

STATEMENT

BY

H. E. MRS. JULIA DOLLY JOINER

COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS

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RIGHTS

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It is an immense pleasure for me to be in Accra today and indeed an honour and privilege to deliver statement on the occasion of the 41st session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Taking place against the background of the 50th anniversary of Ghana's independence and since I was regrettably unable to come to Accra on the 6th of April to join in the commemoration, due to official engagements in South Africa at the time, please allow me to seize this opportunity to warmly greet my Ghanaian sisters and brothers and to and to express my heartiest congratulations on this momentous anniversary. As Africans the world over pride themselves alongside the peoples of Ghanaian celebrating the 50th anniversary of Ghana's independence, we celebrate the leadership of the torchbearers that gave birth to that historic moment. We pay tribute to the heroes of this great country and to the legacy especially of Kwame Nkrumah who strongly believed that only a united Africa could achieve economic and political independence. Beyond the well deserved celebrations over the study progress the people of Ghana have collectively continued to make under the leadership of H.E. President John Kuffour, President of the Republic of Ghana, current Chairperson of the African Union, this year-long event represents a double lesson for the entire African Continent. The first lesson we draw from Ghana's experience is that, change comes through perseverance and unity. The unity that the free Ghana have fought for and championed over the years is as relevant today as it was 50years ago. it is no mere coincidence therefore that we are meeting in Ghana , before the Tenth Ordinary session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and government to reflect on the situation of human rights on our Continent in the context of Africa's integration.

The second lesson is that, prosperity, peace and integration are closely linked and related to human rights. It is Mr. Kofi Annan, a distinguished son of this great country and an illustrious African who, in his official capacity as UN Secretary General restated the

centrality of human rights in his historic report 'In Larger Freedom' when he observed that:

"We will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights."

We must therefore take synergy between peace, security, development and human rights seriously if we want to achieve integration and prosperity in the medium to long term.

Let me at this point, extend sincere appreciation on behalf of the African Union, to the Government and people of the Republic of Ghana for graciously accepting to host this session and for the legendary Ghanaian hospitality, conducive environment and excellent facilities provided to ensure the success of this 41st Session.

A word of gratitude also goes to all those who have in diverse ways contributed to the holding of this session. We feel highly indebted and do hope that the African Union will continue to enjoy similar levels of support in its bid to attain the integration objectives for which it was established.

The regular presence of the African Union Commission at the highest possible level at the Sessions of the African Commission attests to our commitment to support the said organ in the discharge of its duties and responsibilities. Only two weeks ago, we met in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho, where the African Union Commission in collaboration with the African Commission organized a Brainstorming between the African Union Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) and the African Commission as a follow up to the May 2006 Brainstorming Sessions with AU organs in Banjul, The Gambia. This august gathering will be pleased to learn that, the meeting was successful in that, it examined the multiplicity of the challenges that face the work of the African Commission, formulated recommendations for future actions to overcome these as well as strategies for reinforcing cooperation between the two organs, The PRC being one of the key policy organs of the African Union. We are hopeful that the envisaged continued engagement with the PRC and other organs of the African Union will not only enhance the performance of the African Commission but also give added impetus to our collective

efforts aimed at establishing a more dynamic interaction and coordination geared towards strengthening the African mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights.

In addition to participating in this session the African Union Commission, through its department of political affairs, also organized a series of events around the 41st Session in order to contribute to the visibility of the African Commission and maximize the participation of stakeholders such as National Human Rights Institutions in the deliberations of the Session. The workshop on the implementation of the African Union Human Rights Decisions and the Workshop for National Human Rights Institutions on Monitoring and Documenting Human Rights Violations which concluded their deliberations yesterday will be followed by a Consultative Meeting of Media Experts on Press Freedom in Africa slated for the 17th May 2007. The department is poised to pursue these activities as integral components of both its Work Programme and the African Union's Strategic Programme and in fulfillment of the leadership of the Union's various declarations and decisions to strengthen the African Commission. We are cognizant of the fact that the effective functioning of the Africa Commission is critical for the actualization of the African Union's human rights agenda and efforts would therefore continue to be deployed to make the continental body a credible partner in promoting the much needed political change across the Continent.

