

[**African States should implement Maputo Protocol and protect women human rights defenders**](#)

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In a [statement to the 54th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#), ISHR has called on African States to strengthen the level of support and protection provided to women human rights defenders.

'Women human rights defenders across Africa have a critical role to play in advancing peace, security, democratic processes and development,' said ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw.

'Despite this, women human rights defenders across the continent continue to face attack, harassment and intimidation. Attacks against them are frequently justified in the name of tradition, culture or religion, as they challenge the subordinate role frequently ascribed to women in all our societies,' Ms Openshaw said.

Under the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), African States are obliged to 'ensure that the rights of women are promoted, realised and protected'.

'Where women defenders cannot do their work free from attack, human rights will continue to be violated and deep inequalities will persist in our societies. In accordance with the Maputo Protocol, African States should develop and implement gender specific protection measures for human rights defenders,' said Ms Openshaw.

ISHR's statement to the African Commission also calls on African States to show leadership at the [current session of the UN General Assembly](#) in New York by supporting the first ever resolution focused on the protection of women defenders.

In a [further statement to the African Commission](#), ISHR also called on the Commission itself to strengthen efforts to protect human rights defenders, including by endorsing a report by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and by establishing a mechanism or focal point within the Commission to receive, consider, respond to, and report on cases of intimidation and reprisals.