

83rd Ordinary Session on the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights
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ITEM 5 – Activity reports of the members of the Commission and the Special Procedures, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

Speaker: Muhammed BAH, International Service for Human Rights (53)

Honourable Commissioner,

The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) extends its appreciation for the presentation of your report and commends your tireless work in promoting and protecting the rights of human rights defenders across Africa.

Since 2021, the three countries that have adopted national laws to protect human rights defenders have set up protection mechanisms, the most recent being Côte d'Ivoire. These mechanisms are a first in Africa, and we welcome the recent decision by the government in Côte d'Ivoire to afford a seat to defenders within the mechanism. Indeed, effective protection of human rights defenders cannot be achieved without the defenders themselves.

As part of ISHR's long standing commitment to amplifying the voices of marginalised defenders, we recently published a ground-breaking report shedding light on the specific challenges and needs of human rights defenders in the island countries of Africa, namely Cape Verde, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Seychelles. We strongly encourage your mandate to continue to strengthen much needed collaboration with civil society in those countries to address some of the issues civil society has been facing. In Mauritius, under the Public Gatherings Act (PGA), the organisation of gatherings is subject to the notification rule. However, on a number of occasions, requests for the organisation of peaceful gatherings were denied on the grounds that people needed authorisation from the authorities. This rule clearly goes against the principles established by the Commission's guidelines on freedom of association and assembly.

Honourable Commissioner, following your call for inputs in 2019 and 2020, ISHR submitted a report that presented a disturbing pattern of intimidation and reprisals in several African countries against civil society working with African human rights mechanisms. For the African human rights system to function at its best, human rights defenders must be able to share crucial opinions and information about situations on the ground. We very much hope that the Focal Point's first report will be presented at the next session of the Commission. The Commission and member States must do more to prevent and ensure accountability for intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate or seek to cooperate with the African human rights system.

Finally, we take this opportunity to share once again with the mandate that we remain available to support their work towards the adoption of an African Declaration of human rights defenders that reinforces the standards adopted through the Declaration +25.

I Thank you.