



---

Renaissance of Pan-Africanism: the African Union

Author(s): K. Mathews

Source: *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (SPRING 2005), pp. 143-155

Published by: India International Centre

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23005987>

Accessed: 04-11-2018 03:49 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*India International Centre* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *India International Centre Quarterly*

K. Mathews

---

## *Renaissance of Pan-Africanism: the African Union*

*The poverty and backwardness of Africa stand in stark contrast to the prosperity of the developed world. The continued marginalisation of Africa from the globalisation process and the social exclusion of the majority of its peoples constitute a serious threat to global stability.*

(NEPAD, 2001)

*Africa must reject the ways of the past, and commit itself to building a future of democratic governance subject to the rule of law. Such a future is only achievable on the condition that we end Africa's conflicts, without which no amount of aid or trade, assistance or advice, will make the difference.*

(Kofi Annan, 2001)

*The thing we have done today, in this small corner of a great continent that has contributed so decisively to the evolution of humanity, says that Africa reaffirms that the continent is continuing its rise from the ashes. ... Whatever the setbacks of the movement, nothing can stop us now! Whatever the difficulties, Africa shall be at peace! However improbable it may sound to the sceptics, Africa will prosper...*

(Thabo Mbeki, 2002)

**T**he last quotation echoes the Roman philosopher Pliny's famous dictum on Africa: *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi* (There is always something new from Africa). Indeed, Africa today is on the threshold of a new era. From Maputo to Marakesh, from Dakar to Dar-es Salaam, and from Cairo to Cape Town, hope and real success are transforming the continent at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

After decades of stagnation and malaise, a new determination is emerging to move Africa forward, despite continuing crises and contradictions. The latest optimistic development is the ending of the more than twenty-year-old civil war in Southern Sudan on the basis of a historic peace agreement signed in Nairobi, Kenya, on January 9, 2005. It marks a watershed in the history of Africa's largest country. At the same time, it is a continent still beset by economic and social crises. The dramatic changes in the global system brought about by the ending of the Cold War and related events have had a far-reaching impact on Africa.

During the decade of the 1990s, there occurred an unprecedented political revolution in Africa variously characterised as the 'new wind of change', 'a second liberation', etc. At no time since the end of colonialism has the popular struggle for political and economic reform in Africa been stronger than in the 1990s, and the early years of the twenty-first century. From the Afro-optimism of the 1960s and 1970s and Afro-pessimism of 1980s and 1990s, there is, once more, growing optimism about the future of Africa.

The most striking development in this direction was the establishment of a new, improved regional organisation for the continent, the African Union (AU) in July 2002, which replaced the 39-year-old Organisation of African Unity (OAU). This event marked a renaissance of Pan-Africanism, i.e., Africa's quest for unity and dignity, and for an equitable place in the emerging world order.

In the early 1960s, the major challenge facing Africa was to put an end to colonisation and imperialism. The OAU was founded by African leaders in 1963 largely to meet this challenge. Mobilising through the OAU, the collective efforts of African countries towards ridding the continent of the scourges of colonisation and apartheid was deemed necessary for Africa to play an effective role in the world order. The primacy of political over economic matters in the charter of the OAU arose from the general belief that once the political independence of African countries was achieved and consolidated, the process of sustained and rapid development would automatically follow. The OAU was more political rather than economic in its orientation. It was conceived primarily from a determination to safeguard and consolidate Africa's political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The formation of the AU, on the other hand, was prompted by the need to address socio-economic and political challenges facing the continent in the twenty-first century.

Another significant new initiative taken by African leaders was the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) at the Lusaka Summit of the OAU in July 2001. It provides a comprehensive, integrated development plan that addresses key social, economic and political principles for the continent. It entails a commitment by African leaders to African people and the international community to place Africa on the path of sustainable growth, accelerated by integration of the continent into the global economy. NEPAD determines that peace, security, democracy, and good economic and corporate governance are preconditions for sustainable development. It also proposes a system of voluntary peer review, and adherence to codes and standards of conduct. In July 2002, at the inaugural summit of the AU in Durban, heads of state and government issued a NEPAD Declaration on democracy, political, economic and corporate good governance.

