

[African Commission designates high-level focal point to combat reprisals](#)

16.05.2014



(Luanda, Angola) - The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has designated a high-level focal point to document and follow up on cases of intimidation and reprisals against those that cooperate with the African human rights system.

In [Resolution 273](#) conferring responsibility on a Special Rapporteur to document and promote accountability for reprisals, the African Commission expressed 'deep concern' about 'the hostile environment in which civil society stakeholders collaborating with the African human rights system operate, and the fact they are victims of various kind of human rights violations as reprisals for their activities in defense of human rights'.

The African Commission's decision to designate a focal point was also underpinned by evidence of the widespread impunity that continues to be enjoyed by perpetrators of reprisals and [responds to calls made by civil society organisations including ISHR](#).

'The African Commission has consistently denounced reprisals against those engaging with the human rights system, and has now backed these calls up by nominating one of its own Commissioners to ensure a better system-wide response', said Clement Voulé, ISHR's Advocacy Director at the African Commission.

The tasks of documenting, monitoring and encouraging effective Commission follow up on reprisals has been delegated to the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders. Due to their engagement with the African human rights bodies, such as in submitting information and engaging with Commissioners during country visits, human rights defenders are frequently at risk of intimidation and reprisals for their work.

'The Commission recognises the importance of the work carried out by civil society stakeholders, in particular human rights defenders, to the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Africa. The African human rights system depends on the ability of civil society actors to engage without fear of attack to function effectively', said Commissioner Reine Alapini-Gansou, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

'By designating me as a focal point, the Commission has acted on the need to strengthen its response to reprisals by monitoring cases and working with States to prevent recurrence and promote accountability,' Commissioner Alapini-Gansou said.

The African Commission's initiative vindicates a [UN Human Rights Council decision in September 2013](#) to

designate a UN-wide focal point on reprisals - a decision that has since been deferred by the UN General Assembly. The Council's recommendation that the UN Secretary-General appoint a UN-wide focal point on reprisals will come up for reconsideration at the General Assembly in the coming months.

'The UN and its Member States should take note of the African Commission's initiative and approve the designation of a high-level UN focal point,' Mr Voulé said.

'Delegations in New York should also heed the [call led by Botswana and joined by 56 States in Geneva](#) in March to expedite this process and ensure a comprehensive, system-wide response to reprisals.'

'Any other outcome will signal support for impunity for the perpetrators of reprisals and a betrayal of human rights defenders and others who engage with the human rights system', Mr Voulé said.

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Photo: Reine Alapini-Gansou, Commissioner of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

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