



**STATEMENT OF HIS EXCELLENCY AMB. BANKOLE ADEOYE**

**COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS, PEACE AND SECURITY**

**AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**AT**

**THE FORUM ON THE PARTICIPATION OF NGOS IN THE 68TH ORDINARY SESSION  
OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS**

**VIRTUALLY ON 12 APRIL 2021**

**ZOOM WEBINAR**

**Hon. Commissioner Solomon Ayele Dersso** – Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights;

**Mr. Marcel Akpovo** – Director of the Eastern Africa Regional Office of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN-OHCHR);

**Mr. Andrew Chigovera**, Chair, African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) Governing Council;

**Ms. Corlett Letlojane** - NGOs Forum Steering Committee Distinguish representatives of NGOs;

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

All protocol observed.

It is an honour and indeed my pleasure to have been invited to deliver the opening statement on this special occasion. I am aware that the aims of this Forum is to consolidate collaboration between and among NGOs to enhance partnership with the African human rights mechanisms for the Africa we want as stipulated in the African Union Agenda 2063, and is being held this year on the theme **“The Africa We Want: the Role of Arts, Culture And Heritage in the Realization of Human Rights And Democracy in a Post Covid-19 Environment”**. I am particularly please, because this Theme is aligned with the African Union Theme of the year 2021 **“Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want”**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

By declaring the year 2021 as the year of “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want”, the AU is putting spotlight on the importance of Arts, Culture and Heritage and is calling all departments, AU

Organs and AU Member States to ensure that this theme is highlighted in their respective work, not just this year but forever. The AU is mindful of the role of arts, culture and heritage in advancing our common vision sets in Agenda 2063, particularly for the realization of Aspiration 3 which stand for an Africa of Good Governance, respect for Human Rights, Justice and Rule of Law and Aspiration 4 which stands for a peaceful and secured Africa as promoted by the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security.

Being called to share the role of our Pan-African organization, the African Union, in furthering the role of arts, culture and heritage in the realization of human rights and democracy in Africa, I wish to highlight that, it is often artists, experts and cultural professionals who point out the existence of a problem, who reveal uncomfortable truths, who reveal the unspoken, or who make the invisible visible. Using their artistic and cultural means, they create spaces for societal debate both within and outside the ordinary framework of political discourse and social networks.

In terms of cultural rights, all people have to enjoy the right to freedom of artistic expression and creation, which includes the right to freely attend and contribute to artistic expressions and creations, through individual or collective practice, the right to access the arts and the right to disseminate their expressions and creations. This implies the right to access, participate and contribute to cultural life.

Indeed, this is strongly considered throughout many legal instrument of the African Union to ensure that Art, culture and Heritage plays a role in the realization of our continental Agenda 2063 in building the Africa we want. These instrument include, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child, African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance; the Revised AU Plan of Action on Cultural and Creative Industries, just to mention a few.

In view of the foregoing, and in line with major regional, continental and international instruments including: the ECOWAS resolution on the return of illicitly trafficked cultural goods, and the UNESCO decision of July 2020, the

AU is engaged on combatting illicit trafficking in cultural goods. In this regard, the need to promote negotiations for the restitution of illegally trafficked and stolen cultural goods from the continent should be enhanced.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

With regard to the fight against Covid-19 pandemic, The African Union has drafted a Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 response underpinned by coordination, collaboration, cooperation and communication and a Comprehensive Socio-Economic Response which are centred at developing appropriated approaches for human security, using cultural workers, including musicians, film-makers, actors and writers as advocacy agents for good and inclusive health and wellness.

Nelson Mandela said ones that "To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity." And our Humanity is printed in our African cultural value which is guided by the Ubuntu Philosophy '**I AM because you are; You are because I Am.**'

The promotion and protection of Cultural rights is our collective responsibility and together we can move things better.

I declared the NGO Forum opened and wish you all a fruitful deliberation.

I thank you for your attention