



Network of African National Human Rights Institutions

Statement of the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI) at the Opening Ceremony of the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

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Delivered by

Prof. James Mouangue Kobila, Chairperson of NANHRI

***Honourable Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights,
Honourable Commissioners,
Distinguished Representatives of the African Union and Member States,
Colleagues from National Human Rights Institutions, Civil Society and Partner
Organisations***

All protocols duly observed.

Honourable Delegates and Distinguished Guests,

It is a privilege for the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI) to join you at the opening of the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission).

As we commemorate 40 years since the entry into force of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, we honour the resilience and aspirations of the African people, as well as the enduring commitment of African Commission to advancing the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights across our continent. On behalf of NANHRI, I congratulate the Commission on this important milestone and reaffirm our commitment to working alongside the Commission to ensure that the promise of the African Charter continues to translate into meaningful improvements in the lives of people across Africa.

Despite reaching this historic milestone, we must also acknowledge the challenges confronting the human rights agenda on our continent. Across Africa, we are witnessing developments that raise important questions about the protection and preservation of the rights and freedoms that have been advanced over decades through our continental and national human rights frameworks. Of particular importance to NANHRI is the emergence of the draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values. We recognise the legitimate importance of African ownership, cultural values, sovereignty and the strengthening of families and communities. At the same time, we believe that any new regional instrument should complement, rather than diminish, the human rights standards that Member States have collectively affirmed through regional human rights instruments.

We are equally mindful that across several Member States, civil society organisations, human rights defenders, journalists and other civic actors are navigating increasingly complex regulatory and security environments. This narrowing of civic space becomes particularly acute during periods of political transition. As the continent navigates an important electoral cycle, we are concerned that regulatory and security pressures may restrict political participation and civic space. While several elections have demonstrated encouraging examples of peaceful participation, other contexts have seen restrictions on civil society organisations and reprisal against human rights defenders.

Honourable Delegates and Distinguished Guests,

The devastating fallout of conflicts extends far beyond immediate violence, disrupting livelihoods and deepening food insecurity, unemployment and other existing

vulnerabilities. These challenges have contributed to sustained civic mobilisation, particularly among young people seeking greater accountability, inclusion and economic opportunity.

As we confront these longstanding challenges, we must also address emerging human rights concerns, particularly technology-facilitated violence. While digital technologies create unprecedented opportunities for youth participation, access to information and innovation, they also create new avenues for harm. Internet disruptions and restrictions on access to information further undermine transparency and public participation, particularly during periods of political tension and conflict.

NANHRI therefore encourages the African Commission and Member States to strengthen rights aligned regulatory and policy frameworks that ensure appropriate safeguards and protect African citizens from forms of violence that may originate online but can cause profound harm in the physical world.

Honourable Delegates and Distinguished Guests,

Gender-based violence, the recruitment of children by armed groups and abuses against migrants and refugees further remains urgent concerns, particularly in fragile contexts. Persons deprived of their liberty also remain particularly vulnerable to overcrowding, inadequate access to health care, poor water and sanitation, prolonged pre-trial detention and reports of torture, underscoring the need for independent oversight and preventive monitoring.

Climate change and growing demand for critical mineral are creating additional pressures on vulnerable communities, affecting livelihoods, land rights and environmental protection. Our response to these challenges must therefore remain grounded in human rights-based approach that places the protection and dignity of the most vulnerable at the centre of the Africa Human Rights System.

In this changing environment, NHRIs remain indispensable pillars of the African human rights architecture. Their ability to monitor, investigate, advise governments, engage communities and identify emerging risks makes them a critical bridge between national realities and regional accountability mechanisms. It is therefore essential that NHRIs are adequately resourced, protected from reprisals and empowered to fulfil their mandates independently and effectively.

As we commemorate 40 years of the African Charter, NANHRI reaffirms its unwavering commitment to working alongside the African Commission, Member States, NHRIs, CSOs and all stakeholders to strengthen human rights protection across Africa.

We therefore call for continued engagement, openness to dialogue and fidelity to the commitments that Member States have already made under the African human rights framework.

I thank you.