

## 71<sup>st</sup> Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

### Statement under Item 6: Activity Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa

Observer Status No. 359

Honorable Chairpersons,

Distinguished Commissioners,

State Delegates represented,

Ladies and gentlemen!

We welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of women and congratulate Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njieas on her recent appointment as the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa. We reiterate that in countries that are currently facing conflict on the continent, women face serious challenges. Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) working in this context face unique challenges amidst their efforts to protect the rights of women. We would like to also bring to light the risks WHRDs who exercise their right to protest face.

Honourable Chairperson,

Women and girls remain extremely vulnerable to the impact of ongoing conflicts in, among other countries, **Ethiopia, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo**. Sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery, and female genital mutilation (FGM), is being used as a weapon of war, and can constitute crimes against humanity and the crime of torture.

General insecurity, paired with restrictions on access to information and freedom of movement, makes it difficult for the WHRDs working in these regions to not only monitor and document violations, but also provide emergency assistance to minimise the long-term physical and psychological effects on the victims and survivors. Efforts by WHRDs to seek justice and reparations for the victims are often fruitless as many of the perpetrators enjoy impunity, which contributes to the repetition of these crimes.

The human rights situation in **Sudan** also continues to deteriorate following the military coup of 25 October 2021. We have documented death, injury, and arbitrary arrests as a result of the excessive use of violence by the Sudanese army and state security officers against peaceful protesters and those demanding civilian rule or a return to the transitional process. WHRDs involved in peaceful protests have also been subjected to sexual assault during arrest or while being held. Despite efforts by the Commission to address these violations, specifically in accordance with ACHPR Res. 510 (LXIX)2021, the situation is not improving. In January and February 2022, four WHRDs were arrested on fabricated grounds. The conditions in the detention centers expose them to further risks of sexual assault and torture.

Elsewhere, restrictions on freedom of expression result in increased violations against female journalists, especially in the form of harassment, smear campaigns, censorship, physical assault, and arbitrary arrests. We have documented nine violations against female journalists in **Niger, Tunisia,**

**Eswatini, Egypt, and Uganda** since January 2022. In some of these cases, the journalists are targeted for documenting peaceful protests and hence viewed as allies of protest movements.

**Honourable Chairperson**

These threats against WHRDs not only affect the WHRDs in their individual capacity but also often extend to their families and communities they live and work in. Since November 2021, Sahrawi WHRD Sultana Khaya and her family were attacked in their home by Moroccan security forces twice. The WHRD, her sister, and her elderly mother were sexually and physically assaulted in the attacks.

**Honourable Chairperson,**

It is imperative that state parties adopt legislative, policy, and administrative measures to ensure the protection of women and girls on the continent and eradicate all forms of violence against them. We call on this Commission to:

- Take necessary measures to monitor the effective implementation of the Maputo Protocol and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on national level;
- Urge State Parties to implement Res. 492 (LXIX)2021 on Violence against Women during Armed Conflicts in Africa; and
- Urge State Parties to implement Res. 474 (EXT.OS/ XXXI) 2021 on prohibition of excessive use of force by law enforcement officers.

I thank you.