

[African States must protect and provide an enabling environment to human rights defenders](#)

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(Banjul) - States have a critical role to play in preventing violations against human rights defenders in Africa and in providing for their physical and legal protection, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

In a [statement to the African Commission](#) on Human and Peoples' Rights, ISHR has urged States to investigate, prosecute and ensure accountability for violations against human rights defenders.

'We are deeply concerned about gross violations against human rights defenders, including torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearances and even death,' said Clement Voule of ISHR.

Mr Voule called on the Commission to follow up on State obligations and recognised the critical work of the Commission's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in doing so.

ISHR raised particular concerns regarding the misuse of laws, malicious prosecutions, unfair trials and judicial harassment to criminalise the work of human rights defenders. It called on States to ensure any legal or other restrictions on the work of defenders are legitimate and proportionate.

ISHR's statement drew attention to the obligation of States to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders, saying States must uphold the rights of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and put an end to the stigmatisation of defenders.

States should also proactively develop, enact and enforce national laws and policies that recognise and protect the work of defenders, in accordance with the *UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*.

While Botswana, Sierra Leone, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire were commended for supporting the recent UN Human Rights Council resolution on the prevention of reprisals against human rights defenders, ISHR called on the African Commission to improve its response to this issue.

Two years since the Commission passed a resolution condemning reprisals against those who cooperate with the African human rights system, ISHR said it is now vital for the Commission to take concrete action by designating a focal point to receive information, and to monitor and follow up on reprisals cases.

Read the [full statement here](#).

ISHR