The AU and NEPAD are twin plans for the political union and economic recovery of African countries; and to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. In a sense they were born out of necessity occasioned by the end of the Cold War, growth of globalisation and the need for a fundamental change in the iniquitous international economic system. Born of a desire to revive a much-maligned continent, ravaged by centuries of exploitation, oppression, war and hunger, these new initiatives have formed part of a concerted drive by new African leaders to put the continent on a track towards sustainable growth and development. The AU and NEPAD are both relatively new names on the African political landscape. An attempt is made in this paper to assess the role and relevance of the African Union in Africa's quest for unity and prosperity.

**T**he ideological basis of the African Union, like the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) earlier, is Pan-Africanism: the desire to promote unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among the peoples of Africa, and of African states. Pan-Africanism has been a compelling dream of Africans and the African diaspora, for at least a hundred years. As an idea and movement, it reflects pride in the African continent and Africanness, and a commitment to unity and self-rule. Before independence, common colour and shared suffering under European colonialism provided an adequate basis for the

development of Pan-Africanism. Following independence, however, African leaders only paid lip service to the ideology.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the idea of African political unification, as advocated by Kwame Nkrumah, could not find support among the vast majority of African leaders. In May 1963, at the founding of the OAU, Africa was not ready to come together in a strong union of African states along the lines of the United States of America, or the European Union—everyone is aware of the benefits that the two unions have brought the Americans and the Europeans. Pan-Africanism involves a willingness to surrender part of national sovereignty for the greater unity of Africa. The present organisation of Africa into some 53-odd independent sovereign states, mostly small and largely unviable, provides the most suitable climate for dependence, underdevelopment and marginalisation of the continent.

Among the most potent of Africa's development constraints has been the fragility and insignificance (in terms of population and income) of African economies. Nearly thirty countries in Africa have a population of less than ten million. Only five countries—Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, D.R. of Congo and South Africa—have a population of over fifty million. The insignificant nature of the markets makes it difficult to attract foreign investment and achieve economies of scale production, which are crucial for the attainment of productivity, growth and competitiveness in a globalising world, contributing in no small measure to the marginalisation of Africa in the global economy.

The problem of creating political and economic unity in Africa, for which the OAU was created in 1963, remained an unfinished task. Considering the rough journey it has had from its inception, the OAU has accomplished several tasks during its life span of 39 years. Only a few states were independent when the OAU was established in 1963. Consequently, one of the cardinal missions of the OAU was the decolonisation of the continent, and it has successfully accomplished its role in that regard. The OAU has also done a remarkable job in peace-making and peace-building activities in Africa. Yet Africa's worsening debt burden, lack of culture of democratic governance and absence of large-scale popular participation in political and economic life within transparent and efficient state structures, and sluggish economic development, are the OAU's Achilles' heel.

The total debt of the continent which is about US\$ 300 billion and which accounts for more than one hundred per cent of the GNP,

and over 360 per cent of the total export earnings of most of its members was enough to intensify OAU's frustration and pessimism. The irresponsible interventionist politics of the Cold War between the East and the West and its gripping, paralysing effect on the African leadership, deprived the OAU of the political will and prowess to be self-reliant. This made the OAU, to some extent, an impotent organisation. The various plans and proposals for African unity, such as the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA), 1980, remained only on paper.

The decade of the 1990s was characterised by turbulent and crucial developments in African history. Since the adoption of the historic Abuja Treaty creating the African Economic Community (AEC) in 1991, the idea of Pan-Africanism assumed new dynamism and relevance. The AEC formally came into force in May 1994. The Abuja Treaty, among others, recommended the establishment of an African Union and a Pan-African Parliament (PAP). The peaceful and miraculous ending of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 was a crucial development in African history. The 1990s also witnessed the efflorescence of democracy on the continent.

