ANNOUNCEMENT

Background
The late 1980s and 1990s were characterized by concerted struggle for democratization and the clamour for good governance on the African continent (Anyang’ Nyongo’ 1987; Chole and Ibrahim, 1995). The thirst for freedom and justice, the political fallouts from the structural adjustment programmes and the entrenched autocratic and repressive political systems dominant in the larger part of Africa’s post-colonial history provided the incentive and legitimacy for popular democratic struggles in Africa. The democratic struggles triggered constitutional and political changes and reforms in many countries compelling the holding of elections and granting of civil and political freedom (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Bujra and Adejumobi, 2002). Between 1996 and 2006, 44 elections were conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa, and between 2005 and 2007, 26 presidential and 28 parliamentary elections were held in Africa (UNECA, 2009: 17).

The democratic process has taken different turns and trajectories in different countries, with different levels of progress. While elections have become more regular, and other components of liberal democracy relatively improved compared to the situation that obtained two decades ago, the quality of democracy and governance remains suspect in many countries. Strengthening democratic governance in terms of the building of democratic institutions and the capacity of the state to manage the political and economic processes of society for developmental purposes remains a major challenge for many African countries. Indeed, some scholars argue that the quality of governance in Africa is receding, and that the democratic project on the continent is not only being questioned, but has also become endangered. There is therefore a need to reflect on the progress, challenges, and prospects of the democracy and governance project in Africa.

Apart from the process issues involved in the development of democracy in Africa, there is also the need to revisit and interrogate the theoretical discourse on the democracy project in Africa in the interface between democracy, institution building and development; the question of the democratic developmental state; and the democracy and political culture discourse. Liberal democracy must not be taken for granted in
Africa. It must be interrogated in its form, content, feasibility and linkage with development. A major issue of debate from the 1970s, which resonated well in African scholarly circles in the late eighties and early 1990s, was the linkage between democracy and development. While some argued that the values of liberal democracy (freedom of expression, civil and political liberties etc) are good in themselves and should not be forcibly merged with development, others contended that democracy would only have meaning if it provides a link to development. The importance of the role of social movements in the democratization processes was emphasized by a number of contributors to the debates, which began even before the onset of the wave of national conferences that swept through many countries of West and Central Africa. Around the mid-nineties Mkandawire (1999, 2001) and others sought to bridge the gap by advocating for a democratic developmental state. The issue of the form, content and “feasibility of democracy in Africa” (Ake, 2000) needs to be re-examined as part of the charting of the future of democracy in Africa, particularly as violent conflict, and the genocide in Rwanda tended to dampen the enthusiasm generated by the fall of authoritarian regimes and the end of apartheid in South Africa. The transition from authoritarianism to democracy has therefore been the subject of numerous scholarly and policy debates. These days, much of the discussion is framed in terms of governance, more specifically democratic governance, and how to establish or sustain it. A number of governance indexes have been developed with a view to facilitating the monitoring of the quality of governance, and the various reports on African governance published in recent years give a good indication as to where democracy and democratic governance is being consolidated, and where there have been reversals or stalemates. Indeed, recent assessments tend to suggest that there is marginal progress on governance in Africa (UNECA, 2005, 2009), however, there are several and formidable challenges in the consolidation of democratic governance on the continent as identified by those reports. The resurgence of military coup d’état, the rancor, violence and apparent manipulations associated with elections, and the trend towards political settlement after electoral conflicts through the formation of coalition governments all indicate the deficits of Africa’s new democracies. A rigorous scholarly introspection and projection into the future of governance and democracy in Africa is therefore highly desirable and timely.

Focus of the Conference
After two decades in which the process of democratization begun in Africa, how far has Africa gone in terms of promoting democracy and democratic governance? What are the differing interpretations and discourses on democracy and democratic governance in Africa? How do the discourses on democracy in Africa differ from those of other regions of the global South? What are the landmarks and achievements of democratization in Africa in the last two decades? What are the lessons learned? What are the main challenges, problems and prospects? What is the state of knowledge on the democracy discourse in Africa and globally? Which social forces constitute democratic champions and agency in Africa that engage, contest and may invariably reconfigure the political landscape in Africa? How can democratic institutions and
processes—elections, party systems, parliament and judiciary etc—be improved upon in Africa? How feasible are the regional initiatives and frameworks in reinforcing the drive towards democratization and good governance in Africa? How can Africa construct a better democratic future on the current fragile political foundations? What are the prospects of democracy and good governance in Africa in the next two decades of the 21st Century? These are some of the issues to be addressed by the international conference.

Objectives
The main objective of the conference is to have rigorous retrospective and prospective intellectual reflections on Africa’s democratization process and the evolving governance architecture and how they have promoted social justice, social progress and development on the continent in the last two decades. The conference will reflect on the progress and achievements, lessons learned, setbacks, challenges and prospects, and develop policy based interventions that may be useful in improving democracy and governance in Africa in the next two decades of the 21st century. Evidently, it is generally believed that the consolidation of democracy and sound governance institutions is central to reducing poverty, promoting sustainable economic growth and achieving social progress and economic development in Africa. In addition, the state of knowledge on politics and governance and of the democracy discourse in Africa will be captured, teasing out the debate on the form, content and feasibility of democracy in Africa, especially in its interface with development.

The specific objectives of the Conference are to:

- Capture the state of knowledge and of the discourse on democracy, governance and development in Africa;
- Analyze the progress made on democracy and governance in Africa and showcase good practices in the last two decades;
- Identify and review the lessons learned, problems and challenges in the last two decades;
- Analyze the possible course, and prospects of democracy and governance in Africa in the next two decades;
- Provide policy recommendations in strengthening democratic institutions and processes and promoting democracy and good governance in Africa;

Sub-Themes
The conference will cover the following sub-themes:

- Revisiting the debates and new theoretical perspectives on democracy, governance and development in Africa;
- Progress, trends and challenges of democratization and governance in Africa (elections, party systems, parliament, rule of law, accountability and oversight, anti-corruption, public sector reforms, service delivery, marginalized groups etc);
- State architecture, constitutionalism, democracy and governance;
• Conflicts, violence, political settlements, democracy and governance;
• Economic growth, poverty and governance;
• Regional institutions and governance frameworks;
• External actors, aid regimes, political conditionality, democracy and governance in Africa.