

## Africa-Arab League of States Strategic Partnership



First institutionalized through a Declaration and Program of Action adopted by the historical First Africa-Arab Summit held in Cairo, Egypt in March 1977, the Africa-Arab Partnership is the oldest cooperation arrangement that Africa has entered into, although to date it has been a partnership that focuses more on political solidarity than economic collaboration. The partnership builds upon the significant historic, linguistic, cultural and religious ties between Africa and the Arab community, fostered in large part by the fact that in terms of numbers, about 70% of the global “Arab” community are found in the 9 Africa states that form part of the 22-member states of the Arab League.

As outlined in the Africa-Arab Joint Action Plan 2011-2016, which was adopted by the 3rd Africa-Arab Summit held in Tripoli, Libya in 2010, the Africa-Arab Partnership focuses on four major areas:

- Political Cooperation – on institutionalizing regular consultations on issue of common concern including peace and security issues;
- Economic Trade and Financial Cooperation – implementation of the Joint Action Plan on Investment Promotion and the reactivation of the Africa-Arab Trade Fair (six editions of the Trade Fair have taken place since 1993);
- Agriculture and Food Security – implementation of the Joint Action Plan on Agricultural Development and Food Security;
- Social and Economic Cooperation – on transforming the Africa-Arab Cultural Institute based in Bamako, Mali to an Institute for Culture and Strategic Studies as well as cooperation in the areas of migration, mobility and employment.

The Arab League (formally the League of Arab States) is a regional organization of Arab countries in and around North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and Southwest Asia. It was formed in Cairo on 22 March 1945 with six members: Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan (renamed Jordan in 1949), Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Yemen joined as a member on 5 May 1945. Currently, the League has 22 members, although Syria’s participation has been suspended since November 2011. The headquarters of the organization is in Cairo, Egypt. The member states of the organization include (Africa states highlighted in bold): Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria (Suspended), Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The combined population of the 22 countries was 423,000,000 (2018) and the nominal aggregate GDP was US \$2.821 trillion. Although often aligned politically, the 22 countries of the AL are characterized by unequal levels of development, resources endowment (namely oil resources that constitute the main source of significant wealth for many countries), financial capacity and political stability.

In terms of institutional arrangements, the Africa-Arab Summit is to meet every three years, alternately in an African or Arab country (although to date only four Summits have been held in Cairo (1977), Libya (2010), Kuwait (2013) and Equatorial Guinea (2016). The Joint Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which is composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all

African and Arab countries, is to meet every eighteen months alternately in an African or Arab country.

A Commission for Africa-Arab Partnership, yet to be established, is to be composed of twenty-four countries, twelve of whom will be designated by the African Union and twelve by the League of Arab States on a rotation basis and endorsed by each session of the Joint Africa-Arab Summit. The Commission is to meet once a year at the ministerial level and every six months at the senior officials level, alternately in the two regions. In addition, sector focused Africa-Arab Ministerial Councils are to be formed and composed of Ministers from various specialized ministries of the two regions. They are responsible for initialing, monitoring and reporting of activities in their respective specialized domains. These Sector Forums are to report to the Standing Commission. To date only the Ministerial meeting on agriculture have met (in 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019).

The Coordination Committee is composed of a Representative of the current Chairperson of the African Union and the current Chairperson of the Arab Summit, the immediate past and incoming Chairpersons of the two institutions and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Secretary General of the League of Arab States. The Coordination Committee meets every six months at the Senior Officials level and annually at the Ministerial level, ever alternating in Addis Ababa and Cairo or elsewhere. To date five meetings have been held. Lastly, the Africa-Arab Technical Committee, which to date has not been formed, is to be composed of representatives from the Permanent Representatives Committee of the African Union and a similar policy organ in the League of Arab States. The Committee is to meet every six months.

Selected achievements of the partnership since its inception include the following:

1. Economic Cooperation: A Consultative Meeting was held in Cairo, Egypt in April 2012 between the AUC and the Arab League to devise institutional modalities for the implementation of the economic agenda of the Partnership Strategy and Joint Action Plan 2011-2016. In this regard, the two sides have developed Concept papers on the areas of cooperation such as trade and investment, transport, communication, energy and migration.
2. Africa-Arab Trade Fair: The Africa-Arab Trade Fair is one of the most successful projects of the Africa-Arab Partnership. The Fair has been organized 8 times and was last held in Addis Ababa in 2018. The Africa-Arab Trade Fair covers 67 African and Arab countries. It is a general Fair, where all types of goods and services are exhibited and sold. It comprises three key components, namely i) A trade component – exhibition and sale of export products from all economic sectors; ii) An economic component: – a forum on commercial cooperation and buyer and seller meetings organized on the sidelines of the exhibition of goods and services, and iii) A cultural component – exhibition and sale of products of culture (handicraft) and organization of performances by artistic groups. After a long delay of nearly eight years, practical steps have been taken towards convening this edition in Casablanca, Morocco in 2014 or 2015.
3. Financial Cooperation – In line with its mandate to strengthen economic, financial and technical cooperation between the Arab and African regions, the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) approved in 2011 and 2012 with a total loan of US\$384 million to 24 Sub-Saharan African countries. The loan contains grant elements ranging from 29 to 49%. The projects financed by the Bank include mainly road and bridge construction, water, health, education, and rural electrification. BADEA also provided African countries with technical assistance worth over US\$16 million during the reporting period.
4. Agriculture and Food Security – In line with the decision of the 1st Ministerial Meeting on Africa-Arab Cooperation in Agricultural Development and Food Security, practical steps were taken to create a “Facilitation Unit” to be hosted by the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD). The Steering Committee of the Unit was formally inaugurated in Khartoum, Sudan in April 2011. The Committee held two meetings, namely one in Khartoum and the other in Addis Ababa and approved its Rules of Procedure. The structure and mandate of the Facilitation Unit have also been developed. However,

the Unit is not operational to date due to budgetary and other technical and administrative challenges.

The fourth and most recent Arab-African Summit was held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea and was under the theme of "Together for Sustainable Development and Economic Cooperation". At the end of the summit a declaration was made that reiterated member countries' commitment to continue their joint efforts in order to attain peoples' aspirations and bolster a long-term fraternity ties between Arab and African countries on the basis of mutual interests and cooperation to overcome challenges obstructing the progress for mutual relations.

Leaders gathered expressed commitment to the objectives and principles of the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the Charter of the Arab League. A strong emphasis was made on trade and investment, in particular, the need to follow up on concessionary loan pledges that have been made to African countries- these had totaled US 1 billion as well as US 1 billion in investment with a focus on infrastructure. On the agriculture and industrial front, emphasis was made with regards to facilitating trade and technology transfer as well as improving coordination between the African and Arab regions.