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PRESS RELEASE

AU protocol on free movement is a watershed moment for Africa; EALA and ECOWAS legislators' meeting kicks off.



Nairobi, Kenya, June 12, 2019: Legislators from the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) of the East African Community (EAC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Parliament, have convened in Nairobi to deliberate on the acceleration of the ratification process and entry into force of the Protocol relating to the free movement of persons in Africa before the end of year 2020. The three-day meeting will look into the harmonization and alignment of the EAC and ECOWAS free movement frameworks with the "African Union Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons: Right of Residence and Right of Establishment" and its implementation roadmap. The legislators will also develop a plan to popularize the issuance of the African Passport, as a catalyst for the realization of free movement in Africa.

Facilitated by the African Union Commission (AUC) Department of Political Affairs, the meeting is expected to develop a comprehensive ratification roadmap of the protocol and provide recommendations for the harmonization of the EAC and ECOWAS regional norms and policies on free movement of persons, as well as the border security management, aligned with the AU Protocol on Free Movement. The protocol needs fifteen (15) ratifications to come into force as a reflection of the commitment of African Union Member States to promote economic, social and cultural development, and the integration of African economies through seamless borders.

AUC Head of Humanitarian, Refugees and Displaced Persons Division, Amb. Olabisi Dare, while urging the legislators to champion the ratification of the Protocol in their respective National Assemblies, observed that a continental free movement protocol is a watershed moment for Africa. The meeting, he noted, is an opportunity for the two parliaments to share experiences and best practices on free movement of persons in their regions, and advance discussion on opening up their borders to each other through the ratification of the Protocol by members of their Regional Economic Communities (RECS). "We are here to look at the merits and how we can move the agenda of free movement in the continent forward. EAC and ECOWAS are the most advanced regions in terms of free movement of persons, through the provision of Regional Passports, and that is why we also believe we can collectively advance the popularization of the African passport because the two regions can attest to the benefits of integration", he stated.

To harness the demographic dividend of the fast growing population of young people in the continent, Amb. Dare further noted that free movement of persons would allow ease of mobility for the youth and unleash their potential as the driving force for the economic and social integration in Africa.

During the meeting, presentations on the Study on the Benefits and Challenges of Free Movement of Persons in Africa, Security related issues that impact on the Free Movement of Persons in Africa, Security aspects related to travelers and the Guidelines on the Technical Specifications of the African Passport will also be deliberated.

In January 2018, the Assembly of African Heads of State and Government adopted the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons in Africa, its implementation roadmap and the development of the African passport. The African Union Commission have embarked on a series of activities to promote the ratification of the Protocol by Member States.

The free movement of persons and the African Passport is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063. African leaders aspire for "a continent where free movement of people, capital, goods and services will result in significant increases in trade and investments among African countries rising to unprecedented levels and strengthen Africa's place in global trade"



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