



Region of Tuscany
Regional Assembly



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**Decentralization:
The New Dimension
of Peace, Democracy
and Development**

First Conference of the European
and African Regional Assemblies

FINAL DOCUMENT

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I Conference of the European and African Regional Assemblies Florence 17-18 September 2004

Final Document

The "First Conference of Regional European and African Assemblies" held in Florence on the 17-18 September 2004 to discuss the theme of "Decentralization, The New Dimension of Peace, Democracy and Development" attracted more than 100 participants, among them representatives of European and African regional and local assemblies, national Ministers, Governors, representatives of international organizations, international and national local government associations, NGOs, spiritual leaders, academicians, and experts on decentralization.

The conference contributed concretely to its initial objectives, namely:

- to foster and deepen the debate over strategies and models of decentralization;
- to support the process of decentralization as a necessary condition to strengthen good governance, democracy, the rule of law and the promotion of peace and development at the local level;
- to create partnerships and strengthen existing links among regional and local actors in Europe and Africa;
- to develop a framework to support decentralization processes
- to contribute to the modernization of the States and their administration.

While Europe enjoys a tradition of decentralization, only in recent years most African countries have initiated political, administrative and fiscal reforms geared to decentralization. Though still weak in many countries, this process is one of the major political developments in Africa.

As is the European case, African countries have adopted various models reflecting their different political, social and economic characteristics, as well as cultural diversity. For it, the participants did not embrace any specific decentralization model. However they stressed the critical importance of decentralization processes that allow local communities and individual citizens to transform from passive beneficiaries into positive actors of human development.

More specifically, the following points have emerged during the discussion:

- decentralization, when supported by clear political will and if effectively managed, is an instrument of democratization, reconciliation, social integration, as well as a tool to promote sustainable human development and good governance; and
- it is also instrumental in reducing poverty and achieving the millennium development goals;
- participation of local communities and all citizens in the decision making process at the regional and local level is essential for the identification of local development goals;
- Women play a crucial role in making decentralization successful; at the same time, decentralization represents an opportunity to strengthen women's participation and representation and to foster gender promotion;
- decentralization is instrumental in protecting and promoting cultural diversity which, in turn, enriches participatory democracy;
- decentralization can improve service delivery, especially in the field of health and education, therefore representing an important tool in the fight against HIV-AIDS;
- forms and modalities of cooperation and partnerships in institutional and capacity building, in training and sharing of experiences should be given serious consideration.

During the conference the following recommendations emerged:

National Governments should :

- 1) make every effort to initiate decentralization processes and real transfer of responsibilities to the regional and local level with a view to establishing a credible and effective regional and local self-government system;
- 2) prioritise capacity building of regional and local authorities as to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively;
- 3) guarantee sufficient financial resources to local authorities for fulfilling their responsibility;
- 4) establish effective coordination and consultative mechanisms among the various levels of government, taking into consideration their respective responsibilities and the principle of subsidiarity;
- 5) recognize the fundamental function of regional and local authorities in the process of decentralization.

Regional and local authorities should:

- 6) participate effectively, competently and in a transparent manner in the process of decentralization and establish appropriate accountability systems towards the civil society and all citizens;
- 7) actively pursue partnerships with the central government and other regional and local authorities, also by strengthening the role of national local government associations.

International Organizations and the international community should:

- 8) renew their commitments to support decentralization processes through concrete initiatives in this field;
- 9) strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and local authorities and their associations in the framework of national development strategies and plans;
- 10) recognize the potential contribution of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to effective decentralization as well as the role to be played by regional and local authorities in promoting universal access to ICTs. In this respect they should fully support the important role of the Digital Solidarity Fund as a tool to bridge the digital divide in the African communities.

Bilateral and multilateral donors, such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the European Union, should:

- 11) increase the level of resources directed to initiatives aimed at strengthening regional and local governments;
- 12) pay more attention to the impact that cooperation programs have at the regional and local level and involve regional and local authorities in the planning, execution and evaluation of their projects;

- 13) make available increasing level of resources for decentralized cooperation with the purpose of fostering social inclusion and participatory development;
- 14) support institutional capacity building and training to allow regional and local authorities to better perform their functions;
- 15) develop, together with the United Nations, common criteria to evaluate the impact of decentralization policies.

Finally, the participants:

- 16) recommend the creation of a permanent observatory of European and African regional and local assemblies in order to continue the dialogue on a regular basis;
- 17) suggest that such an observatory should serve as a focal point for the exchange of information and best practices in the area of decentralization and decentralized cooperation, and for the training of regional and local officials and staff in partnership with all the relevant international actors;
- 18) express their willingness to meet regularly to discuss and assess progresses and challenges in achieving effective decentralization and ask the observatory of European and African regional and local assemblies to facilitate such periodic meetings;
- 19) take note with satisfaction of the willingness of the Regional Assembly of Tuscany and of the Region of Tuscany to act as promoters of such an observatory;
- 20) express their gratitude to the Italian Government, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the Conference of the European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), the Region of Tuscany, the Regional Assembly of Tuscany, the Province and the City of Florence for their generous hospitality and the support granted to the conference.

Florence, September 18, 2004