERS:

- Defining the African Diaspora/s – are there new and old Diasporas?
- Defining the unity of interests between South & Central America and Africa
- Promoting an understanding of the Afro-Latino existence in South & Central America in Africa

• Engaging Afro-Latino youth, Caribbean youth, African-American youth and
  Africa – how do they currently view Africa?
• Historical experiences and current contributions of the African Diaspora returnees living in Africa: displacement, assimilation or in limbo?
• Expectations, roles, responsibilities of the African Diaspora/s towards the AU in forging African unity
• Expectations, roles, responsibilities of the AU of the African Diaspora/s in
  forging African unity
• The role of the African Diaspora/s in the assistance of Africa’s economic
development e.g. in skills transfers, the development of export-import
businesses between African-Americans and continental Africans. To what
extent is the Africa Growth & Opportunity Act to be supported by African-
Americans or does the Act subordinate Africa to US market interests?
• The mission of the ECOSOCC and the role the African Diaspora/s should play
  in it
• Organising the African Diaspora/s to occupy the 20 allocated seats in the
  ECOSOCC – progress & issues
• Confronting and resolving contradictions and frictions between African
Diasporas & continental Africans
• The Pan-African agenda for the 21st century – the AU perspective
• The Pan-African agenda for the 21st century – the perspective of civil society
• Producing a practical program of action for cooperation between Africa & its
  Diaspora, which may include the following key public policy matters:
  o How to build bridges between Africa and the Diaspora?
  o Remittances and financial instruments for cooperation
  o Business-to-business relations and investment initiatives
  o Skills development and capacity building opportunities
  o Technology development and transfer
  o Cooperation on infrastructure development and industrialisation
  o Cooperation towards effective land, agricultural and agrarian reform
  o Cross-cutting policy questions on culture and identity as well as gender
development in the Pan-African/Diaspora agenda
IV. CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES:
Among the objectives of the conference are to:

1. To produce a book from the conference proceedings.
2. To address the fact that interest in the Diaspora tends to remain partial with a greater focus and attention on North America than Central and South America. The conference therefore seeks to readdress this imbalance with papers and presenters from both not only North America, but also Central and South America as well as from the Caribbean, and particularly from civil society interest groups as well as from individual from academies.
3. To have a fair representation of papers and presenters from women scholars and activists.
4. To encourage the participation of young academics and activists from civil society organisations from the Diasporas and the continent at the conference.
5. To generate concrete policy ideas for engagement with governments and intergovernmental organisations in the run up to the AU African Diaspora Summit towards the end of 2011.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS
With the onslaught of globalization that appears to be recolonizing the African continent, African people and people of African descent must re-assess the ways in which Pan-African unity can be accelerated in order to achieve the material benefits for ordinary African people that Amilcar Cabral envisioned. In addition to this, the destiny, self-esteem and dignity of all Africans is inextricably linked to the negative racial stereotypes of Africa as a place of continuing poverty, instability, disease and illiteracy that continues to exist in the Western world, as well as among some Africans and African Diasporans. When Africans continue to be victims of racial attacks and murders in New York, London, Paris, Germany, China or Russia, the dignity of all Africans is damaged. Therefore, a united Africa would engender respect for Africa and African people wherever they are in the world. This must be among the fundamental objectives of African unity in the twenty first century.
VI. DATES

Submission of abstracts: Monday 21 March 2011

Notification of accepted abstracts: Thursday 21 April 2011

Submission of peer-reviewed papers: Thursday 23 June 2011

Conference dates: Thurs 15, Fri 16, Sat 17 Sept 2011