

For the Well-Being of All: Embracing a New Foundational Paradigm on the 25th Anniversary of the AU–EU Partnership

*A statement of the Bahá'í International Community's
Addis Ababa and Brussels Offices
on the occasion of the
7th African Union – European Union Summit*

Bahá'í
International
Community



Over the past twenty-five years, the African Union (AU)–European Union (EU) Partnership has been evolving into an intercontinental expression of collaboration and commitment to multilateralism, grounded in the recognition that neither continent can effectively address its challenges or realize its ambitions in isolation. A multitude of crises in recent years have again underscored the extent of humanity’s interdependence, reaffirming that the well-being, peace, and prosperity of each continent are inseparable. Against this backdrop, the 7th AU-EU Summit represents both a milestone and an opportune vantage point to assess two and a half decades of engagement and identify elements of the partnership that require further strengthening.

Historical forces have shaped both continents and their interactions in ways that have made it a challenge to overcome power imbalances and establish a truly equal partnership. At the same time, over this period, new opportunities for consensus have emerged, and collaboration has found expression in joint intercontinental strategies, advances that reflect a rise in consciousness of the need for justice and the formulation of new models for regional and international cooperation. Yet, there is growing recognition that the actions taken so far, and the good intentions accompanying them, are unlikely to prove sufficient to meet the scale and complexity of today’s challenges. To understand why social ills and economic disparities continue to persist, even in the face of widespread collective aspirations for peace and prosperity, calls for candid reflection on the assumptions and approaches underlying the partnership.



ADDRESSING THE IMPLICATIONS OF INTERDEPENDENCE

The reality that humanity is one people must be the starting point for conceiving new patterns of regional cooperation. This implies that each continent's wellbeing—its peace and prosperity—is dependent upon, and inevitably bound up with the welfare of the other, indeed with the welfare of humanity as a whole. Recognizing this fundamental oneness does not entail suppressing the historical, cultural, and linguistic diversity that exists in Africa and Europe. Rather, it calls for reimagining the very notion of national and regional interests within a broader commitment to the global common good. What was once viewed as an idealistic vision of international cooperation has now, in light of the obvious and serious challenges facing humanity, become a pragmatic necessity.

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The efficacy of steps in this direction will demand the translation of shared values and collective will into practical measures that express a global civic ethic. In considering the merits of any proposed action, a critical question for policymakers is: Will a decision advance the good of humankind in its entirety? Without full acceptance of the principle of the inherent oneness of humanity, systems of global governance will continue to be trapped in a struggle for dominance and narrow self-interest, thus inhibiting the collective capacity needed for social and economic transformation.

A measure of agreement around the oneness of humanity can already be discerned in the ideals that inform intercontinental agendas such as the Joint Vision for 2030 on the AU-EU Partnership. Notably, the May 2025 AU-EU Joint Ministerial Communique also acknowledged the need to promote “collaborative efforts”, “shared values”, and “common priorities” between the two regions in an effort to protect and promote the “security and prosperity of their citizens”. But there is further to go. As the Unions deliberate on the next steps, they may well consider how their plans can advance the long-term interests of their 1.9 billion inhabitants, as well as those of the billions living in other regions of the world, and how these aspirations can be clearly articulated and translated into action.

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AN EXPANDED CONCEPTION OF PROGRESS

One key prerequisite for a flourishing relationship is an expanded notion of social progress, one which includes, but transcends, increased economic activity. The assumption that relentless growth and competition are the primary drivers of social well-being underpins prevalent approaches to policymaking. Yet, economic and political models built on this assumption have thus far proved incapable of meeting humanity’s collective needs.



Building capacity within citizens and organizations of society to systematically apply scientific, practical, and moral knowledge to promote the well-being of individuals and communities is itself a hallmark of a maturing society, not simply a means to greater material output.

An expanded conception of progress also enables the appreciation of value and insights in different societies, regardless of the level of material wealth they possess. No one region has yet perfected a paradigm of prosperity that is sustainable and furthers global justice—a reminder that progress demands humility, and that every region has both pressing challenges to address, as well as valuable insights to offer. Giving fuller expression to an expanded conception of progress would slowly but surely transform structural conditions and enable institutions and societies on both continents to exercise greater agency in shaping the future of the partnership.

