

**An analytical study issued by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights  
on the sidelines of the U.S.-Africa Summit**

**Participation of Civil Society in the U.S. Africa Leaders' Summit:**

**Gains and Challenges**

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## Background

The U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit, from December 13-15 in Washington DC, highlighted the importance of US-African relations and increasing cooperation on common priorities, in addition to the presence of 50 African heads of various governments.

On the sidelines of that Summit, the "**Civil Society Organizations Forum**", which discusses the pivotal role of African civil society in measuring the extent to which laws, reforms, and policies are implemented by African governments and the policies, was held. The role of the United States of America and its agencies in supporting African development policies over the past years, strengthening national economies, achieving sustainable development and promoting human rights was stressed. Besides, the endeavors of the US government in cooperation with African civil society, in highlighting key axes such as education, health, gender equality, access to healthy and clean water, and climate was underlined.

Within the framework of its interest in strengthening partnerships between civil society organizations and its belief in the role of these partnerships in promoting human rights and accelerating development agendas, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights issues an analytical study on the feasibility of the "Civil Society Organizations Forum" held on the sidelines of the Summit, and proposals for developing its work in the future.**

## First: Background on the Second US-Africa Leaders' Summit

From December 13 to 15, 2022, the US administration, under the leadership of President of the United States of America Joseph Biden, held the "**Second U.S.-Africa Leader's Summit**" in Washington, D.C., with the participation of leaders from all over the African continent. Representatives of about 50 African countries, including heads of state and government, civil society and the private sector, as well as officials of the US administration and the African Union Commission attended the three-day event.

This is the second summit after the first one held under the leadership of former US President Barack Obama, in Washington, D.C. from 4 to 6 August 2014, which focused mainly on trade, investment and security in the continent.<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted that this Summit comes in wake of the United States' support of declaring the African Union a permanent member of the Group of Twenty (G20), which is an aspiration that African countries have always aimed for. The Summit discussed

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<sup>1</sup> Obama white house, **Statement by the Chair of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit**, August 06, 2014, <https://bit.ly/3FZ0zFu>

ways to enhance peace and security in the African continent and to provide American support to the countries of the continent, in order to achieve security and stability and support good governance.<sup>2</sup>

## Objectives of the Second African-American Summit

The Summit was aimed at demonstrating the United States' enduring commitment to Africa, emphasizing the importance of US-African relations, and increasing cooperation on common priorities. In fact, the Summit comes against the background of the **new US strategy** towards sub-Saharan Africa, which was issued about three months ago (August 2022). The US acknowledged that sub-Saharan Africa is crucial to advancing its global priority, being one of the world's fastest-growing countries in terms of population, the largest free trade areas, the most diverse ecosystems and one of the largest regional voting groups in the United Nations. The strategy also recasts the importance of the region to the national security interests of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

## The Main Axes of the Summit and their Relationship to Human Rights Agendas in Africa

The Summit included a set of axes that are clearly related to the reality of human rights on the African continent and the priorities that African governments are interested in regarding the human rights file. In fact, those axes were discussed as a series of forums, and they are; the African and Diaspora Young Leaders Forum, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Peace, Security and Governance Forum.

**In terms of topics**, the Summit focused on discussions of climate issues, what are the ways of a just transition towards clean and sustainable energy, and climate adaptation under the title "**Together, We Build Our Green Future**", to discuss partnership in order to confront climate adaptation and move towards a sustainable environment on the basis of common priorities.

The Summit also focused on vital topics about good governance, democracy, human rights, justice and the rule of law, such as "Africa enjoys peace and security", "a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" and "multilateral partnership with Africa to face global challenges" and "strengthening food security and resilient diets".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bit.ly/3PDushN> الوطن، القمة «الأمريكية - الأفريقية».. واشنطن تبحث تعزيز الاقتصاد مع القارة السمراء، 14 ديسمبر 2022،

<sup>3</sup> **Punchng, US-Africa Summit: Between lofty rhetoric and tangible outcomes**, 12 December 2022, <https://bit.ly/3HJSxBO>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bit.ly/3YwIUMQ> اليوم السابع، جدول أعمال القمة الأمريكية - الأفريقية الثانية بمشاركة مصر، 13 ديسمبر 2022،

All this in addition to shedding light on the African Trade and Growth Pact at the ministerial level, to discuss ways to implement the Pact, enhance economic cooperation, increase the volume of trade and investments between the two sides and support economic integration and intra-trade.

