Final Communique of the 20th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

1. The 20th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights was held in Grand Bay, Mauritius, from 21 to 31 October 1996 and was chaired by Professor Isaac NGUEMA. It was preceded by the Eleventh NGOs Workshop jointly organised by the International Commission of Jurists and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

2. This session started with the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

3. The opening ceremony was attended by all the Members of the Commission; the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, H. E. Mr Navinchandra RAMGOOLAM, accompanied by Members of his government, H.E. Mr Salim Ahmed SALIM, Secretary-General of the OAU; H.E. Mr Ayala LASSO, the UN Human Rights Commissioner; States-Parties delegates; Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited in Mauritius; Representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations; Representatives of the national and international press as well as other distinguished invitees.

4. At the opening ceremony, after the presentation of the draft Plan of Action of the Commission for the next five years by the Vice-Chairman of the Commission, Professor E. V. O. DANKWA, speeches were delivered by the Chairman of the African Commission; the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius; the Secretary-General of the OAU; the UN Human Rights High Commissioner; the Minister of Justice and Human Rights of the Republic of Togo and the Secretary-General of the International Commission of Jurists.

5. The Commission held a meeting with the Secretary-General of the OAU who indicated his comprehension of the issues raised before him. On this occasion, the Commission responded favourably to the invitation extended by the Secretary General to participate in monitoring the elections in Gambia and Zambia.

6. The Commission considered applications for observer status and granted it to 15 NGOs. The list of these NGOs is available at the Secretariat.

7. The report on the conclusions of the 11th NGOs Workshop was submitted to the Commission. Briefly, the Workshop emphasised the future of the human rights' system in Africa and the need to provide assistance to the African Commission in the elaboration of a plan of action for the years 1996-2001.

8. The Representatives of the governments of South Africa, Burundi, Ethiopia, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Equatorial Guinee, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan and Tunisia delivered statements underscoring the willingness of their countries to respect the provisions of the African Charter and reiterated their commitment to cooperate with the Commission.

9. The Commission, the statements delivered by the Representatives of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, the ICRC and African and international organisations, as well as representatives from national Commissions on Human Rights who participated in the session.
10. Concerning the consideration of periodic state reports, the Commission examined the initial reports of Mauritius presented by His Excellency Mr. Razack PEEROO, the Minister of Justice. A discussion followed, thus giving the Commission the opportunity to congratulate Mauritius for its interest in the African Charter and its respect for human rights.

11. The setting up of an Early Warning Mechanism in case of massive human rights violations in Africa was a significant issue of concern to the Commission which appointed three commissioners to follow up the report presented by Professor Umozurike on behalf of a working group that addressed this issue during the meeting in Nairobi.


13. The Commission decided to commemorate its 10th Anniversary on 2 November 1997 at its 22nd Ordinary Session.

14. The Commissioners presented their reports on their promotional activities during the intersession.

15. The Commission considered the report of Commissioner Ben Salem, the Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions and decided to extend his mission up to the end of his mandate in the Commission.

16. The Commission was informed by its Secretary that most States had not yet submitted their comments on the first draft of the protocol establishing the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights. Therefore this issue was deferred to the forthcoming Ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers in February 1997.

17. With respect to human rights situation in Africa, the Commission heard from various participants who highlighted the disturbing situations in Kenya, Zaire, Burundi and Liberia. They raised among others, issues of refugees and internally displaced persons, independence of the judiciary and the need to establish independent electoral commissions.

18. The Commission considered the report prepared after following the Seminar on Prison Conditions in Africa (Kampala, 19 - 21 September 1996) and decided to appoint Commissioner E. V. O. DANKWA, Vice-Chairman of the Commission as Special Rapporteur on prison conditions in Africa.

19. The Commission reiterated its commitment to elaborate the additional protocol on the rights of African women and to appoint a Special Rapporteur and has decided to consider the proposals pertaining to this issue in its forthcoming session as will be submitted by its working group.

20. The Commissioner took cognizance of the progress achieved in the preparation of the planned seminars and decided to hold other seminars.

21. With regard to protective activities, the Commission received five new communications and examined fourteen communications against Zaire, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Zambia, Angola and Benin. For the cases concerning Nigeria and Sudan, the Commission designated missions which will visit these countries, and examine, at the same time, different communications which relate to them. The Commission equally considered and adopted the reports presented by the two delegations sent respectively to Senegal and Mauritania following the previous decisions taken.
during the examination of communications concerning these countries. Recommendations were addressed to the two countries.

22. During the session, the Commission was respectively received by:

H. E. President, C. UTEEM, President of the Republic of Mauritius
H. E. Mr N. RAMGOOLAM, the Prime Minister
H. E. Mr P. BERENGER, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
H. E. Mr R. PEEROO, Minister of Justice

23. The Commission decided to hold its 21st Ordinary Session from 15 to 24 April 1997 in a country to be determined later.

24. The closing ceremony of the 20th Ordinary Session took place on 31 October 1996 and was officiated by H. E. Mr P. BÉRENG, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

25. The Chairman of the Commission held a press conference after the closing ceremony.

Done in Grand Bay, Mauritius
October 31, 1996.