

**Joint statement by the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) and Centre de documentation et de formation sur les droits de l'homme (CDFDH) at the 83rd Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)**

**Honourable Chairperson,**

**Honourable Commissioners,**

**Distinguished Delegates,**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this 83rd ordinary session of the Commission.

Honourable Chairperson,

1. Since the last session in October 2024, the conflict in Sudan has further escalated, with conflicts in eastern DRC and South Sudan intensifying, endangering the lives of millions of civilians exposed to death, violence - including sexual violence - starvation and displacement. We congratulate the Commission on its ongoing hybrid fact-finding mission on Sudan, and urge it to continue collecting and preserving evidence of human rights violations committed against civilians in Sudan and in other conflict contexts, so that perpetrators are held accountable. All efforts must be geared towards promoting ceasefires and humanitarian access to enable civilians to receive the help they need.
2. We are deeply concerned by the continuing reduction of civic space in the United Republic of Tanzania, where independent civil society organizations, human rights defenders and opposition voices are facing increasing repression. In recent years, the authorities have systematically used restrictive laws, administrative obstacles and surveillance to silence opposition and restrict freedoms of expression, assembly and association. Organizations working in the fields of governance, transparency and minority rights report increased state control, arbitrary expulsions and harassment. The recent arrest and prosecution of opposition politicians in the run-up to the elections scheduled for October 2025 is intensifying tensions and threatening the holding of free and fair elections. These actions are contrary to Tanzania's obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and undermine the essential role of civil society and opposition parties in democratic governance.

3. We urge the African Commission to:

- call on Tanzania to repeal repressive laws;
- ensure an enabling environment for civic and political actors;
- respect its regional and international obligations to ensure free and fair elections.
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4. We also remain alarmed by the continuing degradation of civic space in the Republic of Zimbabwe, where the authorities use legislative and administrative frameworks to repress civil society, restrict media freedom and stifle dissenting voices. The recently amended Private Voluntary Organizations Act (PVO Amendment Act) poses a serious threat to NGO independence, potentially criminalizing legitimate human rights work and granting the state excessive deregistration and asset seizure powers against organizations deemed politically partisan. Human rights defenders, journalists and members of the opposition continue to suffer arbitrary arrests, surveillance and intimidation.

5. We call the African Commission to:

- urge the government of Zimbabwe to repeal or thoroughly revise the PVO Amendment Act;
- adopt concrete measures to ensure that civil society operates in a safe, free and enabling environment.

6. We would also like to draw the attention of the Commission, and in particular the Special Rapporteur on the rights of women in Africa, to the worrying situation of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Liberia. Currently, around 31.8% of Liberian women and girls are affected by this harmful practice. The practice is deeply rooted in Liberian traditions, notably through the Sande secret society, making it difficult to eradicate. Despite its regional and international commitments, notably under the Maputo Protocol and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Liberia still has no law prohibiting FGM, making it one of only three countries in West Africa in this situation.

7. Through its Special Rapporteur, we urge the Commission to:

- support ongoing advocacy efforts;
- and encourage the rapid adoption of a law criminalizing FGM as an essential step towards its elimination in Liberia.

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8. IHRDA and *Centre de Documentation et de Formation sur les Droits de l'Homme* (CDFDH) welcome the Togolese government's efforts to promote and protect human rights in a context of persistent security threats. However, we have several major concerns.
9. In particular, we are deeply concerned about restrictions on freedom of expression online in Togo. Indeed, despite the need to regulate the digital space, we note that laws relating to internal security, cybercrime and the press impose excessive restrictions on freedom of expression. Over the past two years, at least ten cases of intimidation, arrest or detention of journalists, activists and young people have been documented in connection with online publications. The case of Honoré Sitchope SOKPO, detained since January 2025 for publishing a poem, illustrates this repressive drift.
10. We would also like to draw the Commission's attention to the fact that Togo still has no legislation protecting human rights defenders, despite a government commitment in 2023 to remedy this. This legal vacuum increases their vulnerability, and discourages young people, and women in particular, from engaging in human rights issues.
11. We would also like to briefly raise the issue of impunity and torture in Togo. Between 2021 and 2025, through six (6) of its decisions, the ECOWAS Court declared Togo responsible for several acts of torture involving twenty-nine (29) victims. None of these decisions have been (fully) implemented, and several victims remain in detention.
12. We would also like to draw the Commission's attention to the activities of Société Nouvelle des Phosphates du Togo (SNPT) at Goumoukopé, which are causing pollution affecting the health of the population (respiratory, dental and eye diseases), without adequate compensation or medical consultation. Land is leased at ridiculously low prices, exacerbating the precarious situation of local communities.
13. We therefore urge the African Commission to:

- Call on Togo to guarantee freedom of expression online, to release those detained in this capacity and to put an end to abusive legal proceedings.
- Demand implementation of international court rulings on torture and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Call for the rapid adoption of a law protecting human rights defenders, in line with international standards.
- Insist on the integration of human rights into industrial and environmental policies, with the effective participation of the communities concerned.

Thank you for your attention.