In April 1997, Thabo Mbeki predicted the rebirth of Africa in the twenty-first century. 'African Renaissance' soon became a buzzword for the emerging new generation of African leaders. The idea of an African renaissance embodies the vision of a more dynamic, stable, integrated and prosperous Africa. The new generation of African leaders believed that Africa is capable of being resurrected from the ashes of continuing conflicts, famine, poverty and marginalisation in the world. This vision formed the basis of the creation of the African Union.

The decision to form the African Union was taken in July 1999 at the OAU Summit held in Algiers, Algeria, where the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar Gaddafi called for the formation of the United States of Africa. Following the Algiers Summit, an Extraordinary Session of the OAU Summit was held in Sirte, Libya, on September 9, 1999. The main purpose of the Sirte Summit was to amend the charter of the OAU in order to increase its efficiency and effectiveness. The amendment was considered essential in order to enable the OAU to address new political and socio-economic realities in Africa and the world; to fulfil growing aspirations for greater unity; to eliminate the scourge of conflicts; to meet global challenges and to improve living conditions of the African people.

To achieve these aims, the summit decided, *inter-alia*, to establish an African Union in conformity with the ultimate objectives of the charter of the OAU and the provisions of the Abuja Treaty, which established the African Economic Community. Adopted at the end of the Sirte Summit, the Sirte Declaration became the bedrock on which the AU was formed. The Constitutive Act of the new African Union was adopted at the thirty-sixth regular OAU Summit in Lome, Togo, in July 2000. In July 2001, at the thirty-seventh Summit of the OAU in Lusaka, Zambia, African heads of state and government agreed that the new African Union would be declared when they would next meet in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002. They adopted the Lusaka Decision on the Implementation of the African Union. The one-year transition period from the OAU to AU was concluded with the inaugural summit of the African Union in July 2002. On July 9, 2002 the AU was formally launched in Durban, South Africa.

The transformation of the OAU into the African Union is more than a cosmetic change of names. In a real sense, the change represents a qualitative improvement in the process of Africa's cooperation and integration: it is expected to impact positively on living conditions and, in the long run, lead to the political and economic union of the continent. The African Union is a political, economic and social project of Africa, moulded along the lines of the European Union (EU). It seeks a higher form of collaborative union for the continent. Unlike the OAU, it has the right and power to intervene in the internal affairs of its member states. The AU vision foresees a peaceful, integrated and prosperous Africa, driven by its people, a dynamic force in the global community. In general, the African Union objectives are different and more comprehensive than those of the OAU. The main objectives of the AU, as contained in its Constitutive Act, are to:

- a. Achieve greater unity and solidarity between African countries and the peoples of Africa;
- b. Defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its member states;
- c. Accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent;

- d. Promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples;
- e. Encourage international cooperation, taking due account of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- f. Promote peace, security and stability on the continent;
- g. Promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance;
- h. Promote and protect human and people's rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and other relevant human rights instruments.

According to its Constitutive Act, the AU will be very different from the OAU: First of all, the AU will have a peace-keeping force, whereas the OAU stressed non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Secondly, it will also have its own Central Bank and Court of Justice, and will work towards creating a single currency on the lines of the European Union. Thirdly, it will also have close relations with NEPAD, which pledges improved economic and political governance for the people of Africa. Through NEPAD, African leaders have made a commitment to the African people and the world to work together in building the continent. It is a pledge to promote peace and stability, democracy, sound economic management, people-centred development, and to hold each other accountable in terms of the agreement outlined in the programme. The AU is the primary organisation that aims to unite the people of Africa, whereas NEPAD is focused on its socio-economic development .

