

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

### Statement under Item 10: Activity Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa

Observer Status No. 359

**Honorable Chairperson,  
Distinguished Commissioners,  
State Delegates represented,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

AfricanDefenders and DefendDefenders welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of women and congratulate the African Commission on Human and People's Rights on its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The African Commission must be commended for its contribution towards the domestic legislation of the provisions of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights as well as its active participation in the adoption of the Maputo Protocol.

However, **Honourable Chairperson**, despite the actions and guidance of this Commission, women and girls on the continent remain extremely vulnerable to violence. Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) have reported a rise in gender-based violence (GBV) on the continent mainly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread conflict. Efforts 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.

**Honourable Chairperson,**

To date, [3 female members](#) of the Abahlali baseMjondolo, a grassroots movement advocating for the rights of informal settlement dwellers, have been killed in South Africa. [Nokuthula Mabaso](#), a leader of the eKhenana Commune of Abahlali baseMjondolo, was shot and killed outside of her home in front of her children. In August 2021, [Babita Deokaran](#), a

whistleblower in the Gauteng Department of Health, was shot multiple times outside her home in Winchester Hills, Johannesburg as she returned from dropping her children at school.

This killing is believed to be a targeted hit as she was a key witness in the Special Investigating Unit's probe into fraudulent COVID-19 PPE contracts, a matter that sought to expose the corruption of high officials.

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. [Isabel Makitoko](#), was verbally and physically attacked in Angola for covering a rally by the opposition party ahead of the August 2022 general elections. In January 2022, following months of harassment and unlawful detainment, [Samira Sabou](#) was charged with defamation and diffusing information to disrupt public order for sharing a report on drugs trafficking in Niger.

The general insecurity in states experiencing conflict such as Ethiopia, Cameroon, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, mostly affects women and girls as sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war.

Additionally, the instability caused by the unconstitutional changes in government in countries like Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Chad, Mali, and Sudan, exposes women and girls to aggravated risks to their physical and mental wellbeing. WHRDs working in these contexts are unable to accurately monitor and report these violations and deliver assistance due to the volatility in these regions.

### **Honourable Chairperson,**

Agenda 2063 recognises ICT as a vital component for the development of the continent, and that access to the internet should be considered a right. Despite the low percentage of women having the ability to regularly access the internet, a significant number of those that do, continuously suffer online GBV. The killing of prominent Libyan political activist and lawyer, [Hanan al-Barassi](#), for posting a video on Facebook in which she made allegations of corruption against the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, is a sad reminder of the potential of online threats and harassment culminating into physical violations. Most, if not all human rights

instruments do not specifically address the issue of cyber violence which is increasingly becoming a problem. The lives of many women and girls, especially WHRDs, remains at risk if the issue of cyber violence is not regulated.

**Honourable Chairperson,**

- We call on state parties to respect their obligation under the African Charter and fight impunity ,