

CO-OPERATION

African think tanks join hands in network

SHAKIRAH THEBUS

shakirah.thebus@inl.co.za

THE inaugural Africa Consultative Meeting (ACM) has culminated in the establishment of the African Academic Consultative Network, composed of think tanks from across Africa to speak as a collective on key issues facing the continent.

The ACM, convened by the Inclusive Society Institute (ISI), met over two-days at the Rockefeller Hotel, and concluded yesterday.

Think tanks from north, west, east, central and southern Africa participated in the meeting.

ISI CEO Daryl Swanepoel said part of the ISI's work was around multilateralism.

"The decision to call a meeting is founded in our international work in promoting international co-operation.

"We found over years of engaging the international community, talking from the academics think tank perspective, is that these academics and think tanks to a large extent meet regularly with the international community but not so regularly with each other.

"So we go and argue Africa's position in silos. The idea with this forum or network is to bring the think tanks of Africa together to pre-empt the discussions that are going to take place in international forums."

The ACM meeting concluded with the establishment of the African Academic Consultative Network. It will meet annually in Cape Town to assess development issues on the continent.

Discussions included Africa's approach to multilateralism; its relationships with regional formations such as the Forum for China Africa Co-operation and others; and peace and security on the African continent.

"There is a real concern about Africa's fragility, peace and security on the African continent," said Swanepoel.

"Africa was moving in the right direction and conflict was diminishing, but in the last five years or so, just around from when Covid-19 started, we've seen it unravelling and conflicts emerging across the continent again.

"So we decided that peace and security is an important issue and we want to engage the AU Peace and Security Council and we will be developing collaboratively an Africa Fragility Index.

"It will do two things: measure on an annual basis where we stand in terms of fragility in the African continent. Then if this is the position, we will consider how can we address the symptoms and what actions we can recommend to stabilise the continent."

Deputy director of a research-based think tank affiliated to the Felix Houphouët-Boigny University, associate professor of Economics, Assi Jose Carlos Kimou from Ivory Coast, said: "In my home country we conduct research, we assess policy and then we make recommendations to policymakers to have influence, and that may be impactful on poverty alleviation and everything that matters for development. We have conducted many research and assessments regarding security in the region regarding terrorism. From our assessment, regional terrorism is driven by several factors, including the economy and inequality, natural resource management, religion etc. So in this region, the factor that matters the most is the issue of social inclusion."

ISI chairperson of the Advisory Council, Buyelwa Sonjica, said: "We need to build on what we have achieved here and build unity in Africa so that we begin to speak in one voice. We need to kill the silo mentality and work together if we want to make an impact on the matters of the world."