



The 15th Biennial Conference of the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI)

Draft Concept Note

Theme:

Original Aspects of African Human Rights Instruments and Jurisprudence

"Leveraging African Human Rights Instruments and Jurisprudence for Strengthened Human Rights Promotion, Protection, and Implementation: The Strategic Role of African National Human Rights Institutions"

Date: 13th to 14th November 2025

Background

The Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI) comprises 46 National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) across the African continent. Established with the mandate to strengthen and support NHRIs and facilitate cooperation among them, as well as with regional and international human rights mechanisms, NANHRI plays a critical role in advancing human rights promotion and protection in Africa.

Every two years, pursuant to Article 56 of the NANHRI Constitution, NANHRI convenes its Biennial Conference, bringing together NHRIs, regional human rights bodies, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), government representatives, Academia, and other relevant stakeholders. These Conferences serve as important platforms for dialogue, advocacy, and strategic collaboration, culminating in the adoption of Declarations and Action Plans that guide collective human rights activities across the continent.

The 15th NANHRI Biennial Conference will be held in Yaounde, Cameroon, physically, in collaboration with the Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), the incoming Chair of NANHRI.

The theme of the conference will be:

Original Aspects of African Human Rights Instruments and Jurisprudence

“Leveraging African Human Rights Instruments and Jurisprudence for Strengthened Human Rights Promotion, Protection, and Implementation: The Strategic Role of African National Human Rights Institutions”

Introduction

The African human rights framework is peculiarly characterised by its responsiveness to the continent's unique historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political realities. This distinctive framework, are represented in core instruments such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa and the African Youth Charter.

Distinctively African jurisprudence, developed by African human rights bodies such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, further enriches the above normative framework. This jurisprudence uniquely integrates collective rights and duties, socio-economic rights alongside civil and political rights, and culturally sensitive interpretations that reflect African values, such as Ubuntu, as well as restorative justice practices.

In an increasingly complex human rights landscape, marked by challenges such as conflicts, economic disparities, environmental crises, digital technology impacts, and evolving governance contexts, the distinctively African interpretation and application of human rights norms become invaluable. For African NHRIs, these original African elements offer powerful opportunities for strategic advocacy, improved legitimacy, and enhanced implementation effectiveness. Against this backdrop, the 15th NANHRI Biennial Conference provides a timely platform to explore, deepen, and strategically leverage these uniquely African human rights instruments and jurisprudence.

Recognising the original aspects of African human rights instruments and jurisprudence, the 15th NANHRI Biennial Conference aims to leverage the unique strengths of these instruments and jurisprudence to strategically enhance the capacity and effectiveness of

African NHRIs to fully leverage the potential of Africa-specific human rights norms to foster tangible improvements in human rights conditions both nationally and regionally.

Rationale

African NHRIs hold strategic positions as key actors in promoting, protecting, and advocating for human rights at the national level. Their mandates, in line with the Paris Principles, include monitoring and reporting on human rights situations, advising governments, addressing complaints, conducting inquiries, and advancing human rights education. To fulfil these mandates effectively within the complex African context, it is essential that NHRIs deeply engage with the unique dimensions embedded within the African human rights instruments and jurisprudence.

The distinctively African aspects, such as the integration of collective rights alongside individual rights, explicit duties toward community and states, and recognition of socio-economic rights as fully enforceable, provide a powerful foundation for NHRIs to strengthen domestic human rights frameworks. These unique elements equip NHRIs with culturally relevant, socially legitimate, and strategically potent tools for advocacy, policy dialogue, and accountability.

Moreover, African jurisprudence developed by African Human Rights Bodies offers critical insights and practical guidance for translating regional human rights principles into tangible domestic outcomes. This jurisprudence, reflecting indigenous justice mechanisms, restorative practices, and culturally sensitive approaches, empowers NHRIs to address continent-specific challenges, including conflicts, digital transformations, and systemic inequalities.

Nevertheless, translating these original aspects into meaningful impacts remains challenging for NHRIs, given resource constraints, varying capacities, limited awareness, and barriers to implementation. Thus, the 15th NANHRI Biennial Conference provides a unique opportunity to bridge these gaps by fostering knowledge sharing, capacity-building, and strategic collaboration. By focusing explicitly on leveraging uniquely African human rights instruments and jurisprudence, NHRIs will be better positioned to generate sustainable human rights outcomes, enhance regional coherence, and amplify their collective impact.

Specific objectives of the Conference

1. Facilitate critical reflection and dialogue among African NHRIs and key stakeholders on the practical implications and strategic advantages of applying unique African human rights instruments and jurisprudence in domestic human rights promotion, protection, and advocacy.
2. Enhance NHRI capacity and expertise through peer-to-peer learning, expert presentations, and interactive workshops, focusing on the effective utilisation of original African human rights principles in NHRI monitoring, reporting, litigation, and advisory roles.
3. Develop strategic recommendations and practical guidance for African NHRIs on translating original African jurisprudence, such as collective rights, communal responsibilities, the integration of socio-economic rights, and culturally sensitive justice practices, into concrete national policies, legal reforms, and institutional actions.
4. Strengthen collaboration and partnership between African human rights bodies and the Pan African Parliament, fostering greater alignment, coherence, and mutual support in advancing human rights across the continent.
5. Establish clear frameworks and follow-up mechanisms that support sustained NHRI engagement, implementation, and accountability in operationalising unique African human rights jurisprudence and instruments beyond the conference itself.

Expected outputs

The 15th NANHRI Biennial Conference is expected to deliver the following concrete outputs:

1. Yaounde Declaration on the Application of Original African Human Rights Principles, affirming the commitment of African NHRIs to strategically implement and advocate for the original aspects of African human rights instruments and jurisprudence at national and regional levels.
2. Strategic Implementation Action Plan for outlining practical steps for NHRIs to operationalise unique African human rights jurisprudence, emphasising collective rights, socio-economic rights integration, communal responsibilities, and culturally relevant justice approaches.

Expected outcomes

1. African NHRIs will have improved knowledge and capacity to effectively apply original African human rights instruments and jurisprudence, significantly

enriching their domestic human rights advocacy, litigation, and monitoring activities.

2. Increased legitimacy, contextual relevance, and effectiveness of NHRI interventions at the national level, grounded explicitly in unique African human rights frameworks and jurisprudence.
3. Strengthened strategic relationships and coherent partnerships among African NHRIs and between NHRIs, African human rights bodies and the Pan African Parliament fostering effective alignment and unified human rights responses across Africa.

Conference format and participants

The 15th NANHRI Biennial Conference will be held over three days physically in Yaounde, co-hosted by the NANHRI Secretariat and the Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC).

The Conference will include an opening session, expert presentations, panel discussions, plenaries and parallel meetings, from the 46 African NHRIs, civil society organisations, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, the UN agencies, thematic experts, the private sector representatives, the academia, select representatives of vulnerable populations and development partners.

A select team, supported by an expert rapporteur, will draft the Declaration and Action Plan, which will be refined throughout the conference and adopted with amendments at its conclusion.