A Liberal Manifesto for Africa

Produced by the Africa Liberal Network

Preamble

On the African continent, Liberal Democratic parties actively campaign to promote political and civil rights, develop a democratic culture and ensure good governance. African liberals believe that development must be founded on the principles of economic, environmental and social sustainability. Governments should promote free markets within an overall policy framework that enables all individuals to participate fully in economic life. Finally, liberals aim to promote peace and stability across the African continent, and call for greater regional integration and cooperation as a way to ensure long-term prosperity. In order to achieve these objectives, the Africa Liberal Network (hereafter the Network) has agreed the following key principles and actions:

Political Reform and Civil Rights

The Network believes that Africa's long-term development can only be assured when political and civil rights are secured for all people. Power comes from the people and is expressed through regular, free and fair elections. The Africa Liberal Network believes in the rights of the individual; rights which are not given to each of us, are not given to any of us.

1. Separation of Powers: The different and independent roles of the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary must be respected. Elected Heads of State should only serve a maximum of two terms in office, not exceeding five years each, so as to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of one individual for a prolonged period. The Legislature, as an assembly of representatives of the people, should play a greater role in oversight of the Executive, in addition to creating laws. The Judiciary should be impartial and independent.

2. Elections: Elections should be open, transparent, and meet the provisions of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The Network calls for full ratification of this Charter and the implementation of its provisions, and for AU monitoring processes to be fully compatible with the highest international standards.

3. Freedom of Expression and Association: Free expression of ideas should be realised for the people of Africa through the establishment of diverse outlets for expression, with equitable access to the media for all citizens.

4. Political Parties: There must be recognition of the vital importance to democracy of political parties as a vehicle for the promotion of ideas. We believe that political parties have a responsibility to represent the views and needs of constituents. The Network calls for the establishment of fair and equitable conditions for all political parties to play their role freely and effectively. At the same time, there must be clear separation of the functions of the ruling party and Government; public resources must not be abused to meet the objectives of one party. The Government has an obligation to act in the interests of the whole population.

5. Rights: The Network upholds the protection of all fundamental human and political rights, as set out in international declarations such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly. Liberals are committed to minority rights, gender equality and freedom of worship. It is for this reason that the Network advocates for the separation of religion and the state. Moreover, the application of fundamental human and political rights of Africans as individuals should not be unduly constrained by the state in its desire to promote common goals. Liberals believe that recognised and secure private property rights are vital, not only to economic development, but also to underpin individual civil and political rights.

6. Devolution of Power: The Network believes that devolution of power creates wider opportunities for individuals to participate in local affairs and to contribute to the development of communities. Mechanisms should provide for the equitable distribution of national resources.

7. Good Governance and the Rule of Law: The Network is committed to the highest standards of professional conduct in public administration. Openness, accountability, an independent civil service, and the rule of law are essential tools in the fight against corruption. Impunity must be addressed and those found culpable of misconduct should face the full force of the law.

8. Civil Society: The role of civil society should be recognised in all states. The Network calls for the provision of a legislative framework which will enable civil society groups to operate freely and effectively and promote the betterment of society through advocacy for the rights and needs of the people.

Economic Development

Liberals believe in the promotion of free enterprise and fair trade. The Network wishes to promote widespread prosperity through the development of entrepreneurship and the empowerment of the private sector.

9. Trade: African liberals are committed to increase intra-African trade by easing of barriers to international exchange of goods and services. The Network will seek to persuade the World Trade Organization to allow preferential tariff reductions between African states.

10. Economic Freedom: The Network believes that each government in the region should encourage the development of markets, without favouring particular businesses, in order to encourage individual entrepreneurs in all sectors.

11. The Enabling State: We believe that government has a vital role to play in enabling all people to participate fully in the economy. This must include enabling economic opportunity for all in a diversified economy, ensuring adequate provision of education, health services and support for disabled people and senior citizens; and addressing unemployment.

12. Public-Private Partnerships: Liberals supports public-private partnerships and see a need for governments to invest in areas that do not attract private investment but are essential for the public.

13. Agricultural Development: The Network will support investment in agricultural technology and skills to improve productivity and profitability. The Network will encourage the development of agricultural processing companies in rural areas to provide jobs. This will reduce over-dependence on limited land and rural-urban migration.

14. Environmental Sustainability: African liberals will work to preserve our natural resources for posterity. We will campaign for water, land and ecosystems to be used sustainably; for investment in clean energy generation; and for governments and peoples to earn their fair share of the profits of minerals, through levying of taxes, rents and charges on extractive industries as appropriate. The Network believes that enterprises should practise corporate social responsibility.

Peace and Stability

The Network wants Africa to be a peaceful and stable continent. The Network and its member parties are committed to working with sovereign states, international and regional organisations, civil society groups and non-state actors to end violent conflict both within and between African states. Where conflict does emerge, the Network is committed to supporting conflict resolution at every level, beginning at the local level, from traditional to national and international institutions.

15. International Relations: The Network calls for the respect of international law and norms, as well as the territorial integrity and sovereignty of African states; while recognising the validity of the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine (R2P) that regimes can forgo their sovereign rights if they commit extreme violence against their own populations. The Network demands an end to proxy conflicts and their negative impact on individual lives and continental prosperity.

16. Regional Integration: The Network believes that regional integration is the key to long-term peace and prosperity and calls for the creation and enlargement of free trade blocs as a prelude to ending protectionism on the African continent. The Network wants to unite the people of Africa and calls for greater investment in communications and infrastructure, in addition to the easing of visa restrictions. The Network actively supports the creation of new institutions and treaties which ensure greater cooperation between nation states to address transnational threats such as terrorism, piracy, corruption, environmental degradation and the illicit trafficking of people, drugs and arms.

17. Humanitarian Values: The Network calls for greater preparedness and cooperation in cases of humanitarian emergency. The Network defends the right to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, while recognising that this requires an urgent coordinated response in order to minimise the stress on those affected, the host state, and the international community.

18. Human Rights: The Network urges the further development of the international legal system and wants to ensure that when credible evidence emerges of grievous human rights violations or crimes against humanity, a comprehensive investigation follows, with the accused judged by a competent court. Where this is not possible at the national level, the Network believes that regional and international courts should assume this role. Those found guilty should be held responsible for their actions while ensuring that the threat of punishment does not perpetuate a conflict which could otherwise be resolved.

19. Conflict Resolution: The Network actively supports all indigenous efforts to address the legacy of violent conflict; including attempts to rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals culpable for crimes against their own communities during civil conflicts. The Network recognises the positive impact of the process of truth and reconciliation, whilst acknowledging that this may not be appropriate in every case.

20. Arms Trade: The Network calls for African governments to re-examine their military expenditure urgently and reallocate resources towards promoting greater peace and stability on the African continent, including AU- and UN-mandated peacekeeping forces which can help to stabilise conflicts. The Network urges stronger international action to curb the arms trade which is a scourge on African development. Furthermore, the Network calls on all African states to cooperate with global efforts to ensure greater transparency in this industry.

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