

**AFRICAN UNION**

**الاتحاد الأفريقي**



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**EXECUTIVE COUNSEL  
Eighth Ordinary Session  
January 16 -21, 2006  
Khartoum (Sudan)**

**EX.CL/223 (VIII)  
Annex 7**

**LANGUAGE PLAN OF ACTION FOR AFRICA**

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Language Action Plan for Africa was prepared in 1985 by the OAU in collaboration with the Inter-African Bureau of Languages (BIL / OAU) based in Kampala, Uganda, with the aim of developing and coordinating African language policies.

2. An international meeting of African and foreign experts was held at the headquarters of this regional office from 11 to 13 June 1985. The meeting also included a representative of the OAU ESCAS Department and observers from the Cultural and Technical Cooperation Agency (ACCT) and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL).

3. Four main reasons justified the need to develop and implement a Language Plan of Action:

i) To guarantee the cultural independence and development of African States through the use of African languages;

ii) To promote African unity by developing regional languages as vehicles of communication and helping to break language barriers;

iii) To contribute to strengthening endogenous efforts by involving the people and explaining to them the meaning and problems of development, in their own languages;

iv) To maintain links between Africa and the rest of the world through the main foreign languages of communication and the definition of their importance in relation to African languages.

4. In this regard, Article XXIX of the OAU Charter, quoted below, constitutes a whole programme: "The working languages of the Organisation and all its institutions are, if possible, African languages, as well as English, French and Portuguese. Indeed, the use of African languages in all sectors of activity is possible. However, measures must be taken to concretely materialise this possibility, through the definition of a master plan.

5. The Language Plan of Action provides the main guidelines within this framework that each institution could adapt to its own realities.

6. The Language Plan of Action was reviewed by the first session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Culture in December 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya, which adopted it as an important instrument for guiding the formulation and promotion of language policies and programmes in Africa.

## LANGUAGE PLAN OF ACTION FOR AFRICA

### TITLE I

#### OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES

7. The objectives and principles of this Language Plan of Action for Africa are to:

- i. Encourage each and every Member State to have a clearly defined language policy;
- ii. Ensure that all languages within the boundaries of Member States are recognised and accepted as a source of mutual enrichment;
- iii. Liberate the African peoples from undue reliance on the utilisation of non-indigenous languages as the dominant, official languages of the state in favour of the gradual take-over of appropriate and carefully selected indigenous African languages in this domain;
- iv. Ensure that African languages, by appropriate legal provision and practical promotion, assume their rightful role as the means of official communication in the public affairs of each Member State, in partnership with European languages, which have hitherto played this role;
- v. Encourage the increased use of African languages as vehicles of instruction at all educational levels;
- vi. Ensure that all the sectors of the political and socio-economic systems of each Member State is mobilised in such a manner that they play their due part in ensuring that the African language(s) prescribed as official language(s) assume their intended role in the shortest time possible;
- vii. Foster and promote national, regional and continental linguistic unity in Africa, in the context of the multilingualism prevailing in most African countries.

### PART II

#### PRIORITIES

8. The priority areas that are the focus of this Action Plan include:

**a. Policy Formulation:**

Whether at the national, regional or continental levels, the selection and prescription without undue delay of certain viable national, regional or continental indigenous African languages as the official languages of the State, regional groupings or the Africa Union.

**b. Implementation and Promotion:**

The subsequent implementation of the language policy adopted and the incorporation of the official African languages in the political, educational, social, cultural and economic lives of the people.

**c. Modernisation:**

The modernisation as necessary and by any means required of the indigenous African languages selected and prescribed as official languages.

**d. Mobilisation of Resources:**

The mobilisation of financial, human and other resources, and all relevant public and private institutions, in the practical promotion of the chosen official languages.

**PART III**

**PROGRAMME OF ACTION (METHODS AND MEANS)**

9. To achieve the objectives defined above, the Member States solemnly undertake to implement the following action program:

- a) At the continental level and as a concrete expression of the African Union's seriousness of purpose, the adoption without undue delay by the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities, affiliated regional organisations or institutions to the Union, of viable indigenous African languages as working languages;
- b) Encourage associations, organisations or institutions that have observer status with the African Union or those that request this status to adopt indigenous African languages as their working languages;
- c) At regional level, the adoption by regional groupings of viable, regional indigenous African languages as official or working languages;
- d) At the national level, it is imperative for each Member State to consider it necessary and primary that it formulates with the minimum of delay a language policy that places one or more widely used indigenous African language at the centre of its socio-economic development;
- e) In order to achieve the objective defined in subparagraph (d) the need for each Member State to establish a national language structure, where none exists, or to strengthen it, where one already exists, to formulate an appropriate national language policy; stop here
- f) The absolute necessity that each Member State, as a matter of supreme practical importance, follows up the formulation of an appropriate national language policy with an adequate and sustained allocation of the necessary financial and material resources, to ensure that the language or languages prescribed as official language(s) achieve(s) a level of modernisation that meets the needs of administering a modern State;
- g) In view of the negative attitude generally observed in Africa with regard to African languages, it is essential that each Member State, as part of its

national programme for the promotion of African languages chosen as the official languages, carry out a campaign systematic education or re-education of its population on the inherent or practical usefulness of African languages to combat such an attitude.

- h) In recognition that the formal national education system plays a key role in the practical use of any language, the need for each Member State to ensure that all the sectors (i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary) of the national education system, are pressed as appropriate in the service of the practical promotion of the indigenous language(s) selected and prescribed as (an) official language(s);
- i) Aware that African universities, research institutes and other institutions concerned with the study and promotion of African languages have a unique role to play in strengthening the role these languages play in the daily lives of the African peoples, the need for these institutions to strike a proper balance in future between the scientific study of the African languages and their actual use and practical promotion,
- j) In connection with (i) above, the need for each Member State to render its national universities and other research and related institutions a primary instrument for the practical promotion of African languages, as regards such critical promotional activities, as the compilation of technical and general dictionaries, the writing of textbooks on useful subjects, the training of teachers of language, translators, interpreters, broadcasters and journalists, the production of useful books and other types of literature, relevant to the lives of contemporary Africans and the up-dating of vocabulary in African languages;
- k) In recognition of the fact that to impart formal or other types of knowledge, the vehicle of instruction or communication should be a language familiar to the learner, the absolute necessity that each Member State should, as an essential part of its educational policy, prescribe as media or vehicles of instruction those indigenous African languages, that best and most effectively facilitate the learning process;
- l) In recognition of the singularly strategic role widespread literacy among the national population plays, in the socio-economic development of a country, and recognising further that literacy education will be greatly facilitated and speeded up, if languages familiar to the national population are employed, the advisability of using indigenous African languages as media of instruction in national literacy campaigns mounted by Member States.

#### PART IV

#### CALENDAR AND FOLLOW-UP

10. In order to ensure the effective implementation of the Action Plan, Member States are encouraged to:

- i. set a deadline for the implementation of actions and set up adequate human, material and financial resources;
- ii. involve the main actors in the process of adaptation, promotion and updating of national action plans or strategies for the development of African languages;
- iii. develop appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the action plan at the national level;
- iv. coordinate the activities of the different institutions / organisations involved in research, advocacy and advocacy for the use of African languages as vehicles for instruction, communication and harmonisation of cross-border relations;

11. The African Union, in collaboration with the RECs, NGOs, CSOs, research and academic institutions, should assist Member States in developing relevant language policies, exchanging best practices and promoting African languages for the cultural and linguistic development of the continent.