

[African Commission: Resolution calls for specific recognition and protection of WHRDs](#)

18.03.2016



(Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire and Geneva) - A landmark resolution adopted at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights calls on African States to ensure specific legal recognition and protection of women human rights defenders and end impunity for threats and attacks against them.

ISHR contributed significantly to the development of the resolution, entitled [Resolution 336 on Measures to Protect and Promote the Work of Women Human Rights Defenders](#).

'In light of 2016 being the African Year of Human Rights, with the particular focus on the rights of women, this resolution presents an important opportunity for African States to be reminded of their obligations to ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders, particularly women defenders, to conduct their work,' said Mr Clement Voule, ISHR's Africa Advocacy Director.

Adopted during the Commission's extra-ordinary session in February, the resolution highlights that women human rights defenders in Africa face particular barriers and risks when engaging in human rights work. It calls on States to 'end impunity by adopting specific laws and relevant measures to promote and protect the work of human rights defenders, which should include provisions that recognize and address the specific protection needs of women human rights defenders'.

This resolution is an important part of follow up to the Commission's report, [The Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa](#), which was adopted last year. This study concluded that the general legal framework in many African countries for the protection of WHRDs is 'inadequate'. It indicates that as a first step towards combating impunity for widespread violence, attacks, threats and harassment against WHRDs and their organisations, families and affiliates, existing laws in many African countries need to be made compatible with international and regional human rights standards.

Meanwhile, guided by the Commission's report, women human rights defenders in Cote d'Ivoire have worked in collaboration with ISHR to ensure that the Law on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Defenders also takes into account a gender perspective.

'While we worked hard to ensure that Article 9 of this law has a specific provision recognising women human rights defenders, it is now necessary to develop guidelines on how this provision should inform the work of governmental and judicial bodies in their efforts to meet the needs of WHRDs,' said Ms Marthe Pedan Coulibaly from the Cote d'Ivoire Coalition of Human Rights Defenders. ISHR and the Coalition are collaborating to develop authoritative guidance on the interpretation and application of Article 9.

The resolution also reinforces a key element of the ACHPR report, which encourages African governments to

work in partnership with women human rights defenders in the dissemination and implementation of national human rights programmes. 'Women defenders are central to achieving human rights and development goals,' stressed Ms Pooja Patel, WHRD Programme Manager at ISHR. 'States have a responsibility to publicise this report and its recommendations widely, including at the level of local authorities, public security officials and the judiciary'.

The ACHPR resolution further seeks to improve reporting on efforts to protect WHRDs by calling on States to include it in their periodic reports to the Commission. 'We urge the governments of South Africa and Namibia, in their periodic report to the Commission at its upcoming session in April, to provide information on how their intend to implement the recommendations contained in the report' said Ms Patel.

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