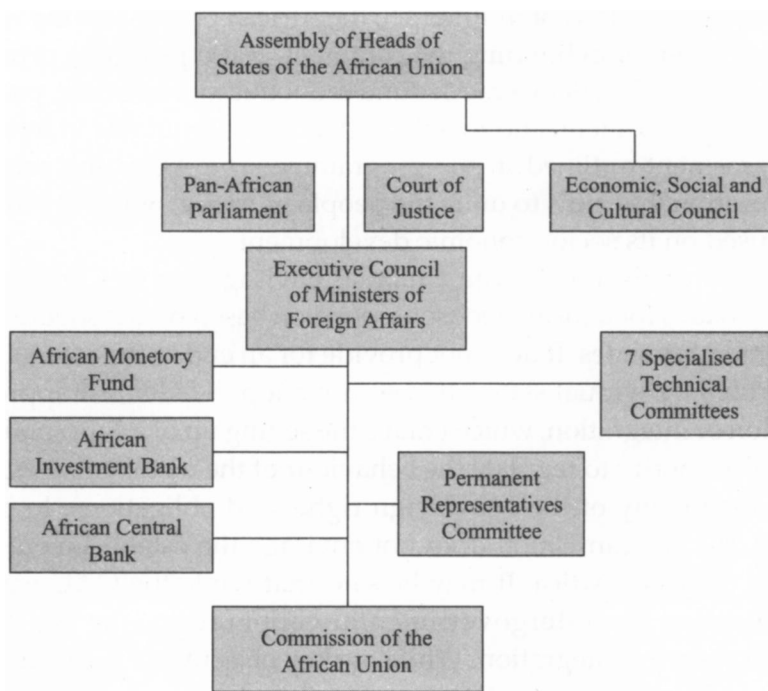
Structurally, the African Union as envisaged in its Constitutive Act, provides for a form of loose association based on the sovereignty of its member states. It does not provide for an end to the sovereignty of Africa's individual states. It does not adopt a federalist approach to union or integration, which entails the setting up of a supranational federal authority to regulate the behaviour of the member states, and to assume many of their sovereign rights and obligations. In other words, the African Union does not envisage the establishment of a United States of Africa. It may be said that while the OAU was an organisation for intergovernmental cooperation, the AU is an organisation for integration. While the key objective of the OAU was national liberation and defence of national sovereignty through collective struggle, the key objective of the AU is to enable Africa to

face the challenges of the twenty-first century and strengthen the position of Africa vis-à-vis the global economy and international community.

The AU also differs from the OAU in other important ways. The AU Act is anchored on respect for human rights and people's participation in the organisation. It specifically provides for "respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance; respect for the sanctity of human life, condemnation and rejection of impunity and political assassination, acts of terrorism and subversive activities; condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of government" (Article 4). These commitments set new standards for Africa that go far beyond those previously contained in the OAU charter.

The AU has a far more elaborate institutional structure as compared to the OAU: The OAU consisted of only four main organs; the Assembly of Head of State and Government (the Summit); the Council of Ministers; the Secretariat and the Commission of

### *The Structure of the African Union*



Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration. In 1993, the OAU established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The Constitutive Act of the AU (Article 5) provides for a more elaborate structure with 17 organs, with the Assembly of Heads of States and Government as the supreme organ of the Union as shown.

The new 53-member AU seeks a higher form of collaborative union for the continent with the right and the power to intervene in internal affairs of its member states. In the short span of four years of its existence (2002–2005), the African Union has made remarkable progress in many fields. President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, the first elected chairman of the African Union, called the new organisation a chance for Africa to take its “rightful place” in global affairs and to end the marginalisation of Africa. Rapid efforts have been made to lay the foundations of the African Union in place since its inauguration in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002. The inaugural Durban Summit was able to establish only the basic framework, including the adoption of the Rules of Procedures of the various organs and the Statute of the Commission, and the Protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council.

