

Human rights defenders urge African Commission to strengthen its response to reprisals

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(Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire) - Human rights defenders from the African region provided concrete inputs to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to better enable any individual or organisation seeking to engage with the African human rights system to do so without hindrance, insecurity, intimidation or reprisal.



In a unique opportunity on 12-13 February, human rights defenders from more than 10 countries across Africa, including focal points of sub-regional human rights defenders networks, engaged in a consultation with the African Commission's Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Ms Reine Alapini-Gansou. The event was co-organised by ISHR, the office of the African Commission Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, the Côte d'Ivoire Human Rights Defenders Network and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defender Project.

'Together with the Special Rapporteur, who is mandated by the African Commission to be the focal point on reprisals, we identified key action points on how to most effectively respond to allegations of reprisals when they occur,' said Ms Roselyn Hanzi from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights.

'During the consultations participants identified the need to clarify and strengthen the process of submission

of information on intimidation and reprisals, as well as the interaction with the Special Rapporteur for assistance on the prevention of reprisals. For instance, a set of guidelines on how to effectively communicate allegations of reprisals with the Special Rapporteur would be useful,' said Mr Clement Voulé, Programme Manager at ISHR.

'The participants also examined procedures for effective engagement on reprisals with the African Commission as a whole as well as the international human rights system,' Mr Voulé added.

'Resolution 273 of the African Commission expanded the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders to include a focus on cases of reprisals against anyone engaging with the African human rights system. The importance of this new function is critical. Whilst some limited progress has been made at the UN level to begin addressing the issue of reprisals against HRDs, this consultation marks the first concrete step towards establishing an African-specific protocol," said Mr Hassan Shire, EHAHRDP's Executive Director and Pan African Human Rights Defenders Networks' Chairperson.

'The consultations were particularly significant as they went beyond reprisals, to considering the procedures of the African Commission more generally. The need for further strengthening and capacity building of civil society to enhance interaction with the African Commission remains crucial,' said Ms Reine Alapini-Gansou. 'Such types of consultations are very positive and constructive', she added, saying 'this collaboration between the African Commission's experts and African civil society should continue'.

'It is important that civil society maintain the momentum generated by this consultation to ensure that the African Commission's focal point on reprisals is effective, responsive and accessible to anyone subject to threats, intimidation and attacks in relation to their cooperation with the African human rights system' said Mr Voulé.

Those who wish to provide written inputs to the Special Rapporteur do so at the following email address: rsddh.achpr@gmail.com.

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