

## **Experience of the Association of African Election Authorities (A.A.E.A.) in terms of installing network**

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Existence of the AAEA results from the will of African experts convinced that stability of opening of the democracy goes through the organisation of free, transparent, and fair elections and to reduced costs. Their conviction is based on the fact that since the accession of the independence of the African countries until the 90s, nominal presidential elections and general elections were organised by these countries but they still lead to political and social deadlock. In fact, political leaders were quickly gained by the syndromes of the single parties, which had a consequence for excluding other opinions, leading also to dictatorships and, as their corollaries, to social dissatisfaction.

Then we could see the irruption of military coups d'état in the political scene not to restore democracy but they said to impose more discipline in the management of state affairs and in social behaviour of the population.

These systems and this matter of governing were installed under the benevolent eyes of guardians of the two blocks, as the world was bipolar that time.

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 tolled the bell to all of these systems; they became weak because of the lack of guardians. African people, seizing this new order, pushed more forward and more firmly their claim of more freedom, more respect for human rights, more participation in the management of public affairs. All in all, they claimed the democracy as well as other people across the world.

These decadent systems agreed to their will, the birth of political parties of diverse opinions, making official the NGO-s of protection of the human rights, and other different organisations of civil society.

The first great question of political parties who were led to settle in the organisation of the first multi-party elections was: how to organise the democratic elections through an administration which was allegiant to the single party system and dominant ideology during three decades?

That's the way of birth of the idea of the creation of autonomous or independent election committees, different from the ministries usually responsible for the elections of the free countries. Yet, certain countries that did not know dictatorship, single party or military system continued to organise elections through the governmental institutions.

In order to organise credible elections, it is necessary to have certain expertise and these new management bodies of the elections (EMB) need them. The creation of the AAEA obeys this need of installing the network of these EMBs to exchange experiences, expertises among election administrators and to exchange election material if necessary.

### History

The idea of the creation of the AAEA was born on the conference of the African election administrators hold in November 1994 in Victoria Falls of Zimbabwe. At the end of this conference a working group was established. They had the vocation for maintaining the contacts among the participants who expressed their strong wish to formalize their relations within an African Association grouping together the election officials and the NGO-s working in the domain of the elections in Africa.

The working team, in collaboration with the African-American Institute (AAI), also developed a questionnaire in order to poll the interest carried by the African election administrators to the creation of a permanent Association. The majority of the persons questioned opted for an exchange forum destined for the election administrators and for the NGO-s of the electoral sector of all the participant countries.

This working team, supported by several NGO-s based in the USA and by the United Nations, managed a draft charter of an association called « Association of the African Election Authorities (AAEA) ». It held a meeting in 1995 in Cape Town and in 1996 in Windhoek in South Africa, and at the end of the debates a detailed draft charter was prepared.

As a result of the poll and the draft charter, the founder meeting was held from 14 to 16 January 1997 in Kampala in Uganda under the sponsorship of the IFES (International Foundation for Election Systems) and the Election Committee of Ugandan was the host of it.

After the founder meeting of Kampala of 1997, the Association held its Inaugural General Assembly in Ghana and its 2<sup>nd</sup> session from 25 to 27 September 2002 in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso.

### The Members and the organs of the Association

At the end of the second General Assembly held in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso in September 2002, the Association counts 19 members of full right, which are the States below: Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa and eight associated members who are: Institute of Economic AFFAIR (Ghana), Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (Zim rights), CERCUDE Cameroon, GERDESS Africa, Institute for Education in Democracy (Kenya), Zambia Independence Monitoring Team (Zambia).

The organs of the Association are:

- The General Assembly, which is held every 3 years
- Consultative Council which is held twice per year; it is governed by the CENI of Burkina Faso for a mandate of 3 years
- The Executive Secretariat assured by the Election Committee of Ghana.

### The activities

The main activities led by the Association apart from the regular sessions of these authorities (sessions of the Consultative Council and the General Assembly) are:

- Exchange of experiences. These exchanges are made through two domains of activities:

- Seminars and conferences
- Papers including information and experiences sent by the missions having participated in the voting processes in the member countries. This is a kind of training supporting the election administrators because no institutes of training exist for them in their countries. This way they get information from their colleagues in order to solve the difficulties, which appear before them in the organisation of the elections. They also give them suggestions to improve the organisation of future elections.

The exchanges of electoral materials. In the research of the optimisation of costs of the elections, the members of the Association carry out the exchanges of electoral materials.

The AAEA is facing currently establishing of regional forums, which will group together the members per region in order to make the exchanges of experiences more successfully.

The first five years of functioning of the AAEA shows that its existence is beneficial for its members. We would like to thank all the international organizations that support us in this beneficial opening. We would like to congratulate Dr Toth and the members of the ACEEEO of the success of this conference GEO III.