## Second: The Role of African Civil Society: Between the US Strategy towards Africa and the Bilateral Summit

In August 2022, during the last African tour of US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, the "**American strategy towards Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa**" was announced. The Strategy included a set of visions and ideas that would help the United States confront developments in Africa, and thus facilitate the return of this role to the continent in a more effective and effective manner. The Strategy focused on four main objectives, namely:

- Promoting just and open societies.
- Supporting a strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Encouraging climate adaptation and green energy transitions.
- Strengthening democratic efforts and addressing security challenges.

One of the most prominent of these goals that is clearly in line with the priorities of the African continent, is the fourth goal concerned with strengthening democratic efforts and addressing security challenges, being an outcome of the determination of the United States of America to support democracies in the African continent, through supporting civil society organizations, empowering marginalized groups, supporting fair elections, and deploying a mix of tools to address democratic backsliding. The Strategy also emphasizes the three-pronged approach (Defense, Development, and Diplomacy) to peacebuilding efforts, such as the Global Fragility Strategy and addressing the drivers of conflict in Africa.

### Strengthening Partnership between the United States and Civil Society in Africa... Serious Steps

There is a clear difference between the first African-American summit held by former US President (Barack Obama) in 2014 and the second summit in 2022. The Biden administration's interest in **merging Civil Society**, is clearly evident as it recognizes the important role civil society plays in reflecting the views of local communities and measuring the reactions of African peoples towards US policies at the national and African levels.



Therefore, we can conclude that the US interest in Africa has begun to take on a new shape, **which is the interest in direct cooperation with civil society in order to support democracy with the associated human rights and development activities carried out by those organizations.**

Speaking of the actual steps taken by the US government in order to achieve the strategy in general and support the role of civil society in particular, we find that during the U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit, a forum was dedicated to civil society organizations under the title "**Comprehensive Partnership to Promote Agenda 2063**"<sup>5</sup>. In addition, there were preparations and aspirations to strengthen partnerships with civil society, which was evident in the objectives of the "American strategy towards Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa" issued last August.

### **Third: Evaluation of the African American Civil Society Organizations Forum... Key Findings:**

As mentioned above, the second U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit hosted a forum for civil society organizations entitled "**Comprehensive Partnership to Promote Agenda 2063**", which is a joint platform between senior government representatives and civil society that provides an opportunity for organizations to express their opinion regarding marginalized groups in public life, workers' rights, anti-corruption and accountability enhancement.

### **An Overview of the Civil Society Organizations Forum on the Sidelines of the American-African Summit and its Importance**

This Forum was organized by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on the first day of the US-African Summit at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., and mainly aimed at discussing the challenges facing the African continent from the point of view of civil society as a mediator and representative of the African people, and with the belief that the United States of America is playing a greater role in helping and developing Africa in terms of democracy and human rights, as well as marginalized groups.

**The main objective of the forum** is to stress the importance of building future partnerships and making joint efforts between the United States and Africa, as well as the commitment of the United States of America to support the efforts of the African Union in achieving Agenda 2063.

<sup>5</sup> <https://bit.ly/3FWTxkG> تريندز، القمة الأمريكية الأفريقية في ضوء الاستراتيجية الأمريكية الجديدة،

## A summary of the activities of the Civil Society Organizations Forum

Speakers stress African civil society's importance in measuring the implementation of laws, reforms and policies by governments around the world, including the US government. Many speakers praised the role of the United States of America and its agencies in supporting African development policies over the past years. Representatives of African governments also talked about their efforts in strengthening national economies, achieving sustainable development and promoting human rights, and about the role of the US government in cooperation with African civil society, this also includes focusing on basic axes such as education, health, gender equality, and access to healthy and clean water.

The optimism of African governments with the US strategy towards Africa and its inclusion of civil society was clearly and fundamentally highlighted. All speakers praised the role of the US in improving life in Africa and supporting development projects, especially the United States Agency for International Development.

The representative of civil society in the forum, "Hindu Ibrahim Omran" from Chad, referred to the main challenges facing the African environment with regard to sustainable development, especially the marginalized African groups, led by the indigenous people. The representative of civil society emphasized that Africa's goal is a green environment, and highlighted the challenge of accessing green energy in Africa, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups, and confirmed the role of youth in supporting indigenous communities, and finally explained that civil society is a partner in losses, damages and success, and therefore there is an urgent need for their participation in decision-making on the ground<sup>6</sup>.

The civil society forum brought together 200 participants from civil society organizations, to discuss available opportunities, to increase the representation of marginalized voices in policy-making and public affairs, and strengthen efforts to combat corruption and promote workers' rights.

