

Human rights situation in Africa
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**Honourable Chairperson,
Honourable Commissioners,
State Delegates represented,
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,**

DefendDefenders and AfricanDefenders would like to address you yet again on the regression of human rights, particularly civic space, in Africa. We draw the attention of the plenary to the ramped-up restrictions on civic space we have witnessed over the past months.

Elections that have been conducted or have been slated to happen across several countries across the continent have seen serious infringements on civic space in Africa. Particularly in Zimbabwe, there were reports of increasing political violence, irregularities with voting registration, arbitrary arrests of key political actors, attacks on journalists, and crackdown on peaceful assembly in the run up to their by-elections. These trends are especially worrying since the by-elections could set a precedent for the electoral climate ahead of general elections in 2023. We have also witnessed an increase in disinformation and misinformation campaigns in Kenya, which are aimed at exacerbating existing political and intercommunal tensions in the country ahead of the August 2022 general elections. Moreover, there have been reports of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of political actors. Like many African states, the political landscape in both countries has been characterised by political violence, which remains inadequately unaddressed or investigated.

We call for accountability and justice on behalf of State actors to end the cycle of impunity witnessed during election periods.

Honourable Chairperson,

We reiterate our concern for the worrying trend of successful and unsuccessful unconstitutional coups that have been occurring across the continent. Just this year, we have witnessed two attempted coups adding to the plethora of coups that occurred last year. These coups in some cases jeopardise democratic gains achieved in countries with fragile transition processes, like Sudan.

As we speak, military officials continue to utilise heavy handed methods to crack down on peaceful civilian protestors asking for the restoration of the civilian-led government, or full-fledged civilian rule, in Sudan. We welcome this Commission's resolution ACHPR/Res. 510 (LXIX)2021 on the deterioration of the human rights situation since the military takeover and urge this Commission to follow up on their call to the African Union, IGAD and United Nations to ensure there is restoration of stability in the country. We encourage the Commission to work in close cooperation with Adama Dieng, the UN High Commissioner-designated Expert on Human Rights in Sudan.

Honourable Chairperson,

There is also an increase of constitutional coups on the continent where executive powers and state authorities are enacting laws and passing decrees that are contrary to their constitution. In Tunisia, for example, the president has amassed nearly absolute power through suspending the sitting parliament, arresting political opponents, and calling for a constitutional referendum. In Libya, there have been several executive decrees that not only restrict freedom of association in the country but also put Libyan and international civil society at risk of reprisals from state-affiliated armed groups, in addition to restricting their work.

These are some of the actions that create an environment that has allowed for coups and unconstitutional changes of power to take place.

Honourable Commissioner,

Conflict on the continent remains a key driver of shrinking civic space as it does not create a conducive environment for civil liberties to thrive and often results in gross human rights violations, such as mass indiscriminate killings, and arbitrary arrests by military officers that have yet to be adequately addressed.

Mozambique continues to be at our utmost concern. We welcome the extension of SADC's Mission to Cabo Delgado to help with the fight against the armed groups present and we look forward to a swift resolution to the conflict that has left over 3,500 people dead.

Cameroon enters its sixth year of the Anglophone crisis without any meaningful dialogue to end a conflict that has left over 712,000 number of people displaced.

We would like to bring to this Commission's attention the importance of accountability and the general respect of human rights in post-conflict environments, hence why we successfully pushed for the renewal of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan which is the main accountability body in the country in the absence of the Hybrid Court and other transitional justice mechanisms set out in the Revitalised Peace Agreement of 2018.

Honourable Chairperson,

We have also witnessed a general clampdown of civil liberties across the continent. We continue to receive reports of the retaliation of civil society actors calling for accountability and transparency such as in Liberia.

Eswatini remains a country of concern. We urge this Commission to call for a meaningful dialogue between the monarchy and the people of Eswatini that will lead to lasting resolutions and enactment of democratic principles.

Considering this worrying human rights situation, we call on this Commission to ensure that the AU strengthen its existing normative frameworks and that the states properly implement them to ensure that the human rights situation in the continent improves.

Thank you.