

[ACHPR Alert: a look at what's ahead at the African Commission](#)

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(Luanda) - States, NGOs, and members of national human rights institutions are gathering in Luanda, Angola for the 55th session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, which opens on 28 April.

As the principal human rights body in Africa the meetings of the Commission are an important opportunity to ensure that human rights situations of concern in Africa are discussed and addressed. To that end, in the days prior to the Commission, NGOs are meeting to determine their own asks of the Commission. Several panel discussions are being held, including on women's land and property rights, on criminalisation of free speech, and truth commissions, as well as a panel on advocacy strategies at the African Commission. Discussions have also been held on human rights defenders and reprisals, and sexual orientation and gender identity.

The NGO Forum will adopt resolutions in which it sets out the actions it expects from the Commission. We hope to see the Commission take this input from NGOs seriously and respond accordingly.

Commission must take action to protect human rights defenders and prevent reprisals

This session of the Commission is a particularly important opportunity for both Commissioners and States to take action on reprisals. At the 25th session of the Human Rights Council, held in March 2014, Botswana led a joint statement in which it and 55 other States (including Benin, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Togo) condemned reprisals and called for a more effective, unified UN response. The statement was an important reaffirmation of States' commitment to addressing reprisals. The African Commission is an opportunity for States to add their voice to that of their counterparts in Geneva by speaking out against reprisals. Likewise, Commissioners should be reflecting on how the Commission can improve its monitoring of and response to cases of reprisals, not least through its own statements condemning attacks against human rights defenders who cooperate with the mechanism.

Civil society voices must be heard during review of States' human rights records

At each session the Commission considers periodic reports submitted to it by States. Scheduled for review at this session are Mozambique, Sahwari Arab Democratic Republic, and Liberia. The reviews consist of a presentation by the State with space for comments and questions by Commissioners, followed by a response from the State and the concluding remarks of the Commission.

While there is no official space for civil society in the review itself, it is important that their voice gets heard. In the case of Liberia, ISHR has supported civil society organisations to make a written submission, which the Commissioners can consider alongside the Liberian government's report. The civil society submission includes questions and recommendations for the Commissioners to put to the State. ISHR is also supporting a Liberian defender to attend the session, providing the opportunity for direct lobbying of the Commissioners. ISHR will be following the session closely and we hope to see the concerns of Liberian civil society strongly reflected in the review and in the concluding report from the Commission.

Commission set to consider reports on women human rights defenders and protection of the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly

The Commission's members and special mechanisms will also be reporting on their activities, including the Chairperson of the Working Group on extractive industries, environment and human rights violations in Africa, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and access to information in Africa, and the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders.

A report on women human rights defenders, by the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, was adopted at the 15th extraordinary session of the Commission. ISHR welcomes this adoption, something we had pushed for at the last session of the Commission, but calls for it to be made public quickly so that the important work of implementing its recommendations can begin.

Also up for adoption at this session is the report of the African Commission study group on freedom of association and peaceful assembly. ISHR is a member of this study group, which is mandated to produce a study on the laws governing freedom of association and peaceful assembly in Africa as well as practices that violate freedom of association and assembly. The study group is also mandated to take effective measures to ensure that States take into account the outcomes and findings of the study.

To address this second requirement, ISHR has also been involved in developing guidelines for NGOs and States on implementation of the report's findings. ISHR will facilitate and participate in a consultation on these guidelines to be held the day prior to the opening of the Commission session.

ISHR will also participate in a consultation on the Addis Ababa Roadmap on cooperation between the UN special procedures and the African Commission. The consultation will examine how to improve the implementation of the Roadmap.

ISHR will provide live updates from the 55th African Commission session. Look for #ACHPR55 or follow @ISHRGlobal.

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