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REDEFINING DEVELOPMENT

One area where a redefinition of progress would have significant implications is in the way that development is understood and carried out. Too often, development has been conceived as a process carried out by one group of people for the benefit of another, reinforcing dependency rather than fostering a sense of agency. Development cooperation has sometimes prioritized donor-driven agendas, with funding conditionalities that do not always align with local needs or contexts. The idea of working together as equal partners, and pursuing “shared interests for the common good of the people of the two continents”,

emphasized in both the AU-EU Joint Ministerial Communique of this year and the Joint Vision for 2030, demonstrates an aspiration for greater inclusivity, coherence, and collaboration. Fulfilling this aspiration will require viewing populations on both continents not as passive beneficiaries of projects but as active protagonists of their own development.

While this adjustment in mindset requires institutions to refrain from imposing solutions on the grassroots, the partnership still has an important role to play in providing conditions for the agency of diverse populations to find expression. This has implications not only for relationships between governing institutions on both continents, but also for relationships between individuals, civil society and governmental actors at all levels. For example, there is a pressing need to strengthen consultative frameworks that enable joint engagement between African and European social actors at various levels, particularly those at the grassroots level. Increased opportunities for the ongoing engagement of grassroots voices in policymaking discourse will help to ensure that policies and strategies adopted at the intercontinental level resonate with the realities faced by communities and societies on the ground. Even more fundamentally, reorienting relationships between institutions and the grassroots can release the inexhaustible reservoir of constructive capacity inherent in the populations of both continents.



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IMPLICATIONS

In light of the above, the following practical implications are proposed as potential steps towards a reorientation of the partnership.

1. ACKNOWLEDGING THE ONENESS OF HUMANITY

Wholeheartedly acknowledging and applying the principle of oneness will have profound effects across different components of the AU-EU Partnership. We respectfully submit that, beyond the adjustments described above, any joint declaration emerging from this or future summits make explicit reference to the principle of the oneness of humanity as the bedrock of a sincere and mutually beneficial relationship between both partners.

2. STRENGTHENING JOINT CONSULTATIVE PROCESSES

To advance any area of the partnership—from economic growth and trade to climate change and food security, governance and peace—it is imperative to establish joint and regular consultative processes through which the AU and EU can regularly engage, collectively and concurrently, with national governments, local communities, and grassroots populations. The goal of such spaces should be to analyse challenges, explore possible courses of action, and provide opportunities for those at the grassroots to engage with institutions at various levels.

These consultative processes would allow participants to see and understand realities from different points of view, creating an environment and system in which information and knowledge flow freely, understanding about social contexts is deepened, consensus is built, and mutual learning between and within continents is strengthened.

This will help to ensure that the aspirations, observations, and ideas of the people most affected by the partnership's programs will remain central and consciously integrated into the design and operation of the partnership's plans and policies.

3. DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE, MULTI-LEVEL CAPACITY BUILDING FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT

To fully realize the Joint Vision for 2030 and accelerate development, the AU and EU should consider prioritizing a framework that promotes long-term and coordinated capacity building in communities. This framework should encompass the development of intellectual, social, moral, technical, and scientific capabilities, which enable communities to foster their own path of development. Measures to assess capacity building should not only be concerned with the number of people who have undergone technical training, but should also consider the ability of communities to apply principles and skills to the advancement of social progress.

In many communities across Africa and Europe, Bahá'ís, together with likeminded individuals and institutional actors, have been striving to learn to systematically build capacity for the advancement of society, inspired by a Bahá'í conception of progress. These endeavors cultivate the capacities in individuals that enable them to analyze social issues and circumstances, to make meaningful decisions aimed at promoting the well-being of all, and to apply principles in action aimed at addressing societal challenges. Decades of experience have shown that when increasing numbers of women and men, young and old, from all economic and educational backgrounds, are together engaged in a collective process of learning and capacity building rooted in action, pathways open for universal participation and enduring social change.



In this connection, the Bahá'í International Community remains ready to offer the experience it has gained from these endeavors as a contribution to the advancement of the partnership's objectives.

The Bahá'í International Community extends its good wishes for a successful and fruitful Summit, confident that the occasion can further strengthen bonds of collaboration and deliver outcomes that serve the needs and interests of all.

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