

6 December 2007

The EU's role on human rights in Africa – how can the EU Africa summit and the EU-Africa strategy move us forward?

Coherence of the strategy

- When European and African leaders began to develop the EU-Africa strategy, this was billed as being genuinely new and different because for the first time, it would be developed in partnership. This was not 'the EU's policy on Africa', but a set of priorities that the two continents would work on together;
- This was an ambitious objective but a welcome one. It makes sense to seek input from those who are most affected by the EU's policies on third countries;
- And indeed while a critique can be made of the depth of consultation outside government – trying to reach into civil society both in Europe and in Africa – it is laudable that a clear timetable for consultation, and mechanisms for contributions to be fed in, were set up.
- Amnesty International also welcomes a number of references in the new strategy in the field of human rights, namely;
 - strengthening African regional architecture such as the African Court for Human and People's Rights and the African Commission for Human and People's Rights;
 - more effective cooperation on human rights in the UN Human Rights Council and other international fora; and
 - working together to strengthen the International Criminal Court.
- However, the strategy is disappointing in that it is a missed opportunity to bring greater coherence to the wide range of EU policies on Africa. If done effectively, what this new initiative represents is a chance for better co-ordination in this way, with buy in and agreement from both sides.
- Seen from outside, the EU's activities on foreign policy; trade; development; security; migration are confusing and sometimes appear contradictory. Different fields bring different interlocutors - - sometimes from the same EU institutions, but also from different ones. And sometimes it can appear that those responsible for one field are not aware of developments in another;
- This cannot be the most effective way of managing a continent to continent relationship, and certainly compromises the impact of the levers the EU does have to improve protection of human rights in third countries.
- To avoid the new EU-Africa strategy remaining simply a checklist of important issues, the implementation process needs to tackle this complexity in cooperation between the two regions. The search for a 'red thread' through these policies leads back to human rights, which provide an international legal framework, overarching in scope, and defining the rights and obligations in a state partnership;
- As part of such relations, both partners should recognise their obligations in respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights in their international development and investment policies and practices. The international human rights framework must also bring accountability, ensuring that justice is accessible to all;

- Clear benchmarks are also needed at national and multilateral levels and a joint monitoring system and enforcing mechanism, should also be developed to assess what progress is being made;
- Finally, while of course we should look forward to what can be achieved through *implementation* of the strategy, any brief summary of its content must acknowledge that the debate on migration has not been moved forward. There is no reference in the new strategy to a need to focus on the rights of migrants themselves, but have become confused with joint concerns between the EU and Africa about counter terrorism. While these concerns are without question a legitimate area of joint concern, they are far from being the only element in improving cooperation on migration.

Messages for the summit in two days time

- As Amnesty International has made clear throughout preparations for the EU Africa summit, the effectiveness of this event should not be judged by how many leaders are in attendance, but by its concrete outcomes for human rights.
- Launching the new EU-Africa strategy will provide an important springboard for some longer term structural improvements in human rights protection mechanisms.
- But if the summit focuses only on the longer term perspective, as this conference has shown today, European and African leaders will fail the people of Zimbabwe, and in the Darfur region. And these are not the only current examples in Africa of situations in which individuals face grave and systematic human rights violations, on a daily basis;
- Of course reciprocity is essential for encounters of this kind to be productive - especially on human rights. Amnesty International therefore underlines the need for the EU to be prepared to reflect on shortcomings and obligations where its own credibility may be in question, notably as regards security and counter-terrorism issues. And it should be prepared to take more positive action on human rights in particular where African interests are directly affected, notably with regard to migration.
- The EU has committed itself, in its guidelines on human rights dialogues, to raise human rights concerns at all appropriate opportunities with third countries. Given its broad cooperation with Africa, it does have a legitimate voice in addressing these issues, and it should use it. With so much human, financial and political resource being invested in this event, the opportunity for real progress must not be missed.