

60th SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS (ACHPR)

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STATEMENT UNDER ITEM 3 - Human Rights situation in Africa

Madam Chair, Honourable Commissioners, State parties, fellow human rights defenders,

The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) wishes to highlight the gains and setbacks with regards to the status of human rights on the continent.

Madam Chair,

I would like to begin by congratulating the government of Cote d'Ivoire for adopting an implementation decree that operationalises its national law on the promotion and protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). We invite the government to provide the necessary political support and resources to the National Human Rights Commission for the operationalisation of the protection mechanism.

Madame Chair,

History has been made. Cote d'Ivoire is the first country in Africa that has a national protection law that focuses exclusively on the needs of HRDs. In particular, Article 9 of the Ivorian HRDs law takes cognizance of the special needs of women HRDs. This fits hand-in-glove with the African Union 2016 year of human rights with a particular focus on the rights of women. We encourage the Ministry of Justice and the Ivorian NHRI to continue to work together to develop an effective human HRDs protection mechanism.

We urge other countries that are currently developing similar laws such as; Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Uganda to ensure the continued involvement of CSOs and national human rights institutions in the law drafting process.

Momentum is rising for the development of HRDs national protection laws in Africa. Madame Chair, ISHR along with partners hosted the first ever continental meeting on the development of national protection laws in the region. At this meeting hosted in Abidjan - civil society, government representatives, parliamentarians and national human rights institutions from across Africa strategised to enhance legal protection and recognition of human rights defenders on the continent.

We will like to thank the African Commission and UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs for their full participation and contribution during this seminar.

Despite these positive steps, enforced disappearances are still a major issue of concern for HRDs in Africa. We urge the African Commission to follow up with the government of Zimbabwe regarding the case of Mr. Itai Dzamara. He is a HRD who

disappeared after being abducted in March 2015. The government must comply with the country`s court orders to investigate his whereabouts.

Madame Chair, Ethiopia`s state of emergency still exists and ultimately limits the ability for HRDs and CSOs to freely assemble and express themselves. We call on the Commissioners to follow up on the African Commission`s resolution 356 that was adopted at 59th ordinary session and give feedback on measures taken to look into the human rights situation in this regard.

The situation in Burundi and South Sudan remains a big concern. Despite the international community efforts to mitigate the crisis in these countries - the situation is deteriorating. We call on Burundian authorities to cease attacks against journalists and defenders and to cooperate with the UN commission of inquiry and implement the recommendations from both UN and African Commission reports.

I thank you.