

[African Commission Alert: Overview of 58th session and NGO Forum](#)

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(Banjul, The Gambia) - The [58th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights \(the Commission\)](#) will be held in Banjul, The Gambia from 6 to 13 April and 20 April 2016. The Commission will be preceded by the NGO Forum and the 32nd African Human Rights Book Fair, which will take place from 3 to 5 April.

2016: The African Year of Human Rights

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. The launch of the thematic year took place in January 2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during the African Union Summit.

The designation of 2016 as a Year of Human Rights should reinforce the AU's commitment to protecting and promoting human rights on the continent. To this end, the African Commission has adopted its own plan of activities to raise awareness about human rights on the continent.

The theme is timely given the numerous human rights challenges facing Africa.

In countries like Burundi and South Sudan, human rights defenders have been systematically threatened, subject to arbitrary detention and excessive force, and in some cases disappeared and killed.

In other states, such as Congo Brazzaville, Uganda and Rwanda, leaders are testing the limits of democracy and suppressing human rights in order to extend their stay in political power.

By positive contrast, some countries are taking significant steps to strengthen respect for human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law, as is currently the case in the Central Africa Republic.

Provisional Agenda: NGO Forum and [58th ACHPR](#)

State Reviews

At this session, there are three state periodic reports that will be considered: Namibia, Mali and South Africa.

Namibia's review will look at the country's [sixth periodic report](#) covering January 2011 to December 2013. The presentation of the report of the Republic of Namibia will be considered under Item 7 on Saturday, 9 April 2016.

For **Mali**, the review will be based on its second periodic report, a [combined report](#) for the period 2001 to 2011, submitted to the ACHPR in March 2016. The presentation of the report of the Republic of Mali will be considered under Item 7 on Sunday, 10 April 2016.

South Africa's review will be based on the second periodic report, [combining its third, fourth, fifth and sixth reports](#), that was submitted in September 2015. It captures developments within South Africa on the realisation of the rights guaranteed by the African Charter from 2002 to the end of 2013. The presentation of the report of the Republic of South Africa will be considered under Item 7 on Monday, 11 April 2016.

Panel Discussions

NGO Forum

The NGO Forum will feature 10 panel discussions, focusing on a range of topics, such as electoral processes in Africa, terrorism, statelessness and education. Of the discussions, ISHR will follow closely:

- **Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa: Implementation of adopted Recommendations** (Panel 2): Sunday, 3 April at 14:30-16:00
- **Follow-up to the ACHPR Resolution 391 on the Freedom of Association and Assembly (FOAA) Guidelines** (Panel 4): Monday, 4 April at 09:15-10:45
- **Fragility of the African Human Rights protection system** (Panel 10): Tuesday, 5 April at 14:00-15:30
- **Respecting and protecting human rights while countering terrorism: the ACHPR's new Principles and Guidelines** (Panel 6): Monday, 4 April at 12:30-13:30

African Commission session

The African Commission will feature over 14 panel discussions. Topics range from sexual reproduction, death penalty, elections to torture. Of the discussions, ISHR will follow five closely:

- **Panel on the Launch of General Comment No. 3 on the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights: The Right to Life (Article 4) - Item 4:** Wednesday, 6 April
- **State Reporting Guidelines under the Maputo Protocol - Item 4:** Sunday, 10 April
- **Panel on the Role of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on ESCR in Advancing Equality and Human Rights for All - Item 7:** Monday, 11 April
- **Panel with State Representatives on the Commission's new Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights while Countering Terrorism in Africa - Item 7:** Monday, 11 April
- **Panel on OHCHR Regional Consultations on Regional Human Rights Mechanisms - 2016 (Human Rights Defenders) - Item 4:** Tuesday, 12 April

ISHR's advocacy priority areas during the 58th 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 continue to advocate for the protection of defenders by strengthening and supporting the mandate of the Special Rapporteur during this session.

Activity Reports of Members of the Commission and Special Mechanisms

ISHR will engage in the interactive dialogues and deliver 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

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. During the NGO Forum, ISHR will host an Interactive Dialogue with the African Commission Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) on the implementation of the African Commission's [first report on the situation of women human rights defenders in Africa](#), together with [ACHPR/Res. 336 on Measures to Protect and Promote the Work of Women Human Rights Defenders](#) of February 2016.

The African Commission Special Rapporteur on HRDs consulted the NGO Forum during the production of the now published WHRDs report. It is important to provide her the space to report back and share her strategy for its implementation. Civil society at the NGO Forum can therefore offer suggestions and input on how they can add value to the implementation process.

Join us for the panel, **Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa: Implementation of adopted Recommendations** (Panel 2): Sunday, 3 April at 14:30-16:00

Human Rights Defenders Law: Challenges, Opportunities and Experiences

In June 2014 Côte d'Ivoire enacted a law that will strengthen the protection of human rights defenders. The Law on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Defenders was adopted by the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire on 11 June. It is the first time an African State has enacted a law with the specific purpose of protecting human rights defenders and comes at a time when many other African States are developing laws and policies which restrict rather than enable their work.

In 2012, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights recommended that the country adopt such legislation, while the UN Human Rights Council, of which Côte d'Ivoire is a member, has called on States, as recently as in March 2016, to enact 'relevant legislative and policy frameworks to this end, in consultation with human rights defenders'. This call is also reflected in ACHPR/Res. 336 of February 2016, which calls on States to adopt 'specific laws and relevant measures to promote and protect the work of human rights defenders, which should include provisions that recognise and address the specific protection needs of women human rights defenders'.

In the context of these calls and the 2016 African Union Year for Human Rights, this panel seeks to inspire and motivate non-governmental organisations, national human rights institutions and African governments present at the African Commission to encourage their African States to develop similar legislation.

The objective is to provide a space to share and discuss Cote d'Ivoire's HRD law as a measure to protect HRDs. It should be seen as a start on which we can build on. The audience must understand the history and what it entailed for the law to be passed, they must get a status update on the decree and share strategies, learnings and opportunities so that other countries can follow.

Join us at the side event: **Human Rights Defenders Law: Challenges, Opportunities and Experiences**. Wednesday, 6 April 2016 at 13:30 to 14:30 at the Kairba Beach Hotel.

Roundtable to develop a human rights roadmap for States 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 for 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.

Follow developments live at the Commission

ISHR will monitor and report on key developments at the session using the hashtag #ACHPR58. Follow us on Twitter at [@ISHRglobal](https://twitter.com/ISHRglobal).

Our staff attending and advocating at the Commission can also be followed on twitter at [@cvoule](https://twitter.com/cvoule) and [@rumbi_masango](https://twitter.com/rumbi_masango).