

[African Commission - week in perspective](#)

13.04.2013

(Banjul, The Gambia - 13 April, 2013) - During the opening ceremony of the 53rd Ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Chair, Madame Catherine Dupe Atoki, condemned any reprisals against human rights defenders engaging with the mechanism.

Several African human rights instruments acknowledge the importance of the role played by human rights defenders, and call for States to take steps to ensure their protection. Equally, through its resolutions and practice the African Commission has demonstrated that it considers human rights defenders' contribution to be essential to the work of the mechanism. Whilst the African Commission has previously passed a resolution condemning reprisals, such intimidation and attacks continue.

'We know of human rights defenders who are not participating at the Commission meeting today because of the intimidation they experienced at the last session and when they returned home. They consider the risks too high,' said Mr. Voule.

Hundreds of defenders from across the continent and beyond, gathered together for the NGO Forum from 5-8 April, unanimously passed a resolution calling on the Commission to act.

'An attack against a human rights defender or anyone engaging with the African Commission is an attack against the Commission itself,' said Mr. Voule. 'The NGOs attending the forum sent a clear message that now's the time for the Commission to take concrete steps to establish a reporting and follow up mechanism to prevent reprisals and provide effective redress to victims when they occur.'

The under-resourcing of the activities of the African Commissioners and Special Procedures is well known. However, resource constraints are not reason enough for the Commission to stop at mere words. We are convinced that initial steps with no or limited resource implications can be taken immediately, said Mr. Voule.

The lack of protection for human rights defenders across the African continent is frequently highlighted by activists during statements made to the Commission. Reprisals against those engaging with the mechanism are evidence of that broader insecurity for defenders. The Commission has an opportunity to take action to Stop attacks when they occur at the Commission meeting. The Commission has a responsibility to do so, given that many defenders engage with the mechanism precisely because space to claim and defend rights at national level is so limited.

With the recent UN resolution ensuring enabling environments for defenders, ISHR calls on the African Commission to echo these demands on states, as part of its effort to promote and protect human rights defenders in their legitimate work.

'Over the decade that ISHR has regularly attended Commission sessions, we have seen a sharp increase in the numbers of defenders engaging at the Commission in a bid to hold their states to account for their human rights obligations under the African Charter. The African Commission's own ways of working must continue to improve to ensure that the commitment shown by defenders to support and engage with the Commission is facilitated and acknowledged,' said Mr. Voule.

ISHR Statements to the ACHPR

- [Statement under Item 4 on 'reprisals and criminalization'](#)
- [Statement under Item 6 on 'national human rights institutions'](#)
- [Statement for item 6 on 'cooperation between the ACHPR and NGOs'](#)

Contact: Eleanor Openshaw, e.openshaw@ishr.ch, or Clement Nyaletsossi Voule, c.voule@ishr.ch.

ISHR will be providing live updates from the 53rd African Commission session. Look for #ACHPR53 or follow [@ISHRGlobal](#).

ISHR