It is encouraging to note that the regular organization of the NGO Forum preceding the African Commission Sessions is with a view to supporting the work of the African Commission. The initiative is commendable and I would like to express gratitude to the organizers of the Forum for their valuable contributions in this direction. Let me also seize this opportunity to restate the merits and indeed expediency of such partnerships which not only reinforce the principle of inclusively but what is more augur well for the attainment of our common objective of an Africa that upholds human rights and fundamental freedoms so beautifully enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the constitutive Act of the African Union.

That the African Commission needs to be provided the means to live up to the numerous human rights expectations entrusted to her by the African peoples, cannot be overemphasized. The implementations of the priorities outlined in the Communiqué issued at the end of the 40th Session and follow up to the recommendations of the recently concluded consultations with the PRC require our support. However, I would like to caution that goodwill is not enough for the African Commission to attain its objectives. We need to move from rhetoric to action and for this concrete support and action by all stakeholders and partners is of essence!

In the same vain the recently inaugurated African Courts on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child and the Pan-African Parliament require similar attention given their pivotal role in the implementation of the human rights agenda. Needless to say, the creation of these mechanisms will be seriously undermined if they do not have the requisite resources to effectively discharge their mandates. I therefore wish to call on African Governments, UN Agencies, bilateral and multinational partners to increase their support to these institutions. It is equally important to accord the National Human Rights Institutions, the media and NGOs the requisite recognition and protection. Empowering and protecting these bodies would no doubt in turn enhance the African Commission's capacity function effectively and efficiently.

it is in this context that we welcome the signing in November last year of the 10- year Capacity Building Programme for the African Union by former United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Prof. Alpha Oumar Konare. The Programme, as far as the advancement of human rights is concerned, is comprehensive enough. We look forward to its speedy implementation and to the continued interest and partnership of the United Nations in this and other areas of common interest as we seek to achieve our ambition of a united and prosperous Africa.

As we highlight the role of our partners, I would like to reemphasize though that, the primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights rests with

Member States as underscored by the Kigali Declaration adopted by the AU Ministerial Conference on Human Rights in Africa in May 2003. In this respect we welcome the establishment by Member States of National Human Rights Institutions and acknowledge the submission of their periodic reports to the African Commission, which is very critical for advancing human rights on the Continent.

The ratification of human rights treaties, I must also emphasize, should be accompanied with implementation to give meaning to the process of ratification and also to enable our peoples enjoy their provisions. I would therefore like to resubmit my appeal to all Member States to ratify all regional and international related human rights instruments and ensure compliance with their commitments. Equally significant also, is a renewed appeal to all Member States to honour their obligations under the said Declarations and Decisions and indeed the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

As we gather here to review and reflect on the human rights challenges and opportunities on the continent against the backdrop of its integration vision, allow me before I conclude, to congratulate Members of the African Commission as they celebrate 20 years of human rights work in Africa and to pay a special tribute to all the Commissioners of the African Commission, past and present for putting a solid foundation in place and for their untiring efforts to guarantee enjoyment of basic and fundamental human right for our peoples. My congratulations also go to the outgoing Members of the African commission for their outstanding contributions and for the demonstrated commitments in the often times laborious engagement with Member States as they stoved to execute duties and responsibilities assigned to them. We say Felicitation! Well Done! Obrigada! and Shokran! to you all and have no doubt that your future endeavors will usher in more opportunities for further engagement in our common quest for the advancement of the peoples of our dear Continent.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm that today, winds of change are indeed blowing across Africa presenting new opportunities for the promoting and protection of human rights. Established in 1986 to provide an enforcement mechanism for the African Charter on

Human and Peoples' Rights the African Commission has indeed made progressive gains and is more and more evolving s a force to reckon with. New standards have been set particularly on economic , social and cultural rights as well as on the rights of women and children all supported by a renewed commitment by all Member Stated of the African Union to implementing the African Charter. Let us , each and everyone here present, therefore leave this hall in our individual and collective capacities, strengthened in our resolve to build on the momentum and deliver to the peoples of Africa!

On a final note, I wish to thank the Government of the people of Ghana once more, for hosting this Session, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples, Rights for the opportunity to deliver a statement on behalf of the African Union Commission. May your deliberations be fruitful and may this 41st Session be another resounding success.