

[African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights meets for its 53rd Ordinary Session](#)

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(Banjul, The Gambia – 9 April, 2013) - The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights - the peak regional body for the discussion of human rights issues - meets this week in Banjul. During the session, the Commission will discuss the human rights records of States, hear reports about the human rights situation on the ground from independent experts and civil society representatives, and report on its own official activities.

The International Service for Human Rights is attending the Commission and pushing for reforms to protect women human rights defenders, hold states to account for their human rights obligations, and ensure human rights defenders are not subject to attacks, intimidation or reprisals.

A key purpose of the session is for States to periodically report publicly on their obligations under the African Charter, and to be questioned by Commissioners on their human rights records. However, at this upcoming session, there are no State-reporting features in the agenda, which is a development that needs clarification.

Several standing agenda items will be considered, including discussion of the human rights situation in Africa; cooperation between the ACHPR and NHRIs and NGOs, and reports on individual communications received. Commissioners will present reports on official activities of the previous six months, including those of Commissioners, Special Rapporteurs, and Chairs of Working Groups (see [here](#) for a full list of Special Procedures). During the public session, NGOs and NHRIs with observer status will be able to make oral statements.

In addition, this session will see the official launch of the Model Law on Access of Information. Developed by the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, with strong input by civil society, it was finally approved by the ACHPR at its February Extraordinary Session following several years of preparatory work.

During its private session, the ACHPR will consider several thematic draft reports, including a report on the situation of women human rights defenders in Africa, and reports from missions to Lesotho, Cameroon, Tunisia, and Mali. In addition, the Commission will receive a briefing by the UN Special Rapporteur on Eritrea.

In last November's Ordinary session, the ACHPR celebrated its 25th Anniversary by holding several panel sessions that explored its achievements and the ongoing challenges it faced. ISHR has produced an analytical report on the recommendations made to the ACHPR and other stakeholders, [Kumulika](#). Many of these recommendations echoed longstanding concerns voiced by civil society, and related to increasing the effectiveness of the Commission, and adequately resourcing its activities.

As usual, the NGO Forum will be held in the days ahead of the ACHPR session. At this regular Forum, NGOs from across the continent as well as several international NGOs, come together to discuss emerging and ongoing human rights concerns, and prepare collective engagement with the African Commission for the upcoming session.

The Forum provides the opportunity to examine the response of the regional and international human rights systems to human rights concerns in the continent. With the ACHPR investigative mission to Mali ending just before the Commission meeting, and the recent Human Rights Council resolution creating a Special Rapporteur on the situation in Mali, the human rights situation in this country will be one of the issues discussed at both the NGO Forum and the Commission.

For over a decade, ISHR has engaged with the NGO Forum and the ACHPR regularly, in a bid to enable human rights defenders to better engage with the regional human rights system, and thereby press for the system's greater efficacy.

At this session, ISHR is calling upon the ACHPR to:

- Provide a response to recommendations made to it during its own 25th Anniversary Session last year and to produce a road map for the implementation of those recommendations it accepts.
- Establish a realistic schedule for State reporting to the Commission on their obligations under the African Charter and relevant protocols. The Commission should make this schedule public to enable civil society to hold states to account for the production of reports and to press states where reports are late or not produced.
- Establish a focal point to receive information on reprisals experienced by those cooperating with the African Commission, and prepare regular reports and proposed follow-up action for the African Commission. ISHR strongly recommends that this focal point be situated in the Office of the Chair of the Commission in order to signal the Commission's resolve to challenge and prevent reprisals.
- Adopt a comprehensive report and a set of recommendations on the situation that women human rights defenders face and their specific protection needs.

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ISHR will be providing live updates from the 53rd African Commission session. Look for [#ACHPR53](https://twitter.com/ACHPR53) or follow [@ISHRGlobal](https://twitter.com/ISHRGlobal) and [@eleanoropenshaw](https://twitter.com/eleanoropenshaw).

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