Tuesday, 28 July 2020 was the second meeting of the Africa-Europe committee and the UCLG Africa working group, which was held to support the drafting of the "Charter of Local and Regional Authorities of Africa for Gender Equality." The online meeting was organized by UCLG Africa’s Network of Locally Elected Women of Africa (REFELA) in collaboration with CEMR/Platforma and UCLG, the other stakeholders of the project and signatories of the Marrakech Pact for the promotion of local equality.

The drafting of the Charter forms part of the implementation of the "Marrakech Europe-Africa Pact for Local Equality," which aims to make progress on issues of gender equality in Africa. The Pact was adopted at the 8th edition of the Africities Summit in Marrakech in November 2018.

The work chaired by Mrs Macoura Dao Coulibaly, President of REFELA, was attended by some 60 members and participants from Africa, Europe, including other continents and countries such as Peru. Opening speeches were made by Mr Léandre Nzue, Mayor of Libreville in Gabon, President of UCLG Africa, Mrs Thembisile Nkadimeng, Co-President of UCLG, Mrs Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of UCLG, Mr Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General of UCLG Africa, Mr Frédéric Vallier, Secretary General of CEMR-Platforma and Mr Emil Broberg, President of CEMR's Standing Committee for Equality.

Mr. Léandre Nzue, the president of UCLG Africa, emphasized the need to make the charter a reference guide for local and regional authorities on the continent with the "objective being to arrive at a final text to be submitted to African local elected representatives at the next Africities summit in November 2021"; this to be achieved by encouraging the continuation of the partnership between the 3 organizations of UCLG Africa and its network, REFELA, CEMR-Platforma and UCLG, and to bring the draft charter to completion.

Mrs. Thembisile Nkadimeng stressed the importance of the continent's local and regional authorities in adopting the charter. "I am convinced that the Charter of Local and Regional Authorities for Gender Equality in Africa is now more necessary than ever, if we want to adopt a path towards generational equality, where women’s leadership is no longer an exception but the new norm. The time has come to ensure the full inclusion and participation
of women and girls in the political and social fabric of cities and regions. Equality, especially
gender equality, must be placed at the heart of all development processes to ensure that
decisions are made conscientiously, without forgetting half of the world’s population when it
comes to making decisions that affect us all,” she explained.

Mr. Emil Broberg, commented on the progress made by the Africa-Europe Committee since
the first meeting in Paris in 2019. "We are working on the same issues in Europe and in Africa
but the context is different. Violence against women and economic equality are common
challenges. As the Standing Committee for Equality, we are committed to working on this
issue continuously."

Mrs. Emilia Siaz, stated, "It is essential to identify the political dimensions to be addressed,
responding to the needs of the African continent. This charter should pay particular attention
to women in decision-making positions and to the future of young people and children.
UCLG’s support for its elaboration will not be found lacking. We also believe it would be
crucial to involve more stakeholders."

Mr. Frédéric Vallier returned to the benefits of collaborative work. "When we signed the
Marrakech Europe-Africa Pact for Local Equality we wanted to commit ourselves together to
carry a message to promote gender equality and girls’ empowerment in Africa. It is long-term
work. You have to be very committed and know how to take the time to build things with
seriousness and methodology. Things are built with rules. At CEMR we have put in place the
charter that helps our continent. I think it is up to Africans to put in place the charter for
their continent. If we don’t put in place rules that are binding on everyone, progress is very
long and very difficult to see. In order to ensure the place of women in positions of
responsibility, there must be rules both at the level of countries and at the level of our
organizations. We even have a lot of work to do on this subject in Europe and it is not for us
to give lessons. It is through gender balance and sharing between men and women that
innovative solutions can be developed. The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated this up to this
point."

Mr. Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi recalled that it was thanks to the efforts of REFELA that the
elaboration of this charter is under way. "We were right when, in 2009, the members of
UCLG Africa said that it is necessary to establish a network of locally elected women in Africa.
It is thanks to the involvement of REFELA that we can talk about the development of this
charter. It is necessary to impose a presence of locally elected women among our operating
bodies through the presence of REFELA national chapters within the National Associations.
For this charter to become a reality, it must be appropriate not only at the level of the UCLG
Africa secretariat, not only at the level of our partners. We want it to be an instrument that
REFELA will bring so that the approach of gender ‘territorialisation’ is brought to the level of
the African Union."

There were a number of contributions from the 1st session regarding the process for the
drafting of the Charter for African local governments, facilitated by Mr. Mohamed Nbou,
Director of the Climate Department of UCLG Africa, who presented the results of the online
consultation, conducted by the REFELA Secretariat team and UCLG Africa: Available on the
UCLG Africa Knowledge hub.
Mrs Olenka Ochoa Berreteaga, Member of the Board of Directors of UCLG’s Huairou Committee, the Federation of Women and Municipalities of the LAC and the Urban Thinks Campus of Peru, welcomed the work already done and emphasized the need for additional tools to accompany the Charter, which would support local governments in institutionalizing gender equality, as lived and experienced in communities in her country, Peru. Where one of the main problems was the insecurity of women and girls. Efforts had been made since the 1990s to protect women in order to make equality automatic. To that end, training had been provided to local elected officials in the defense of women’s rights. A gender committee was also created at the level of parliament in addition to a local coalition to effectively carry the fight forward. Mrs Olenka proposed to create these tools in the area of public budgets. "In Latin America, women are working hard to make gender-sensitive budgets. Now it is more important to support the implementation of public budgets dedicated to equality in order to manage our efforts in the long term." Dr. François Yatta, Director of the Program Department of UCLG Africa, discussed ‘spatialization’ as an approach, “it needs to be further developed when it comes to understanding the problems that exist at the local level, such as gender inequalities.” He stressed the proven economic potential of African women in their towns and cities and recommended that for the next step, the application of a spatial dimension to the indicators be made, following results from the online consultation.

