

[ACHPR Alert: A look at what's ahead at the African Commission](#)

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The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights meets over the next two weeks in Banjul, The Gambia, to consider the situation of human rights across the continent. The Commission brings together representatives from State parties to the African Charter, national human rights institutions, and civil society organisations. As the principle human rights-focused body in Africa, the Commission meets biannually to consider periodic reports submitted by States, to report on the activities of its sub-mechanisms (including Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups) and articulate its resolve in the form of decisions and resolutions.

Over the last three days, ahead of the Commission session, human rights defenders from across the continent have met at the NGO Forum to discuss both long-term and emerging human rights concerns, and to consider how best to engage with and influence the Commission's debates and outputs. ISHR's ['Dispatch'](#) provides coverage of some of the principle debates held during the Forum. On its final day, the Forum approved a series of resolutions on a range of human rights issues - from the rights of persons with albinism, to the [protection of human rights defenders](#), to human rights violations and extractive industries. Several Commissioners attended the NGO Forum as observers, confirming the importance they place on engagement with human rights defenders. Attending the Forum provides Commissioners with the opportunity to hear substantive discussion on the issues that NGOs consider the Commission should focus and act upon. Information provided to the Commissioners by defenders during the Forum also assists Commissioners when they question States on their human rights records.

In a bid to best influence the Commission, the NGO Forum creates an agenda that speaks to items to be considered by the Commission. Therefore, the Forum considered the human rights situations in Cameroon and Gabon, as these State reports are due to be considered during the Commission session. The report of the Saharawi Arab Republic was due to be considered this week - having been postponed from the last session - but is no longer on the agenda apparently due to the absence of State representatives.

With the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the 'Maputo Protocol') marking its 10th Anniversary this year, the NGO Forum focused attention on the lack of State ratification and implementation of this landmark African human rights instrument. In addition to the concerns on this expressed by the Forum in its resolution related to the rights of women, it is expected that defenders will speak to these issues in oral interventions during the Commission session itself.

During its private session, the Commission will consider several thematic draft reports, including a report on the situation of women human rights defenders in Africa. It is during the private session that a new Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission will be appointed, and several mandates will be redistributed amongst Commissioners. A new Commissioner is expected to be confirmed, Lawrence Mute, who was until recently a Commissioner of the NHRI in Kenya and has long experience engaging with the Commission in that capacity.

For over a decade, ISHR has regularly participated at the NGO Forum and the ACHPR, supporting human rights defenders to better engage with the regional human rights system and working to strengthen the accessibility and effectiveness of the Commission itself.

At this session, ISHR will call upon the ACHPR to:

- Designate a focal point to work to prevent and respond to intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders who cooperate with the African Commission. With the adoption of the recent [Human Rights Council resolution designating a UN focal point to address reprisals](#), ISHR considers it important and timely for the African Commission to step up its response to attacks against human rights defenders and others who cooperate with the mechanism. 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.
- Provide the NGO Forum with a response to the recommendations it has made to it on a range of human rights issues in recent sessions, indicating what action the Commission has taken or intends to take in relation to them.

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