### Civil Society Organizations Forum... An analytical view

In fact, the role played by the current US administration in integrating African civil society, and ensuring that civil society voices are supported and heard, cannot be overlooked. However, the Civil Society Organizations Forum held on the sidelines of the

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<sup>6</sup> U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit - Civil Society Forum Pt.2, <https://bit.ly/3FZgrl4>

African-American Summit in its first session faced some challenges that may hinder its basic objectives, which can be listed in the following points:

**a. Focusing the forum sessions mainly on African efforts and successes rather than challenges and reality.**

The forum shed more light on the efforts of African governments in supporting the efforts of civil society, as many representatives of countries spoke about the role of governments in supporting the activity of civil space, and about the forms of support provided by governments, whether technically and financially, or in terms of their involvement in decision-making. Therefore, the African challenges or the challenges of African civil society were not given priority in the participation of African governments in particular and the US government in general in the implementation of development policies.

During the forum, representatives of African governments also praised the efforts of the United States of America and its government agencies in supporting African development efforts, while the main purpose of the forum is to highlight the support of civil society and its involvement in the development efforts of African governments, especially at the levels of policy and decision-making.

**b. Limited opportunities for civil society representation in the forum:**

During the Civil Society Forum, many speakers participated as representatives of the governments of African countries. As previously mentioned, the bulk of the forum sessions focused on presenting the efforts of governments and not the efforts of civil society itself. The role of civil society was limited to commenting on the words of representatives of African governments, and thus was clearly summarized. Limited expression by civil society organizations of their voices and the challenges they face in order to strengthen their role. This is despite the participation of 200 representatives of African organizations active in the field of sustainable development, human rights and peacebuilding.

**c. Lack of strong and realistic outputs for the Civil Society Forum:**

Despite the noticeable progress in caring for civil society and allocating a forum for it within the American-African summit, in reality the civil society forum could not produce any strong and realistic outputs in order to enhance its role at the level of Africa and in order to achieve Agenda 2063, as the forum sessions were limited as It was previously mentioned that the government's successes in involving African civil society were

highlighted, while no real and realistic recommendations were made to develop the role of civil society.

The US government announced that the State Department plans to invest at least two million dollars to develop a new initiative that facilitates civil society participation in the security sector. By facilitating the development of Civil Society Consortiums, and emphasizing that this program will amplify civil society voices at the nexus of security, governance and human rights on the continent, but without clarifying actual decisions or details about this investment<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Fourth: Proposals to strengthen the role of African civil society in light of the “African-American Leaders’ Summit”:**

The current US strategy towards the African continent sends a glimmer of hope about global interest in African civil society .The strategy sheds clear light on the previously mentioned things. However, the challenges that emerged during the Community Organizations Forum Civil society at the African-American Leaders Summit during December 2022 may reflect the contradiction of US government policies with its declared strategies, as those government policies made clear the limited roles given to civil society even in representing themselves. In that context, many alternatives can be proposed to develop the role of civil society in the African continent:

1. In its capacity as head of the African ECOSOC Cross-Programs Sector, and within the framework of its interest in networking with all African civil society organizations, Maat recommends launching a summit at the level of civil society organizations with a larger space for organizations than for governments, in cooperation with the African ECOSOC, in order to accelerate joint development and human rights work on Agenda 2063 African.
2. Maat association proposes launching a roadmap for the work of African civil society. This plan aims primarily to implement the African agenda and also to strengthen the work of civil society in the African continent to find solutions to development challenges in Africa.
3. Maat for Peace commends the role of the US administration and United States agency for international development (USAID) in developing the work of the civil society forum at the African American Leaders Summit, and encourages giving

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<sup>7 7</sup> THE WHITE HOUSE, FACT SHEET: U.S.-Africa Partnership in Promoting Peace, Security, and Democratic Governance, 15 December 2022, <https://bit.ly/3YwtbwZ>



more opportunity to civil society organizations to clearly express the challenges they face.

4. Maat calls for the launch of separate meetings for civil society organizations only under the auspices of the African ECOSOC, as a precedent for the upcoming African-American Leaders Summit, which contributes to a convergence of views between African organizations and the identification of the most prominent problems and challenges that must be presented to the representatives of African governments participating in the forum.
5. Maat recommends more representation of organizations working in the field of supporting marginalized groups to participate in the civil society forum on the sidelines of the upcoming African American Leaders Forum, led by organizations representing women and children, as well as youth and indigenous people.
6. Maat stresses the necessity of issuing a joint statement by civil society organizations after the this Forum in order to highlight the opportunities and challenges highlighted by this forum, as well as to clearly announce the outcomes of this forum in order to complete the work on developing civil society participation in the upcoming summits. .