

## [NGOs call on African States to respect and protect human rights defenders](#)

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A broad coalition of local, national, sub-regional, pan-African and international NGOs have adopted a consensus statement on the protection of human rights defenders in advance of the 54th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights which commences in Banjul, The Gambia on 22 October 2013. ISHR is pleased to have acted as rapporteur for the NGO coalition preparing this statement, the text of which follows:

### **NGO statement on the situation and protection of human rights defenders in Africa**

We call on States and the Commission to report on the implementation of human rights defenders resolutions arising from previous sessions and urge human rights defenders and NGOs to provide information in this regard.

We recall the International Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by consensus in the UNGA in December 1998 and Human Rights Council Resolution 22/6 on the protection of human rights defenders, adopted by consensus with 77 co-sponsors in March 2013.

We recognise the important work of the African Commission's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, acknowledge her important work and support for civil society, and emphasise the importance to her mandate of investigating and following up on cases.

We express our grave concern about the widespread lack of both physical and legal protection of human rights defenders, together with the criminalisation and stigmatisation of their work, across the continent.

We urge States to investigate, prosecute and ensure accountability and remedy for gross violations against human rights defenders, including torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention (including incommunicado detention), enforced disappearances and even death and call on Commission to follow up States in this regard.

We urge States to avoid the use or misuse of laws, malicious prosecutions, unfair trials and judicial harassment to criminalise the legitimate and important work of human rights defenders, including journalists.

We urge States to uphold the rights of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly for all and to respect and enforce those laws which support the work of human rights defenders and which uphold their rights, including in relation to freedom of peaceful assembly.

We call on States to protect the friends, families, organisations and associates of human rights defenders from harassment, intimidation, threats and reprisals in connection with the work of defenders.

We urge States to develop, enact and ensure the effective enforcement of specific national laws and policies which recognise and protect the work of human rights defenders in accordance with the International Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

We call on States to ensure that any legal or other restrictions on the work of human rights defenders are for a legitimate purpose and are strictly necessary and proportionate, including in relation to counter-terror laws and measures.

We call on States to avoid the stigmatisation of human rights defenders, including by State officials, and to publicly recognise the value and importance of their work.

And we urge States to recognise and respond to the particular support and protection needs of certain groups of human rights defenders, including journalists, women human rights defenders, and defenders working on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

ISHR