INTER-SESSION ACTIVITY REPORT
(October 2019 to June 2020)

Presented to the 66th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights

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Lawrence M. Mute
Outgoing Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa
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I. Introduction

1. This Report is prepared pursuant to Rules 25(3) and 64 of the Rules of Procedure (2020) of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (the Commission), which requires each of the Commission’s subsidiary mechanisms to present a report on its work at each Ordinary Session, and each Commissioner to submit a report on activities undertaken during the inter-session.

2. I submit this report to the 66th Ordinary Session of the Commission in my capacity as the outgoing Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (the Special Rapporteur).

3. This report covers the inter-session between the 65th Ordinary Session held in October 2019 and commencement of the 28th Extra-Ordinary Session in May 2020, when my mandate effectively ended.

II. Inter-sessional Activities

4. I undertook the following activities as a Member of the Commission and as the Special Rapporteur:

   a. From 19 February to 04 March 2020, I attended the Commission’s 27th Extra-Ordinary Session, which was held in Banjul, The Gambia.

   b. On 19 May 2020, I convened a Webinar to introduce the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (the 2019 Declaration), which was adopted during the Commission’s 65th Ordinary Session in November 2019, in collaboration with the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria and Article 19 East Africa. The online launch served as a forum for disseminating the Declaration, in addition to initiating discussions on the Declaration’s continuing relevance to the exercise of Article 9 rights. The webinar’s participants included Members of the Commission, civil society organizations working on freedom of expression and access to information issues, in addition to the general public.
5. During the intersession period, I issued the following press releases and letters of urgent appeal:

a. On 28 October 2019, I issued a press statement on the human rights situation in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, noting with concern the escalation of protests which had taken place in the Oromia region on 23rd October 2019. It was noted that those protests spiraled into clashes amongst civilians, and between civilians and security forces, which were increasingly fanned by ethnic and religious under-currents, with groups being mobilized to attack minority ethnic communities and churches.

b. On 22 November 2019, in collaboration with the Commissioner Rapporteur for the United Republic of Tanzania, a Press Statement on the deteriorating human rights situation in Tanzania was issued. The press release highlights various areas of concern, notably freedom of expression and the media, freedom of association, particularly the free operation of civil society organizations and opposition party members, in addition to the right to non-discrimination, equality and education of pregnant girls and teen mothers.

c. On 27 March 2020, I transmitted a Letter of Appeal in response to reports received regarding the arrest and prolonged pre-trial detention of Mr. Mohamed al-Yammani, a freelance journalist working in the Arab Republic of Egypt, who had reportedly been in detention since 08 December 2019.

d. On 27 March 2020, I transmitted a Letter of Appeal to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, regarding the abduction of at least eighteen (18) university students from Dembi Dollo University, South West of Ethiopia in December 2019.

e. On 08 April 2020, I issued a press release on the Importance of Access to the Internet in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which notably expressed concern on the incidents of internet shutdowns amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The press release called on States Parties to guarantee respect and protect the right to freedom of expression and access to information.
through ensuring access to internet and social media services especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

f. On 17 April 2020, I issued a Press Release on the Publication of the 2019 Declaration, which announced its publication on the Commission’s website. The Declaration is now available on the website in the four (4) AU languages.

g. On 28 April 2020, I participated in a Joint Letter of Appeal to the Republic of Mozambique, regarding the enforced disappearance of Mr. Ibraimo Abu Mbaruco, a community radio journalist at Palma Community Radio in Mozambique. The letter was issued in response to reports that Mr. Mbaruco may have arbitrarily been detained because of his work as a journalist, particularly his reports on the ongoing armed attacks in the region.

h. On 05 May 2020, in collaboration with the Country Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Tanzania and the Chairperson of the Working Group on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a letter of urgent appeal was transmitted to the United Republic of Tanzania regarding the rights of people in Tanzania to the protection of their health and life and for having access to public health information in the context of the novel coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic in the country.

III. Closing Remarks

6. It has been my pleasure and honor to serve as Special Rapporteur for the last three years. During that time, the Commission has made significant steps in clarifying applicable standards for implementation of Article 9 of the Charter. In the course of that time, I have also undertaken invaluable engagements with State and non-state actors towards the better implementation of Article 9.

7. I am confident that the new Special Rapporteur will position the Commission on an even better trajectory for the full implementation of the rights to freedom of expression and access to information in Africa.
8. Let me conclude by thanking all the stakeholders who have worked with me over the last few years towards implementation of my mandate.