

ECOWAS Parliament, EALA Strategize to promote Integration, Trade and Investment

The Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) are collaborating to strategize on how the two regional legislative bodies can initiate active framework to promote integration, through free movement of people in order to grow business, trade and investment in the continent. Indications to this development emerged when the Speaker of the EALA Rt. Hon Ntakirutimana Joseph paid a courtesy visit to the Speaker of the ECOWAS parliament, Rt Hon. Sidie Mohamed Tunis in Abuja as both sides said they are working out modalities about legislative action to promote integration. Addressing a press conference after a closed door meeting, Hon Joseph noted that "ECOWAS and EALA have been working closely together with the common aim is to build an Africa where we will have free movement and free business," adding that "Africa should be one and the two regions can work together to achieve this dream." He stressed that although his region has challenges of economic crises in some of the member countries including political problems, he believed that these challenges can be surmounted through mediation and with the support of ECOWAS via exchange of ideas and knowledge.

Dr. Joseph, who was accompanied on the visit by a member of the Tanzanian parliament, Dr. Mlozi Shogo, used the opportunity to solicit for the support of the ECOWAS Parliament for the candidature of Dr. Tulia Ackson, the Speaker of the Tanzanian Parliament who is vying for the Speakership of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). According to him, Ackson is a female lawyer, academician and politician who possess profound credibility to lead the IPU, which represents women empowerment and progress and an inspiration to women not only in Africa but to the rest of the world. Also speaking to reporters during the conference, Speaker Tunis noted that "free movement, "is an integral part on how we can collaborate more and because we represent the people of Africa, and we believe we can come up with the resolutions that can enhance free movement of people from West Africa to East Africa and vice versa. That is why I said that the aim is to work together for Africa to become one." Hon. Tunis also accompanied his guest to visit the ECOWAS Commission, where they strengthened deliberations with the President of the commission, Dr. Omar Touray.

On the issue of the candidature of Ackson, Tunis, while speaking when he accompanied Hon Joseph for a visit to Nigerian National Assembly said "we are very happy that African Union has already endorsed her. If we support her, we will be doing so as Africans because she will represent Africa."

Deputy speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives, Ben Kalu, who received the delegation, said the visit was significant because it is a step forward in the continent for closer collaboration for mutual interest and for Africa to speak with one voice. He added that in unity " we can tackle problems such " climate change, human trafficking" especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Rt. Hon. Hon. Benjamin Kalu also called for greater economic partnerships and co-operation amongst the 54 Africa countries, stressing that the artificial boundaries that impede free movement of people and goods should be removed. He encouraged Dr. Ackson in her dream of becoming the Speaker of IPU. "We are one people. We must not allow this to fester in the near future. I don't know whether this is part of the dreams of the speaker of Tanzania who wants to be the President of the IPU. These are dear to our hearts, we will encourage when you go back to inform her. We need to get to know more about her manifesto, what she's taking to Inter-parliamentary union. The need to engage the biggest parliament in Africa cannot be over emphasized, we don't want to be recorded as those who didn't support one of our own but we need to understand her vision to the IPU."

Earlier, the speaker of ECOWAS parliament, Hon. Tunis emphasized the need for Africa's integration. He also hailed Nigeria for her contributions to ECOWAS.

"As you know, ECOWAS generally is about integration. To integrate our people considering free movement of people and goods. "We believe that, in Africa, for all of us to come together, the various regional bodies must be in the position to work together to support their trade union. "Nigeria is the country that is leading the region. Like I told the Speaker of EALA in my office today, Nigeria in ECOWAS is like United States in UN. The bulk of our budgetary support comes from Nigeria. That's why we don't allow them to even get upset. When they get upset, we will begin to catch cold."

In her remarks earlier, the member of Tanzania parliament, Hon Richard appealed to Nigerian parliament to support Ackson for IPU presidency. "I'm very honoured to be here today with my colleagues, to campaign for Dr. Tulia Ackson who is contesting for the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). "Dr. Tulia Ackson is a Member of the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania. She joined the National Assembly in the year 2015, and since then, she has been attending series of meetings in IPU and she has had the opportunity to understand the vision and mission of the IPU. She as well understands the role of IPU in the World. "As at now, Hon. (Dr.) Tulia Ackson is the Speaker of the Parliament of Tanzania and the President of African Group in the IPU. "I have had the opportunity of working with Dr. Tulia Ackson for over 10 years and I can attest that she is a very dynamic and committed person. She is a remarkable Lawyer, a distinguished Academician and a distinct

Politician. "We understand that as of now, women have been so marginalized in top decision-making positions and if Dr. Ackson is elected as President of IPU, that would really mean progress and empowerment for women to start taking positions in top management and decision-making positions. "We also need to understand that we need to start breaking the barriers, we need to start challenging the gender norms and I believe that Dr. Ackson will be an inspiration to many women if she gets elected; not only women, but the young women who are the majority, in not only Africa, but around the world", she said.

