ACHPR Alert: Previewing the 57th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights

29.10.2015

Banjul, The Gambia - The 57th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Commission) will be held in Banjul, The Gambia from 4 to 11 and 18 November 2015. The Commission will be preceded by the NGO Forum and the 31st African Human Rights Book Fair, which will take place from 31 October to 2 November.

This Alert outlines the key panel discussions, activity reports of Members of the Commission and ISHR advocacy priority areas for the session.

State Periodic Reports

There are four state periodic reports that will be considered during this session: Sierra Leone, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Algeria.

For Sierra Leone, the review will be based on its first ever State periodic report, submitted to the ACHPR in 2013.

Kenya submitted a combined eighth to eleventh period report in March 2015, covering the period from 2008 to September 2014. Kenya’s report is of particular interest due to the gross human rights violations that were perpetrated in the wake of the 27 December 2007 Presidential and Legislative Elections.

Burkina Faso’s review will look at the third and fourth periodic report covering 2011 to 2015. It will be presented by the current transitional government; as of 30 October 2014, the country has been undergoing political transition after the former dictator, Blaise Campaoré, was withdrawn by popular revolution - events which caused many deaths and injuries. The review will largely focus on human rights violations and accountability concerns during this period.

Finally, Algeria’s fifth and sixth periodic report covering 2010 - 2014 will be considered. The low level of commitment and political will to uphold and promote human rights in Algeria has been a growing concern to the Commission.

To contribute towards some of the above-mentioned state reviews, ISHR has produced briefing papers highlighting concerns and recommendations highlighting the plight of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Sierra Leone, Kenya and Burkina Faso (these will be made publicly available in the coming days).
Panel Discussions

NGO Forum

The NGO Forum will feature 10 panel discussions, focusing on a range of topics such as electoral processes in Africa, the reinstatement of the SADC Tribunal, and poverty on the continent. Of the discussions, ISHR will follow closely:

- **2016: African Year of Human Rights, with focus on the Rights of Women** (Panel 1): Saturday 31 October at 10.30am
- **Update from Sub-regional Focal Points on Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Africa** (Panel 2): Saturday 31 October at 11.30am
- **Engagement with the African Commission on Reprisals** (Panel 6): Sunday 1 November at 10.15am
- **Addressing Laws Restricting Civil Society Space in Africa - Challenges, Opportunities, Lessons Learnt: Role of Stakeholders** (Panel 8): Monday 2 November at 09.10am
- **Preserving the ACHPR independence in fulfilling its mandate: Revisiting the relationships between the ACHPR and the AU Political Organs** (Panel 10): Monday 2 November at 12:00.

African Commission session

There are three panel discussions scheduled for the session:

- **State Reporting Guidelines under the Maputo Protocol - Item 5**: Saturday 7 November
- **Update on the Preparation of the Celebration of 2016 as African Year of Human Rights with Special Focus on Women’s Rights - Item 7**: Saturday 7 November
- **Panel on Complementarity Between International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law - Item 10**: Monday 9 November

**ISHR’s advocacy priority areas during the 57th session**

**Reprisals**

During the 55th Ordinary Session in Angola, the African Commission adopted ACHPR/Res. 273, which extended the scope of the Special Rapporteur of Human Rights Defenders in Africa’s mandate to include issues relating to reprisals against human rights defenders. ISHR will advocate for the protection of defenders by strengthening and supporting the mandate of the Special Rapporteur during this session.

ISHR’s advocacy will include the organisation of a panel discussion during the NGO Forum entitled ‘Engagement with the African Commission’s Focal Point on Reprisals.’ The Focal Point on Reprisals, Ms Reine Alapini-Gansou, will present a draft policy on how the mandate will respond to reports of reprisals (the communication policy). A set of Guidelines for human rights defenders on how to communicate with the Focal Point is also being developed, and has been drafted with the support of ISHR and Cairo Institute for Human Rights.

**Women Human Rights Defenders**

At the 23rd African Union (AU) Heads of State meeting in June 2015, the AU declared 2016 the ‘African Year of Human Rights’ with a particular focus on the rights of women. ISHR will advocate and lobby for States to adopt the draft ‘Resolution on Measures to Protect and Promote the Work of Women Human Rights Defenders’, which is being considered by States at this session of the Commission. ISHR will also call on States to implement adopted recommendations from the first report on the situation of women human rights defenders in Africa.

**Human rights defenders working in the extractive sector**

In collaboration with the Working Group on Extractive Industries, Human Rights and the Environment, ISHR will host a side event at the Commission on the challenges faced by defenders working to promote corporate respect for human rights and accountability for violations. The event will seek to raise awareness of the
threats, attacks and difficulties they face in their work, and will explore the role of States, extractive industries and the Commission in expanding protection for them and in providing a platform to raise cases for concern (Download flyer in English / Français).

**Activity Reports of Members of the Commission and Special Mechanisms**

ISHR will be engaging in the interactive dialogues and delivering at least two statements during the scheduled activity reports by the:

- Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders in Africa
- Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa
- Chairperson of the Working Group on Extractive Industries, Environment and Human Rights Violations in Africa

**ISHR Events**

**NGO Forum Panel**

- **Engagement with the African Commission on Reprisals**, Sunday 1 November, presented by ISHR. This event is scheduled for 10.15 - 11.15am

**African Commission Side Event**

- **Human rights & extractive industries: challenges faced by defenders**, Tuesday 3 November, presented by ISHR and the African Commission Working Group on Extractive Industries, Human Rights and the Environment. This event is scheduled for 10.00 - 12.30 at Kairaba Hotel.

**Parallel discussions on the roadmap on State in transition**

The role of, and challenges faced by, human rights defenders working in States undergoing transition to democracy has increased in recent years, particularly since the start of the Arab Spring. In order to support these defenders and ensure the international community understands the nature of the challenges faced by them, ISHR is developing a ‘Roadmap on human rights defenders working in States undergoing a transition towards democracy and rule of law’.

This Roadmap aims to assist the work of these defenders and their engagement with the international human rights system, and expound the special role these defenders play in developing the rule of law and securing greater international human rights commitments in their respective States. It also seeks to highlight the different tools these defenders need to ensure domestic laws and mechanisms that uphold human rights are put in place.

In order to maximise the effectiveness of the Roadmap, ISHR will conduct consultations with defenders from countries undergoing transition to democracy, and who are attending the NGO Forum and African Commission session.

*ISHR will monitor and report on key developments at the session using the hashtag #ACHPR57. Follow us on Twitter at @ISHRglobal. Our staff can also be followed @cvoule, @rumbi_masango and @IneichenM.*