

Check against delivery

Ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

77th session

Arusha, 20 October– 9 November 2023



Statement by
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Honourable Chairperson
Honourable Commissioners
Distinguished delegates

Warm greetings from Mr. Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

I address you today exactly 40 days until 10 December when the international community will gather around the world to celebrate the adoption of a milestone document in the history of human rights – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A document which promised humanity equality, freedom and justice for all.

Three years after the San Francisco Conference that gave birth to the Charter of the United Nations, our forebearers embarked on a noble and courageous task to craft a set of fundamental human rights. On 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world – was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. Since then, this important document – translated into over 500 languages – has inspired and paved the way for the adoption of over seventy human rights treaties, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

In September this year, the African Union and my Office joined together to celebrate this anniversary with..... I would like to extend our Office’s invitation to all of you to join the commemorative event at the end of this year. Our office is organising a Human Rights 75 - High-level event on 11 and 12 December. The event is a culmination of the national and regional dialogues and thematic consultations that some of you have had the privilege to attend.

The December event is hybrid, allowing for virtual and physical participation from 4 locations – Geneva, Nairobi, Bangkok and Panama.

In a world confronted by interlocking crises, this event is an important opportunity for all of us to renew faith in human rights and demonstrate how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can meet the needs of our time and advance its promise of freedom, equality and justice for all.

Honourable Chairperson

Distinguished delegates

Since your last session, a number of developments have taken place as our respective organisations continue to collaborate and advance the agenda for human rights in Africa. Countries in Africa continue to face intractable challenges and crises – from civic space contractions, political polarisation, hate speech, hunger, inflation, unsustainable debt to unconstitutional changes of government. Our longstanding partnership in human rights requires that we redouble our efforts in addressing these challenges. This Commission is the first line of prevention and defence against human rights excesses committed by State and non-State actors in Africa. As we look to the future, our resolve to address the myriad challenges and seize the opportunities of our time should tap on our common resources and skills for more meaningful impact of our programmes.

Honourable Chairperson

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As the year draws to a close, it is important to also reflect on the AU theme of the year – “Accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area”. Economic development and human rights are

intricately linked. A thriving economy can contribute to the realization of human rights by creating opportunities, eradicating poverty and advancing social justice. Conversely, an approach to economic policies devoid of human rights considerations can perpetuate inequality and marginalization. As we accelerate the implementation of the AfCFTA, it is crucial to maintain transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in decision-making processes. Multi-stakeholder engagement plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the benefits of economic progress are experienced by everyone, everywhere.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Commission for adopting a resolution on mainstreaming human rights into the AfCFTA. Our Office remains ready to work with you and other actors to support the implementation of the AfCFTA. I note that during this session we will have a dedicated panel discussion on the Addis Ababa Roadmap in the context of the 75th Anniversary of the UDHR – with a focus on exploring OHCHR-Banjul Commission collaborations on mainstreaming human rights into AfCFTA implementation. These collaborative efforts are important for impactful results, including ensuring that we prioritize measures that protect vulnerable populations, foster gender equality, and uphold the dignity and well-being of everyone.

Honourable Chairperson

In the past ten years, work around the Addis Ababa Roadmap has often been quoted in different fora, as one of the success stories, a blueprint, of cooperation between international and regional human rights systems. This cooperation has manifested itself in many forms, including joint statements, press releases, joint field visits, joint thematic activities and participation in sessions and events of our respective institutions. It has contributed to charting the path towards a future defined by the interconnected nature of the challenges and solutions in our international and regional human rights ecosystems.

The Addis Ababa Roadmap has also demonstrated that stronger, efficient, well-resourced and coordinated international and regional human rights mechanisms are key to addressing the challenges that people face, particularly on this continent.

Honourable Chairperson,

Let me reiterate our call to African Member States to join the UN Torture Fund's Group of Friends. As you know, the UN Voluntary Funds for Victims of Torture and on Contemporary Forms of Slavery have supported hundreds of thousands of individuals to receive social, medical, psychosocial, legal and humanitarian services. This has helped foster their rehabilitation, recovery, economic empowerment and social inclusion.

I recall that earlier this year, during a meeting with the Funds' Secretariat, Commissioners expressed interest in both Funds, noting cross-cutting issues of common concern such as migration, deprivation of liberty and violence against women and girls. The Fund's mandate is clearly complementary to international human rights mechanisms and has added value to the work of the various regional human rights mechanisms and instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Our Office is available to provide additional information on how AU Member States can join the Group of Friends for the UN Torture Fund

Honourable Chairperson,

I am aware that you have a heavy programme ahead of you. I, therefore, would like to extend best wishes from our High Commissioner to all of you for a successful and productive session. Thank you for your attention.

