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REPORT

What is Next for the new AU leadership?

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ISS - What is Next for the New AU leadership?

The event was introduced and moderated by **Dr. Andrews Atta-Asamoah**, Head, Africa Peace and Security Governance Programme, Institute for Security Studies. And involved the speakers, **Prof Thomas Tieku**, Politics and International Relations, King's University College, University of Western Ontario; **Moussa Soumahoro**, Researcher at ISS, and **Dr. Ahmed Bugre**, Senior Expert Coordinator Reparatory Justice and Racial Healing, CIDO, European Commission.

Background Information

The **38th African Union summit** took place between the 15th and 16th of February of 2025. Focusing on Reparatory Justice and Racial Healing, under the theme “Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations”, the summit also served as a space for African leaders to endorse groundbreaking strategies aimed at advancing Africa’s integration, economic transformation and climate resilience¹. One of the highlights of the event, also known as the **38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Head of State and Government**, was the election and the swearing-in of the new Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission. H.E Mahmoud Ali Youssouf from Djibouti has been elected as the Chairperson, being deputised by H.E Selma Malika Haddadi from Algeria.

The elections of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson took place a few days after the election and appointment of the new AU Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment; Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace & Security; Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian & Social Development; and Commissioner for Infrastructure & Energy during the **46th Ordinary session of the Executive Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs**. On the other hand, the elections for the Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry, and Mining (ETTİM), and the Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI) were postponed.

Discussion

The 38th AU summit has occurred in a particularly challenging context, with Africa being stretched between internal challenges and global constraints. However, the way this summit has unfolded has been quite prolific, generating numerous decisions from the draft outcome and document. A total 38 decisions have been made, spanning 6 major thematic areas. **Prof Thomas Tieku** focused on the five following ones:

1. Leadership transition at the AU

Contrary to expectations, the outcome of the elections was not solely a scorecard analysis but rather reflected deeper political dynamics among member states. The candidate who emerged victorious as Chairperson demonstrated superior technical capacity and presented clear plans compared to his opponents. Notably, Djibouti successfully mobilized support across various linguistic and regional groups, including the Francophone group and other Eastern African countries, which was critical for securing their lead.

The election of the Deputy Chairperson of the Commission (TCP) was also notably competitive. The Algerian president's strategy of building bilateral lobbying proved decisive in this closely contested election, given the thigh gap in competencies between herself and the Moroccan candidate.

¹ African Union, (2025)



2. Managing Peace and Security on the Continent

The AU's focus on peace and security remains a pressing concern, as evidenced by discussions surrounding the situation in Sudan and other crises.

3. Reform Process and Representation

Reform processes have regained interest among the AU leadership, with the assembly deciding to establish an oversight committee for reform. The committee is composed of Kenya and five members of the group, including Angola as the Chair. There is also a summit scheduled for July. On the other hand, we can also see changes in the organizational and power dynamics of the AU, with a rise of young professionals and the increased representation of particular geographical regions/groups such as North Africa.

4. Key Focus Points for the New Commissioners

Commissioners should adopt an **anticipatory** approach rather than a reactive crisis management. Focusing on peace dialogues and long-term governance challenges in Africa is key. For that, addressing representation issues to manage Africa's diversity as a strength is very important.

Moreover, Africa, being largely agricultural, must prioritize agricultural resources to ensure food sufficiency and economic stability, which can directly lead to the prevention of instability in the region.

5. Youth Participation in Governance and Connecting the AU to the local population

Although there is a systematic **effort to involve people in all aspects of society**, engagement remains insufficient. This can be improved by keeping more young people in school and facilitating their participation in democratic processes. To improve trust among the local population, it is important for the AU to eliminate its image as an institution for the "political elite" by focusing on strengthening ties between the AU and the local public

The seminar also reflected on the 2025 African Union theme, titled "**Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations**", which aims to address historical injustices, including the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, and genocide².

• Moral and Historical Justification for Reparations:

- Reparations are owed to Africa on **moral grounds**, as other groups, such as the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, have received compensation.
- The **Abuja Declaration** acknowledged this debt but failed to define what reparations truly meant (whether acknowledgement, financial compensation, or institutional mechanisms).
- The **diaspora played a key role** in reviving the debate, particularly through US-based civil society organisations that linked reparations to **racial justice and healing**.

There is still no unified African position on reparations, and the AU lacks a clear strategy. Financial compensation is key, but there is no consensus on how to define reparations for what mechanism should be used for their implementation.

² African Union, (2025)

- **Key Steps:**

- A **Committee of Experts** that includes eminent African figures needs to be established, to define reparations under international law and ensure non-repetition of historical injustices.
- The creation of a **Global Reparations Fund** to finance reparations efforts.
- Ensuring that reparations are **not just about financial payouts** for the African diaspora but also about justice and repair for the continent itself.
- Addressing colonial-era divisions, which continue to fuel conflicts in Africa.
- Ensuring African representation at the UN Security Council as part of global justice efforts.
- Moving away from external categorizations (such as “Anglo-Saxon” or “Francophone” which are remnants of colonial rule).

- **Potential Success and Challenges:**

- Success depends on **political will**: if decision-making bodies such as the PRC (Permanent Representative Committee) and AU Assembly grant the reparations commissions real authority and resources, then an effective strategy can be designed and executed.
- Without **financial backing from member states**, the movement could collapse.
- **Civil society and academic engagement** is important: reparations should benefit citizens, not be a politically driven initiative. The voices of civil society organizations and academics must be included.

Conclusion

The AU leadership summit highlighted critical issues concerning leadership transitions, peace and security management, and the need for reform and reparations. Moving forward, the AU must foster a more inclusive approach, prioritize the involvement of youth and marginalized groups, and define clear strategies to address historical injustices and governance challenges.

Sources

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