

56th SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

Banjul, 21st April to 7th May 2015

STATEMENT UNDER ITEM 5

Madame Chair, Honourable Commissioners, State parties, fellow human rights defenders,

ISHR welcomes the report of the Commission on the situation of women human rights defenders in Africa, launched this session. We particularly appreciate the cooperation extended by Madam Soyata Maiga, Special Rapporteur on the status of women in Africa, in the development of this report. We make this statement to encourage all the Commissioners of the ACHPR to mainstream the recommendations of the report into their work, as they engage and interact with women human rights defenders in carrying out their mandates.

The report highlights that human rights defenders often face threats, intimidation, harassment and violence for the work that they do. Women defenders face specific and targeted attacks on the basis of their gender and/or sexual orientation and therefore require specific protection responses.

Madam Chair,

Recalling the African Union's 2015 theme of 'Women's Empowerment and Development Towards Africa's Agenda 2063' and in light of 2016's theme focusing on human rights and women's rights, ISHR welcomes General Comment 2 to Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol. We particularly appreciate Madam Soyata Maiga's close cooperation with women human rights defenders in its development.

We stress that in many African countries, women working in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights are particularly vulnerable to attacks, particularly from non-State actors and even from within their own communities or families.

ISHR encourages Madam Soyata Maiga to work in collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders to systematize the Commission's interactions with women human rights defenders.

In particular, we call on the Commission to further promote and sensitise women human rights defenders on all the mechanisms available, including the communications procedures. We also recommend that the Commission's own monitoring and response to human rights violations are sensitive to the experiences of women defenders.

Madam Chair,

The Commission's timely report on the situation of women human rights defenders in Africa, launched at this session, calls on States to develop legislation that guarantees the rights of all human rights defenders to safely and securely conduct their work. And in particular, it highlights the need for such laws to include specific provisions that recognize women human rights defenders and respond to the specific protection they require.

In this light, we welcome the law passed in Cote d'Ivoire on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Defenders in June of last year. In particular, Article 9 includes a specific provision on women defenders.

We recommend that the Commission work with the government and civil society in the country to unpack this provision with the view to develop national mechanisms – in Cote d'Ivoire and elsewhere – that provide specific protection needs for women human rights defenders and ensure an enabling environment for them to work safely. Furthermore, such protection mechanisms should promptly, effectively and impartially investigate all allegations of violations against women human rights defenders, with the view to combat impunity.

I thank you