



AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

**REMARKS ON THE OCCASION OF THE AU-UN HIGH LEVEL
DIALOGUE ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

**24 APRIL 2018
AFRICAN UNION HEADQUARTERS
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

BY: COMMISSIONER SOLOMON AYELE DERSSO

Excellences ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends, all protocols duly observed,

A very good morning to you all!

First, I would like to express my sincere regret at the fact that I am not able to join you in this first high-level dialogue on Human Rights between the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) owing to flight arrangement difficulties. I would also like to thank the organizers of this event for their invitation.

I find the focus of the theme for this dialogue to be very timely. It is happening at a time when the human rights system faces its most serious assault from a web of state and non-state actors almost in all parts of the world. It is happening at a time when the support for human rights is at its lowest, including from its traditional champions. Given the contemporary pressure facing human rights in our age of populism, nationalism and various forms of bigotry, there is no other time than today for the regional and global multilateral platforms to elevate their role and importantly forge ever stronger partnership in upholding the ideals of human and peoples' rights.

The focus of this dialogue on human rights in conflict situations could not also have been more timely. All indications are that there is no other area of the human and peoples' rights field today that requires ever more vigilance and enhanced action than in the realm of conflicts. Indeed, current experiences from Syria to Yemen, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to South Sudan show that no other situation exhibits the worst

and heinous manifestations of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law than those of major political crises and armed conflicts. It is in these settings that we have come to witness the use of violence with unrestrained zeal and unconscionably absolute brutality.

Perhaps the most useful seminal reference for understanding the disturbingly shocking character of violations that are witnessed in recent times is the main Report of the African Union (AU) Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (AUCISS) as well as the Separate Report of Prof Mohmood Mamdani. ‘The stories and reports of the human toll of the violence and brutality have been heart-wrenching’ stated the AUCISS main report. It went on to note ‘reports of people being burnt in places of worship and hospitals, mass burials, women of all ages raped; both elderly and young, women described how they were brutally gang raped, and left unconscious and bleeding, people were not simply shot, they were subjected, for instance, to beatings before being compelled to jump into a lit fire. The Commission heard of some captured people being forced to eat human flesh or forced to drink human blood.’ In the words of Mamdani’s separate opinion, ‘[g]ratuitous degradation was a marked feature in many of the incidents of brutality narrated to us.’

It is the recognition of the foregoing developments that prompted the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights to adopt Resolution 332 on human rights in conflict situations in Africa. Under this resolution, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights entrusted me with the responsibility of developing comprehensive study on the human and peoples’ rights issues that arise in conflict situations in Africa and advise the Commission on the strategies required for

mobilizing effective response for addressing these situations. I am pleased to announce that we have finalized the drafting of the study. On 5th and 6th April, I convened a high-level technical workshop that brought together representatives of the various AU departments, senior UN representatives from the UN missions including in South Sudan, Somalia and Burundi that reviewed and provided input on the draft study.

Within the framework of Resolution 332, I have also been collaborating with the AU Peace and Security Department for documenting the experience of the AU with respect to compliance with human rights, IHL and conduct and discipline in its peace operations. Although they are scattered and ad hoc, our visits to the various missions and review of previous missions show that there is rich material on compliance that offers the basis for articulating AU's peace operations framework for compliance with human rights, international humanitarian law and conduct and discipline.

These major ongoing works of the African system are clear testimony that we are cognizant of the challenges of this era. Importantly, these works attest that the African Union system is working in concert for facing these challenges coherently and with more effectiveness. I am sure you all also agree that these are initiatives on which the AU and the UN can anchor their dialogue and partnerships as far as human rights in conflict situations is concerned.

In conclusion, I would like to state that despite the gravity of the challenges that the present era present, we are demonstrating that we have the resolve and the preparedness for facing these challenges through these initiatives that would reinforce the agility and technical

fitness of the continental and global multilateral human rights mechanisms.

I thank you all for your attention and wish you a fruitful deliberation.

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