



# ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

## Tripoli Statement on the Brain Drain and the African Diaspora as a Resource

### Background

The Association of African Universities (AAU) is an international non-governmental organization set up in November 1967 by universities in Africa to promote cooperation among themselves and between them and the international academic community. With a current membership of 208 higher education and research institutions, drawn from all regions and language groups within the continent, the AAU aspires to be the voice of the African higher education community.

More specifically, the Mission of the AAU is to raise the quality of higher education in Africa and strengthen its contribution to African development by fostering cooperation and collaboration among its member institutions; providing support to their core functions of teaching, learning, research and community engagement; and facilitating critical reflection on, and consensus-building around, issues affecting higher education and the development of Africa.

Among the constitutional organs of the AAU is the Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors, and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP), made up of the chief executive officers of AAU member institutions or their representatives, as well as invited higher education leaders and policy makers. COREVIP meets once every two years to examine themes of common concern and priority for the development of higher education in Africa, and make recommendations to its members, as well as to all other higher education stakeholders.

### Preamble

The 2007 Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors, and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP), organised by AAU in Tripoli, Libya, and co-hosted by the 7<sup>th</sup> April University, Zawia, from 21 - 25 October 2007 had the theme, *The African Brain Drain – Managing the Drain: Working with the Diaspora*. While the exact impact of the brain drain is difficult to measure, it is clear that many countries in Africa are experiencing a substantial and sustained outflow of skills, and a variety of indirect indicators give a sense of the value of the human capital lost to Africa to the benefit, especially, of developed countries. At the same time, the full potential of the African Diaspora remains untapped. This is a topic that continues to attract heated and not always productive debate. What is needed is a fresh approach, one that takes

account of the real situation and, drawing on experience in Africa and elsewhere, moves matters in a positive direction. Therefore, after intense deliberation,

**WE, participants at the AAU Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP), held in Tripoli, Libya, from 21 - 25 October 2007,**

***Noting that***

- o While migration of highly qualified and skilled professionals from their countries of origin is an age-old phenomenon, it is highly problematic for developing countries, where it exacerbates existing capacity deficiencies
- o Difficult economic and social conditions, including conditions in higher education institutions and professional services in many African countries constitute “push factors”, driving out indigenous talent
- o Better remuneration and living conditions, wider career horizons and greater political freedom in the developed world constitute “pull factors”, all combining to draw Africa's 'brightest' to the developed world
- o The “pull factors” are reinforced by the employment of deliberate and aggressive and recruitment strategies by some developed countries and their institutions, targeting high skills categories to facilitate the inflow of sought-after skills
- o This outflow of skills and talent deprives Africa’s people of the benefit of essential capacities in which they have invested scarce resources

***Acknowledging that***

- o There are major limitations in stemming the “pull” aspect of this process, given the increasing demand for high skills in advanced countries and the continuing challenges facing African countries, with the health and education sectors being the hardest hit
- o Members of the African Diaspora dispose of skills and connections, which constitute a potentially massive contribution to the development of the continent, as has happened with the Diasporas in some Asian and Latin American countries, and which they are willing to put at the disposal of the continent
- o Attempts have been made in recent times to court Africans in the Diaspora to return to the continent and contribute to its development efforts, in particular following resolutions by the African Union (AU) to “... encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of the continent” and various national schemes to the same effect, as well as complementary efforts by several international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and United Nations Volunteers (UNV) in facilitating contacts between Africa and its Diaspora

- o Owing to contemporary advancements in ICT and transportation, it is possible for members of the African Diaspora, wherever they are located, to contribute directly and actively to development on the continent

### ***Hereby Call Upon***

#### **(a) Africa's Higher Education Institutions**

1. To create internal environments conducive to staff retention through flexibility in appointments and promotion, remuneration and other incentives, while providing specialised support systems for young academics and other professionals, especially entry-level staff
2. To revamp educational curricula and deepen academic collaboration through staff exchange programmes, curriculum review based on international standards, collaborative seminars and joint research programmes and the creation of endowed 'chairs' to attract and retain talent, including from the African Diaspora
3. To strengthen and modernise systems for networking and information sharing by providing appropriate infrastructure and establishing databases of African experts at the institutional, national and continental levels; creating institutional as well as central websites on the African Diaspora; facilitating regional systems of quality assurance, accreditation and research; and encouraging the widespread use of modern information and communication technology as a medium for research, instruction, and collaborative work
4. To establish partnerships with stakeholders through links with alumni, and with industry, and the building of consortia to facilitate open and distance learning and education.

#### **(b) Members of the African Diaspora**

5. To dedicate themselves to providing positive support - material, intellectual and political - to the cause of Africa and the development efforts of their countries of origin and the continent as a whole
6. To organise themselves to take pro-active measures in support of initiatives of support for Africa
7. To form and actively participate in alumni and other organisations in support of home institutions and facilities.

#### **(c) National Governments and Regional Organisations**

8. To expand the pool of skilled professionals by promoting tertiary education generally
9. To increase funding for higher education generally, while establishing minimum standards for funding higher education as a percentage of GDP.

To contain the “push” factors by identifying and implementing policies for the encouragement and retention of skills

To develop and implement policies to encourage and facilitate mobility and collaboration in research and teaching between members of the African Diaspora and higher education institutions in their home countries and the continent more broadly, including, guaranteeing duty-free movement of research equipment from the Diaspora to African higher education institutions.

12. To share experience of best practice and support the scaling up of promising Diasporan initiatives and policy dialogue.
13. To create national Diaspora Websites with updated data that could provide information for matching local needs with resources available abroad and guide African Diasporas on opportunities available in their home countries.

**(d) Development Partners**

14. To undertake advocacy in their home countries against the selective targeting (poaching) of scarce African skill and talent by developed country agencies and institutions
15. To strengthen the efforts of African countries in expanding the pool of skills and retaining capacity, by supporting the revitalisation of African tertiary and professional education, and funding the establishment of databases of African experts at home and abroad.

*Tripoli, Libya  
25 October 2007*