The 2nd session was facilitated by Mrs EmEkong, Director of Communications at UCLG Africa. Presentations and discussions centred around the preliminary architecture and drafting of the Charter (7 chapters). The respondents to the consultation advocated the localizing of gender issues at local and regional authority level as well as action in relation to gender budgeting. Four (4) main support tools are required to ensure effectiveness for both the adhesion and application of the Charter: a practical guide for the application of the Charter; a support and advice plan; a monitoring and evaluation system integrating the implementation of a local equality observatory; an information and dissemination approach.

On this subject, Mrs Helén Lundkvist Nymansson, Head of Section, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) drew attention to the need for a practical and concise instrument for mayors and proposed the separation of the political document from the
Charter. "In a charter that is addressed to the institutions, the decision-making process must be clearly highlighted. Without this there is no democracy. We must try to be as clear and concrete as possible. Separate political messages from technical messages." says Helén Nymansson.

There were a series of interventions from the contingency of mayors that were present. Mrs. Carola Gunnarsson, Mayor of Sala, UCLG Vice-President for Europe advised, "it is important to ensure that the work on the Charter meets the needs of citizens. In this kind of work, it is important to combine the theoretical and the practical side." Mrs Joyce Nyambura, Governor, Deputy Secretary General of the Association of County Governments of Kenya (ACGOK), stated, "This charter should be disseminated as widely as possible through the newsletter... and to national TC associations, to be informed of this work that is being done. Some leaders are not aware of the existence of these instruments. They need something quick and short." Mrs. Ratsimbazafy Sahondramalala Esther, Mayor of Fianarantsoa, Vice-President REFELA-East Africa, pointed out the need "to explain well what is expected from this Charter. To show the objectives, duties and obligations ..." Mr. Innocent Uwimana, Mayor, President of the Association of Local Authorities of Rwanda (RALGA) added, "We should have a chapter developed for monitoring and evaluation. We need to see if gender is taken into consideration at the local authority level. The political will exist, but we need this monitoring office for implementation."

The results of the online consultation were presented by Dr. Malika Ghefrane Giorgi, REFELA Special Adviser. She highlighted that in launching the drafting process with UCLG and CEMR technical teams and experts, including Mrs Jaimie Just and Mrs Sara Vieux, the challenge was how to find a way to involve local and regional authorities in this first draft stage of the Charter. This objective was achieved through the online consultation that took place from August to September 2019, with a level of participation that exceeded initial expectations. "We were hoping to receive around thirty questionnaires given the difficulties of access to the Internet in some countries. In the end, 118 cities and organizations responded, with 96% of them African responses."
Representatives from the 5 sub-regions of the continent expressed their views on the document, with 51% of responses from women and 30% from mayors and locally elected officials. This demonstrates "a parity of interest on the issue," said the Network's Advisor. The results of the online consultation, recommendations from African local governments and other parties interested in local equality, contributions from the 2nd meeting and material gathered from the debate, will ensure the confident drafting of the Charter.

At the 3rd session, facilitated by Mr. Thierry Sanzhie Bokally, Head of Knowledge Management of UCLG Africa, the three stakeholders of the pact decided on the next steps, to set out in a calendar the process of consultation and discussions on the charter with stakeholders and agreed to hold a third meeting of the Africa / Europe committee.

For the Secretary General of UCLG Mrs. Emilia Saïz "There is a lot of work that needs to be done now, developing training tools, prioritizing peer validation, involving national TC associations, in dissemination... targeting other stakeholders. We support the dissemination of this work on the Charter, to other regional sections, even at the next UCLG Committee meeting and other upcoming events... We must develop together a plan to define the next steps."

CEMR Secretary General, Mr. Frédéric Vallier proposed to "continue working with REFELA with the possibility of including the results of this work in the Charter, and at other times perhaps at the EU/African Union summit in October 2020 in Brussels. We will see what tools to put in place for the follow-up of the Charter."

Mr. Mbassi, Secretary General of UCLG Africa suggests 4 key steps. "I am pleased with the collaboration shown throughout this work. Thank you for the contributions on how we should approach this work, enriching it so that it does not remain at the level of petitions of principles. We are inspired by the enrichment provided by other regions. I suppose if we do the same work in Asia and North America we will come out ahead. We need to build bridges with other regional sections of UCLG so that this mutual exchange will bear fruit. For the next steps I propose: The European Union/African Union meeting next October in Brussels. The forum of local and regional governments, planed within this framework, should be a moment to work on what comes out of this webinar. The UCLG meeting can also serve this purpose. I think we need the draft charter by June 2021. This skeleton can be peer-reviewed and in September 2021 we will have a finalized draft that can be submitted for adoption to African, locally elected representatives at the Africities 9 Summit in November in Kenya (Kisumu)."

Mrs. Macoura Dao, President of REFELA closed the session by thanking all the participants and commending the work accomplished so far by the Africa-Europe Committee and the UCLG Africa working group in support of the drafting of the Charter.