The second summit of the AU was held in Maputo, Mozambique, on July 4–11, 2003. It was attended by over forty heads of African states and other dignitaries. This was primarily concerned with the creation of the Union, institutions and structures, as well as the election of the president of the commission and eight commissioners. It also evaluated the progress made in the implementation of NEPAD, particularly in the areas of peace and security, democracy, good governance, poverty reduction and sound economic management. At the start of the Summit, President Chissano of Mozambique assumed the chairmanship of the AU from South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki. Professor Alpha Omar Konare, a former head of state of Mali, was elected chairman of the AU Commission. Patric Kayumba of Rwanda was elected deputy chairperson of the AU. The eight commissioners of the AU elected by the Executive Council were also duly sworn in. The budget of the AU which stood at US\$ 43 million for the year 2004, was also considered and approved.

The third summit of the AU was held on July 4–8, 2004 at its headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It was attended by 48 countries, including 38 heads of state. At the start of the summit,

President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria was elected the chairman of the AU. It took 18 decisions and issued two declarations on important political, economic and social issues of the continent. Among others, the summit made a decision on vision, mission and strategic plan of the AU, 2004-2007. The AU vision is: *"A peaceful, integrated and prosperous Africa, driven by its people, a dynamic force in the global community."* The vision's components consist of "an interdependent, strong and ambitious Africa (Pan-Africanism); opportunities of the globalised community; African values, wealth and diversity of heritage; human and material resources fully utilised in pursuit of progress and prosperity; unity and integration as a platform for growth and progress; and an environment where justice and peace prevail." The summit also approved the Policy Framework Document on the establishment of the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Military Staff Committee (MSC). Much progress has been made so far in the matter of institutional development.

On March 18, 2004, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) was formally launched in Addis Ababa. Ambassador Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania was elected as the PAP's first president. The 202 representatives are selected by 36 member-countries from their national parliaments. The number of representatives is set to rise as more member-countries sign the protocol establishing the parliament. Each member-country nominates five representatives from its national parliament to the PAP, which has its headquarters now in Cape Town, South Africa. Although the Pan-African Parliament does not yet have full legislative powers, it is expected to do so in five years' time when its members will be elected directly by full universal suffrage. The parliament will only have consultative and advisory powers for the first five years. Eventually it will become the AU's law-making arm. The parliament has a vital role to play in the implementation of the objectives and principles enshrined in the AU's Constitutive Act, particularly with regard to the protection of human rights, consolidation of democratic institutions and the promotion of good governance.

Perhaps the most important development in the brief existence of the African Union was the launching of its Peace and Security Council (PSC) on "African Liberation Day" ( May 25, 2004) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Without peace and stability, the main driver in the formation of the AU, there can be no economic development. The

main challenges facing the Council were the creation of the African Standby Force and the AU's Early Warning System.

To be set up in a phased manner by 2010, the African Standby Force will undertake peacekeeping operations, including military interventions, if justified. It will also be concerned with humanitarian operations and post-conflict reconstruction. A key objective will be to eliminate the occurrence of unconstitutional changes of government. If the AU member countries will not be fighting each other, then each country can count on the AU force in the case of external aggression, including internal rebel attacks. This obviates the need for disproportionately large national armies. AU members can also contribute a determined percentage of their annual defence budgets to the creation of the Standby Force. There is a need for effective conflict resolution mechanisms backed by the coercive powers of the African Standby Force (ASF).

It may be said that remarkable progress has been achieved by the AU in the resolution of many crises situations in Africa today—The Comoros, Burundi, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, The Sudan, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Somalia and the Great Lakes Region. A historic final Peace Agreement has been signed in Nairobi on January 9, 2005, ending the longest-running civil war in Sudan. One of the most serious crises faced by the continent is related to the situation in Darfur in Western Sudan, which is currently experiencing the most catastrophic humanitarian situation ever known. The crisis in Darfur has come to be seen as a test for the African Union. The deployment of a Military Observer Mission in Darfur is currently underway in pursuance of the humanitarian ceasefire agreement of April 8, 2004.

