Commission of the African Union

The African Union, and particularly its Commission, is ready to engage with civil society. You have immense contributions to make.

— Ambassador John K. Shinkaiye, Chief of Staff, African Union Commission

The Commission of the African Union acts as the AU’s secretariat and is based in Addis Ababa. According to the Constitutive Act, the Commission is composed of a Chairperson, his/her deputy or deputies, Commissioners and staff.

The Assembly determines the Commission’s structure, functions and regulations and elects the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson; the other commissioners are elected by the Council of Ministers and appointed by the Assembly. There are eight Commissioners, who manage the day-today tasks of the AU in relation to their portfolios. These officials hold office for concurrent four-year terms.

The Chairperson of the AU Commission reports to the Executive Council of Ministers.

In February 2009, the AU Assembly resolved to transform the AU Commission into an AU Authority, with stronger powers (discussed in Part 3). The responsibilities of the Commissioners will be slightly modified as part of this transformation: however, the basic structure of Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and eight Commissioners (to be renamed Secretaries) remains. In the table below, the portfolio name is given both for the AU Commission and the new name under the AU Authority (if relevant). The list of responsibilities is based on the new assignments.

The Commission both initiates policy and budget proposals for consideration by other AU organs and is responsible for implementing the decisions of the PRC, Executive Council of Ministers and Assembly. It also provides operational support to the Peace and Security Council, ECOSOCC, the Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other AU activities.
As at late 2008, there were close to 700 people working for the AU Commission: though the approved complement is substantially larger the budget has not allowed more to be employed.

The African Citizens’ and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO), located in the office of the chairperson, is the official liaison office for civil society organisations from Africa or the African diaspora wishing to interact with the Commission. CIDO is responsible for accrediting NGOs to attend summits and other meetings and acts also as the secretariat for ECOSOCC, the AU’s civil society organ.

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### Responsibilities of the different Departments and Directorates within the AU Commission:

**> OFFICE OF THE CHAIRPERSON**

**Office of the Legal Counsel**
Status of country ratifications, drafting and interpretation of treaties

**Women, Gender and Development Directorate**
Gender issues, country reports for implementation of solemn declaration on women’s rights

**African Citizens’ and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO)**
Civil society and diaspora issues, accreditation to meetings, observer status, support to ECOSOCC

**> OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON**

**Conferences and Events**
Organisation of AU meetings

**Human resources**
Management of AU Commission staff

**Finance and budget**
Analysis of AU budget and resource allocation priorities

**Protocol**
Accreditation procedures
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>New Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace and Security</td>
<td>Peace Security and Common Defence</td>
<td>Conflict prevention and management, peacekeeping, terrorism, transnational crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Affairs</td>
<td>Political Affairs and Coordination of Common Positions on External Relations</td>
<td>Political cooperation, governance, elections, human rights, humanitarian affairs, free movement of persons, financial crimes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure and Energy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Transport and energy infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Affairs</td>
<td>Health and Social Affairs</td>
<td>Children, crime prevention, human trafficking, population, migration, labour and employment, sports and culture, epidemics including HIV and AIDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resources, Science and Technology</td>
<td>Education, Human Resources and Science and Technology</td>
<td>Information and communication technology, youth, research, universities, intellectual property</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade and Industry</td>
<td>Trade, Industry and International Cooperation</td>
<td>International trade negotiations, trade, industry, customs and immigration, free movement of goods and services, tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural Economy and Agriculture</td>
<td>Rural Economy, Agriculture and Environment</td>
<td>Agriculture and food security, livestock, water, desertification, natural resources, climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic integration, international economic cooperation, monetary affairs, private sector development, investment and resource mobilisation, poverty reduction, statistics</td>
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In 2003, after a long campaign by women’s rights groups, the Assembly approved a Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. It is one of the most far-sighted instruments on women’s rights anywhere in the world. By July 2004, only Comoros had ratified the Protocol. Women’s rights organisations – including the coalition Solidarity for African Women’s Rights (SOAWR), the African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), WILDAF-West Africa and Southern Africa Women’s Agenda – found an enthusiastic partner in the AU Commission’s Women, Gender and Development Directorate for advocacy to achieve ratification by 15 countries, the minimum number required before the protocol could enter into force.

The SOAWR coalition reached out to national women’s organisations and formed a Pan-African steering committee with Equality Now in Kenya as its secretariat. It published books, issued press releases and lobbied AU staff and permanent representatives, as well as submitting a petition to Heads of State for the ratification of the Protocol on the Rights of Women and issuing ‘report cards’ at summits on whether Member States had yet ratified.

Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) also worked with the AU Commission’s Women, Gender and Development Directorate to lobby successfully for the creation of an African Women’s Committee for Peace and Development and has collaborated with the Commission and the new Committee in the ‘Gender Is My Agenda’ campaign on violence against women.

At the July 2004 summit in Addis Ababa, the Assembly adopted the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, committing the AU to gender parity in its appointments, and African leaders to action to address a range of issues affecting gender equality, including the impact of HIV and AIDS on women.

The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa received its fifteenth ratification and entered into force in November 2005, less than two years after women’s organisations began their campaign for national ratifications.

SOAWR: www.soawr.org
FEMNET: www.femnet.or.ke
FAS: www.fasngo.org
WILDAF: www.wildaf.org.zw
Gender is my Agenda Campaign: www.genderismyagenda.com