The building is located in the diplomatic corridor of the city, which links Menelik Palace in the north to Meksel square in the south. A wide tree lined boulevard fronts the building complex, which is in close proximity to nearby prestigious buildings including Jubilee Palace and the Sheraton and Hilton hotels. Along an embankment on the south boundary of the complex are a cluster of lower income dwellings.

The complex currently houses the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, which occupies the new wing of Africa hall, constructed in 1971. (www.addisababacity.gov.et, cited 01 June 2007) Additional buildings housing auxiliary function are located south of the original Africa Hall and are joined via a covered walkway.

The complex is enclosed by perimeter security except on the northern boundary where the landscape drops to create a steep embankment. The complex is accessed by vehicle from the front of Africa Hall. The two pedestrian access points are either from the stairway on the northern boundary of the complex or along the axis of symmetry of the building on the western boundary, accessed via a processional stairway. Security guards monitor both of these entrances.

The building orientates itself to the boulevard on the west and is raised above the street level by a landscaped plinth that creates two processional staircases parallel to each other, and an elongated vehicular processional path. The plinth is further articulated by a central fountain, on the axis of symmetry and two stepped plant beds that flank the staircases.
The building houses an office wing, as well as a conferencing hall. These two functions having different volumes are linked to each other by a wide enclosed walkway.

The building is symmetrical about its centerline, and this axis of symmetry extends from the street edge through the stepped fountain and through the conference hall and office building. The building by separating the two functions allows these to function separately at the same time creating a larger footprint. The profile of the building sees the lower conference hall against the backdrop of the higher office building. The conference hall has two entrances.

The main processional entrance overlooks the street at a higher level. The OAU president and other important members of the secretariat use the private entrance located at the back of the conference hall. The main architectural elements of the building are the landscaped plinth, the strong building profile, the concave street facing glass facade of the conference hall and the tall convex front facade of the office building. The center of the office building is articulated with full height mosaics of African inspired symbols.
From this discussion, we see a number of architectural devices used to portray power. These are summarized below:

- The building is symmetrical about its centerline. This axis of symmetry creates a strong axial view and axial pedestrian approach. This is used to create a strong profile of the building and a strong layering of foreground, middle ground and background creating an overall powerful composition.
- The use of a plinth creates an added height to the building and creates axial processional stairways and an elongated vehicular processional path. The use of the plinth draws the eyes of visitors ascending the stairway upward, focusing the eyes on the powerfully composed building profile. This creates the impression of ascending up to something embodying greatness.
- The processional vehicular path is elongated, and the use of the plinth creates an uphill drive before arriving at the plateau in front of the conference hall. This creates a processional path for dignitaries in full view of the street heightening the sense of arrival.
The building makes use of a variety of subtle mechanisms to make it appear larger and more prominent.

- Firstly the office block uses a convex curve on its front elevation to emphasize its width.
- The use of strong vertical elements on the office block including the higher mosaic tiled center and the full height columns expressed on the facade, emphasize its height.
- The placing of the lower conference hall in front of the higher office block creates a dual focus on the foreground and background creating a stronger building profile.

Overall, the building is seen to use its site, landscape and clever architectural articulation to portray a sense of power.

AU Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

The AU headquarters houses the AU Commission and the various councils of the Commission. The AU Commission sees to the day-to-day running of the AU and consists primarily of office functions including a small conference center. (www.afria-union.org , cited 30 June 2007)
The AU headquarters located to the south east of Addis Ababa near Lidita Airport, in an area characteristic of business and light industrial functions. The AU complex is adjacent to the Alemekange or end of world prison where the former Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam was executed by firing squad.

(www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk.html , cited 1 July 2007)

The 11.3-hectare former prison complex was given to the AU by the Ethiopian government for expansion of its existing headquarters. The Chinese government will sponsor this extension.


A perimeter wall surrounds the existing AU complex, which has three points of vehicular access. The main access point is on the northern boundary, which is guarded by security guards housed in the perimeter guardhouse.

The complex consists of a main u-shaped building, which fronts a square, a tall tower element hosing the complexes vertical circulation and a main conferencing chamber that closes off the square. Although the buildings appear to create a public square this is not the case. This is why the square is referred to as a civic square.

Charles T Goodsell in *The social meaning of civic space*, describes a civic space as a “space that is controlled by the state in which ceremonies are performed before outsiders.” (1981:13)

The complex is symmetrical about the centerline of the civic square with most spaces having larger windows opening up onto this space. A larger volume and a high red pyramid roof articulate the center of the u-shaped building, housing the most important spaces.
The processional vehicular path is found on the west of the complex near to the entrance of the conference chamber however due to the slope of the land, which falls to the interior of the site, this is not visible to the street. A central grass island holds flagpoles with the flags of the AU’s 53 member states close to the entrance to the conference chamber.

From this we see the following architectural devices used to communicate power:

- High perimeter walling is used both as a physical division to the context and security device. This creates the impression of the compound housing an important function that needs to be actively guarded.
- Strong vertical elements, visible above the wall, highlight important spaces creating an impression of the buildings importance.
- The building uses symmetry to create strong axial views from within. The strong building profile is thus highlighted which creates an impression of power to the visitor.
- By the buildings enclosing a ‘square’, it creates a symbolic resonance of public access although this civic square is used only on certain occasions for ‘civic’ display.
Comparison

If we compare the two buildings, we see many overlaps as well as differing strategies on the architectural display of power.

- Both of the buildings use symmetry to provide strong axial views. At the AU headquarters, this is visible to visitors who have gained access to the compound; however, at Africa hall this is visible to all from the street.
- Both create strong building profiles by composing volumes to create a powerful and simple composition. This is used to maximum effect in the entry sequence.
- While Africa Hall uses a plinth to create a presence above the street the AU headquarters uses strong vertical elements to highlight itself above the perimeter walls.
- Both use active security in the form of perimeter security and security guards, however in the AU headquarters the security aspect is greater defined and as such the high perimeter walls and entrance portals become architectural elements.

Hence we see that both buildings, the architecture landscape and site strategies are used to portray power. The hierarchy of entrance and access to the buildings adds to this. Hence, the buildings embody the top-down nature of the organizations that they house.