


<b>AFRICAN UNION</b>		<b>UNION AFRICAINE</b>
<b>الاتحاد الأفريقي</b> <b>African Commission on Human &amp; Peoples' Rights</b>		<b>UNIÃO AFRICANA</b> <b>Commission Africaine des Droits de l'Homme &amp; des Peuples</b>
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**Opening speech by H.E. Ms. Sanji Mmasenono Monageng, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, delivered at the Opening Ceremony of the 5<sup>th</sup> Extra-Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights**

**Held in**

**Banjul, The Gambia**

**On 21 – 29 July 2008**

- Mr. Sainey Susso representing the honourable Secretary of State for Justice and Attorney General of the Republic of The Gambia,
- Honorable Dr. Angela Melo Vice Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights,
- Honorable Members of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights,
- Your Excellencies, members of the diplomatic and consular corps,
- The Secretary and staff of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights,
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the members and staff of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, I welcome you all, to the 5th Extraordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

This Session is the second extraordinary session the African Commission is holding this year. You will recall that in February this year, the African Commission held its 4th extraordinary session here in Banjul, The Gambia.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

In opening this extraordinary session, I wish to start by thanking the Government of the Republic of the Gambia, for graciously hosting the African Commission for the past twenty plus years. I especially thank the Government for the information conveyed by them, at the recently concluded 13th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, held in Sharm El- Sheikh, that the Commission will be moving to new premises following the expiry of the present lease agreement, and also pending the construction of permanent premises that are in line with the 2005 criteria for hosting African Union organs. This demonstrates the devotion and dedication, which the Government of the Gambia has, to the work of the African

Commission in the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights on the Continent.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

At the 13th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, the Council urged the Commission to expedite and finalise its revised Rules of Procedure for harmonisation with the Rules of Procedure of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. This, I must say, is the main reason why the African Commission is here at this 5th Extraordinary Session, for the next nine days, to try and finalise what it has started. The fact that we are meeting for the second time in less than six months, to look at the Rules of Procedure should tell you the importance we attach to this document and its relevance to the promotion and protection of human rights on the continent. The importance of the Rules of Procedure cannot be over-emphasised, they determine our relationship with relevant stakeholders, they explain how the Commission deals with human rights issues brought to its attention, and in relation to the African Court, expantiate on the complementarity between the Commission and the Court.

Excellencies, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

At this Session, the Commission will also deal with a backlog of other issues, in particular, communications pending before it.

The African Commission is cognisant of the numerous human rights challenges facing many African States, but it is not going to discuss those challenges at this forum. I would, however, like to take this opportunity to call on all State parties to the African Charter and Member States of the African Union to honour their obligations under the African Charter in particular and other international human rights instruments to which they are parties.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen,

Having said this, it would be remiss of me, if i do not appreciate the efforts of our partners; the NGOs, National Human Rights Institutions, Intergovernmental organisations, civil societies and individuals for their relentlessness in bringing to the attention of their Governments and the African Commission, the various human rights issues that arise in different parts of our continent. Their efforts have shown without a doubt, their commitment to making this continent a better one, with better respect for the rights of every individual.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are meeting at a time when The Republic of The Gambia is celebrating the 15th anniversary of the July 22nd Revolution. On behalf of the African Commission, I wish the President of the 8 Republic of the Gambia, His Excellency, Alhaji Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh and the people of The Gambia, a happy celebration.

Lastly, I wish to thank my colleagues once again for leaving their busy schedules in various parts of the continent in which they live, to converge in Banjul for this extraordinary session. Your commitment to human rights has always humbled me. I wish all of us fruitful deliberations during this Session.

I thank you all, and wish you God's blessings.