The Peer Review Mechanism has been another important aspect of the AU's work. Africa has always been criticised for poor governance, where African leaders mismanage their economies, become dictators and put their personal interests above the nation's. To deal with this, a Peer Review Mechanism has been set up, meant to encourage member-states to ensure that their policies and practices conform to agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards enshrined in the NEPAD document. It is about policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated economic integration through the sharing of experiences and the reinforcement of best practices, including identifying deficiencies, and assessing the needs for capacity building. It is an African-owned and

managed process that will measure four substantive areas: democracy and political governance; economic governance and management; corporate governance; and socio-economic development. It is important to note that over twenty countries have so far agreed to subject themselves to such scrutiny.

**T**he crucial problems facing Africa today concern poverty and lack of development, aid dependence, debt, continuing conflicts, the AIDS pandemic, and bullying by the major powers through such instruments as the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF. More than forty years ago, Kwame Nkrumah called insistently for unity. His arguments were simple enough: only a united Africa would be able to stand up to the neo-colonialist pressures of the former metropolitan countries, and the Cold War pressures of the US and the USSR. Africa rejected real unity at that time and opted instead for a weak compromise in the OAU.

Undoubtedly, the establishment of the African Union offers a major opportunity for Africa, providing an effective and legal institutional mechanism to respond to their aspirations for unity. It also offers many challenges. There are many hurdles to overcome to make the AU vision a reality. The biggest challenge, of course, is the challenge of implementation. Africa has so far displayed a low level of implementation of treaty obligations. This is mainly due to an unwillingness to incorporate international treaties into domestic law and give powers to supranational bodies. A genuine commitment to unity and a strong political will are required.

The AU reflects important positive developments in Africa in recent years, particularly the efflorescence of democracy and popular participation. The key shift is that the principle of absolute sovereignty has been abandoned. It was the central belief of the OAU that nobody should interfere in anyone else's internal affairs. That was particularly convenient for African dictators in the past. Now the AU "has the right to intervene in a member state" as is being done, for instance, in the case of the crisis in Darfur, Western Sudan, and elsewhere. Significantly, the African Union also refuses to recognise any new military government born out of a coup. In the past, Africa has had an unfairly large share of dictators and military autocrats—more than any other continent on earth.

Recent history reveals that Africa has been literally torn apart by a barrage of civil wars and border conflicts. Africa had become the boiling pot of civil strife where governments raided state coffers to buy guns instead of medicines and books. It is laudable that the AU is attempting to make a mark where its predecessor, the OAU, had failed. Much of Africa's problems today are internally caused and, logically, solutions should also come from within the continent. What Africa needs most is a viable continental organisation that does not simply step into the OAU's shoes. As Nkrumah wrote in 1961 in his book, *I Speak of Freedom*: "Divided we are weak; united, Africa could become one of the greatest forces for good in the world."

## References

- African Union Directory*, 2002.
- Aparajita Biswas, "Africa's Quest for Recovery in the 21st Century: The AU and NEPAD", *Africa Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2003.
- Charter of the Organisation of African Unity*, Addis Ababa, 1963.
- Constitutive Act of the African Union*, Lome, Togo, 2001.
- New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)*, Abuja, October 2001.
- Adekunle, Ajala, *Pan-Africanism: Evolution, Progress and Prospects*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1973.
- Amate, C.O.C., *Inside the OAU: Pan-Africanism in Practice*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986.
- Asante, S. K. B., *Regionalism and Africa's Development: Expectations, Realities and Challenges*, Macmillan, London, 1998.
- Cervenka, Zdenek, *The Unfinished Quest for Unity: Africa and the OAU*, Africana Publishing, New York, 1978.
- Maloka, Eddy (ed.), *A United States of Africa?*, Africa Institute of South Africa, Pretoria, 2001.
- Mathews, K., "The OAU and the International System", in R.I. Onwuka and T.M. Shaw (eds.), *Africa in World Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1989.
- Mathews, K., "The Organisation of African Unity", in D. Mazzeo, *African Regional Organisations*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1984.
- Mathews, K., "The African Union: From Dream to Reality", *Africa Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2003.
- Mathews, K., "Prospects for Africa in the New Millennium", *Africa Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No.1, 2000.