

## AU Liaison Offices

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There are currently twelve Liaison Offices in Africa under the aegis of the African Union (AU) located in Burundi, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya (covering Somalia), Liberia, the Central African Republic, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan (in Khartoum and Juba) and Western Sahara. The Liaison Offices are mandated by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), and fall within the scope of the Peace and Security Department (PSD). Although the mandate of each Liaison Office varies dependent upon the particular situation in the host country, the work of the offices generally focus on representation, participation and facilitation.

Primarily, the Liaison Offices provide the AU with physical representation on the ground. The offices' regular monitoring reports help to keep the PSC and the AU Commission informed of political, social, economic and humanitarian developments in the host country, and in turn, directly contribute to the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and the overall African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The offices also provide the AU with the capacity to follow up on the implementation of commitments in peace agreements of various host countries. Through its Liaison Offices, the AU can participate in meetings and other mechanisms on the implementation of peace agreements and help provide support to post conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding activities.

The Liaison Offices help the AU facilitate its mandate of prevention, management and resolution of conflict in Africa by providing advice and assistance on administrative and thematic matters by negotiating, liaising and coordinating between national authorities and missions of other regional or international organizations hosted in the region. In doing so, the Liaison Offices typically work in conjunction with or in the support of other regional and international organizations. This is the case in Somalia, where the head of the Liaison Office in Somalia, Ambassador Boubacar Gaoussou Diarra, works in collaboration with the UN SRSG for Somalia, Augustine Mahiga, and the Facilitator of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Kipruto Kirwa.

While the AU Liaison Offices generally maintain a low profile, they offer a valuable service by providing the organization with situational awareness in areas in or emerging from crisis. However, lack of adequate funding as well as limited staff strength thwart the Offices' capacity for engagement. Previously, the Liaison Offices were supported by a pooled funding arrangement agreed upon by the African Union Commission, the governments of Norway, Denmark, the UK and Sweden.<sup>1</sup> Although Norway, Denmark and the UK provided additional funding in 2010, the Joint Financial Agreement was not renewed and external funding in the future remains uncertain.

<sup>1</sup> The African Union Liaison Office for Somalia is funded outside the Joint Financial Agreement.