



European Economic and Social Committee  
Specialised Section for external relations

## The role of civil society in a changing environment

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*Speech by*

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Check Against Delivery

Co-Presidents,  
Members of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me and my colleagues from the European Economic and Social Committee and ACP civil society representatives to participate in this 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly here in Togo.

In addition to our participation in these meetings, we have been able to see first-hand some of the development projects funded by the EU and hand the positive developments that are taking place in Togo. We want to extend our appreciation to Commissioner Pieblags and the EU delegation for this.

On Monday, in the margins of the Assembly meetings, our delegation met with Togolese representatives of civil society organisations which included trade unionists, the National Employers Council and NGOs ranging from women to environment organisations. The aim of this meeting was to gain a better understanding of their working environment, challenges and prospects. There was a dramatic prelude to the meeting, as the First Vice President of the National Assembly of Togo, refused to allow the trade union representatives access to the building. His strong reaction appeared to confirm the briefing I received that "*since the adoption of a new labour code and a memorandum of understanding in 2006, there has been virtually no progress in social dialogue*". Let me take this opportunity to thank the JPA Secretariat for their intervention and attempts to calm the situation and for arranging for the meeting to be transferred to the other building.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the meeting started with the Togolese civil society representatives venting their frustration at a range of issues from the attempt to exclude them from the meeting to their feeling of being ignored both by the Togolese authorities and the European Delegation.

We eventually started to discuss some substantive issues. These organisations explained that as a result of nearly 15 years of conflict they have been severely weakened and need assistance with capacity building so they can rebuild their structures and strengthen their professionalism and networks. They acknowledged the progress that Togo has achieved over the past three years however they feel

that for long-term sustainable development to be achieved, economic sectors need to be improved in order to create jobs and reduce poverty, and this would not be possible without a participative approach that includes social and civil dialogue. Yesterday the Prime Minister of Togo gave a positive response to the question on social dialogue which paradoxically appears to contradict the briefing the European Economic and Social Committee received from the International Employers organisation and the International Trade Union Confederation. While we cannot explain this contradiction, our committee are willing to assist in bridging the gap. Yesterday the parliamentarian from Mauritius offered to share the experiences of her country and maybe this could include this country's experience of social dialogue and its participative approach.

The EU, whose Member States has a long-history of social and civil dialogue and is also the biggest donor, can also share its experience and facilitate the progress towards the participatory approach in Togo.

Following the meeting, I was approached by the representative from the Women's Rights and Democracy Think Tank, concerned that there will be a low turnout of women voters at the legislative elections next year, given Togo's recent history, unless positive action is taken to encourage especially women from rural areas to participate. I told her about the Women's Forum event I attended, giving her the briefest of summaries about the excellent and thought-provoking topic and debate. I promised that I would raise her concerns during my contribution and hope one of the outcomes from Saturday's event will be the monitoring of proportion of women voters as an indication of positive conflict resolution.

(Changing topics) In May this year, the EESC organised a high level conference on *"Food for everyone towards a global deal"*, at the request of the French Presidency. The conclusions of the conference were submitted as civil society's input to the G20 discussions on food security.

The current food crisis in the horn of Africa shows once again the need to put food security on the top of the international development policy agenda so that hunger and famine can be eradicated.

The proposal of the World Food Programme to set up an emergency food reserve system could in the Committee's point of view be a short term solution to alleviate the most acute crisis, but the long term solution must lie in the development of an effective, local and sustainable food production.

We welcome that the resolution on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa, calls on African governments to meet their commitments to allocate at least 10% of their national budgets to agriculture. This should include guarantee access to land for small farmers, access to training and credit and the investment in water irrigation systems and storage facilities to farming communities or cooperatives.

The development of national food production should be the cornerstone of national policies in developing countries. They should have their own national agricultural policy, which would lay the ground for organising the supply of food for its citizens.

In this context I come back to the importance of the participatory approach and involving civil society, in this case farmer organisations, when developing national policies on agriculture and food security.

Finally, what we need today is a sustainable and inclusive growth agenda. This simply means that people should be able to participate in, and benefit from, wealth created by their countries.

Another fundamental part for creating sustainable growth is the access to sustainable energy for all citizens. Access to reliable and stable priced energy resources is a driver for poverty eradication, vital for health, education, agricultural and economic development.

I believe that also in this area, innovative and local solutions, is the way to go forward, at least as a first step before more substantial energy supply production systems can be set up.

I am very pleased that the EU is taking its responsibility to act in order to achieve these important goals, developed in the recent published "Agenda for Change".

The EESC and its counterparts will also continue to contribute to face these challenges in its scope of action:

Supporting and strengthening civil society in order to create a more inclusive and just world.

Thank you for your attention.