

## [Human rights systems must strengthen protections against reprisals](#)

02.07.2014



***By Reine Alapini-Gansou, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders***

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has recently stepped up its response to reprisals and intimidation against individuals who cooperate or have cooperated with the African human rights system. In a [resolution](#) adopted at our last Ordinary Session in Luanda, Angola in May 2014, the Commission designated a focal point to document, report and follow up on alleged cases of reprisal. As the Commission's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, I am honoured that the Chair of the Commission has charged me with this task.

Human rights defenders across the continent experience a range of threats and attacks as they carry out their vital work to promote human rights, democracy, development and the rule of law. The Commission's recently adopted report on the situation of women human rights defenders has underlined the vulnerability of defenders, and the need for States to implement their obligations to enable and safeguard their work. Where individuals - whether victims of violations, defenders, or other civil society actors - approach the Commission to provide information, or to seek protection and justice denied them at national level, it is utterly unacceptable that they or family members should face attack for doing so.

In September last year, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution calling on the Secretary-General to designate a focal point on reprisals within UN structures - a resolution that is yet to be implemented. Meanwhile, individuals who engage with the UN have faced attack and intimidation and continue to do so. It is evident that the UN needs to do more to effectively prevent and address reprisals and intimidation. Individuals and groups using all human rights systems should be protected from reprisals. Human rights mechanisms have a responsibility to do everything possible to contest these attacks and threats, which are, in effect, an attack against the human rights system itself.

I am very pleased that the African Commission has taken this important step to ensure we can respond more effectively to reprisals, and to support defenders and others who provide the Commission with vital

information. I look forward to seeing similar initiatives emerge in other human rights systems, as we work together to protect those who courageously shine light on human rights violations and abuses worldwide.

*Reine Alapini-Gansou is the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and was recently appointed by that Commission as a focal point on reprisals. She is also a member of the ISHR Board.*

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