

Statement by **DefendDefenders** and **AfricanDefenders** on the situation of human rights in Africa at the 73rd session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Honorable Chairperson,

Honorable Commissioners,

State Delegates represented

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

DefendDefenders and **AfricanDefenders** join the rest of the African community to celebrate the 35 years of growth and milestone achievements of the African Commission. For this reason, we have supported **27 human rights defenders** from across the continent to join this celebration and engage with the Commission.

Honourable Chairperson,

This celebration takes place as, in contrast, we continue to record a spike in violence, repression against human rights defenders, and armed conflicts that obstruct the achievement of justice and accountability.

Despite impressive efforts to strengthen the Commission's framework for the past 35 years, it is disturbing to see the lack of political will by states to implement the Commission's recommendations and the total disregard of their obligations under the African Charter. We remember vividly in a few examples; Egypt ignored a call by this august house to suspend the execution of 26 detainees and Eritrea ignored the ruling of the Commission calling for the release and compensation of the journalists arrested in September 2001 that remain detained incommunicado.

Just a day before the opening of this session, in Chad, protests were met with bloody repression. The government reported at least "fifty deaths and more than 300 injured." The Commission should call for a prompt, impartial, and effective investigation into the loss of life.

Additionally, there have been ignored conflicts in Cameroon, Nigeria and Central Africa Republic that the Commission should monitor and take action on.

Honorable Chairperson,

By end of 2021, the UNHCR reported that the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region **hosted 4.9 million refugees and asylum seekers, as well as 12 million internally displaced people.**

This demonstrates the complexity of the region due to political instability, drought, flooding, food shortages, insecurity, and localized violence and conflicts.

Regrettably, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia remain the biggest epicentres of conflicts on the continent. We call on the Commission to condemn ongoing violations and abuses, governments' repression and obstruction to justice and the transitional justice process in Sudan and South Sudan.

Honorable Chairperson,

While reflecting on climate changes and the protection of the environment, we deplore some direct threats by African governments against HRDs working on issues of climate justice.

In this regard we hope the COP 27 that will take place on our continent, specifically in Egypt, will build on successes and pave the way for future ambition to effectively tackle the global challenge on climate change.

However, we would like to emphasize that there is no climate justice without an open civic space.

We therefore, urge the **Egyptian authorities** to immediately lift restrictions imposed on numerous NGOs, release unjustly detained human rights defenders and ensure that activists attending COP27 are not obstructed by prohibitive administrative processes or other undue restrictions of their rights.

Honourable Chairperson,

The resurgence of Coup d'états in Africa has contributed to weakening the democratic order and the rule of law by escalating conflicts, and worsening chronic vulnerabilities.

Countries like Chad, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Sudan are still under the authority of unelected military juntas, while Tunisia is on its way back to dictatorship, threatening to reverse gains of the Revolution.

Others, like Swaziland [Eswatini] and Zimbabwe continue to repress and suppress human rights defenders, and curtail fundamental freedoms with impunity.

On a positive note, this year has seen successful elections and changes of government in Angola, Somalia and Kenya. Despite pre-election tensions characterized by sporadic violence in some, the elections in these countries have been largely peaceful, with results accepted by all parties.

Finally Honorable Chairperson,

We call on Member States to adhere to their commitments to protect, promote, respect, and fulfil the fundamental human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the African Charter and as preached in the African Union Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

I thank you for your attention.

Hassan Shire,

Executive Director, DefendDefenders and Chairperson, AfricanDefenders