

**Statement at the Special Edition of the 52nd Ordinary Session of the African
Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, held on 9th October 2012 at the
Fondation Felix Houphouet Boigny, in
Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast**

Your Excellency, Alassane Ouattara, President of the Republic of Cote D'Ivoire; and
Chairperson of ECOWAS;

The Lord Mayor of Yamoussoukro

Your Excellency, The Prefect of Yamoussoukro;

My Lord, Chief Justice of The Republic of Cote D'Ivoire;

Honourable Members of the National Assembly;

Honourable Ministers of the Republic of Cote D'Ivoire;

Your Excellency, Commissioner, Department for Political Affairs of the African Union
Commission;

Your Excellencies, Madam Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Members of the African
Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR);

My Lord, Chief Prosecutor of the International Tribunal Court on Rwanda;

Your Excellency, Madame Navi Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights

Members of the United Nations Family present – UN OHCHR, UNOCI and UNOWA;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps;

The Chairperson and Executive Governing Council Members of the African Centre for
Democracy and Human Rights Studies (GC/ACDHRS);

Distinguished State Representatives;

Venerable Religious and Traditional Leaders;

Representatives of National Human Rights Institutions;

Representatives of National and International NGOs;

Representatives of the Press;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen; All protocols respectfully observed

Twenty-five years is indeed a milestone! It is a historic and important time, whether it is in the life of any human being or any institution. It is a time to muse over those moments that have brought success in its wake as well as those other moments we might have changed, given the opportunity. It is indeed a time to pause, to reflect and to get more prepared for a sombre stance towards the challenges of the future, having been armed with the wisdom and experience of the past.

It is, therefore, my pleasure coupled with a great sense of humility that I stand before this august gathering of the African human rights community, on this auspicious occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (hitherto referred to as ACHPR or The African Commission), charged with the responsibility to give a statement on behalf of all my colleagues of the Forum of NGOs in the Work of the 52nd Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Before I proceed, permit me to request that we observe a moment's silence for those Commissioners who have passed on. We remember in particular the first Chairperson, Mr. Isaac Nguema, under whose leadership the African Commission started its first foot forward.

On behalf of the Governing Council of the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS); The NGO Forum Steering Committee; all the participants of the NGO Forum, and indeed on my own behalf, I wish to thank the Chairperson and Members of the African Commission for affording us this opportunity to accompany you in this walk along memory lane in a bid to realign your priorities and chart your forward direction.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The Forum wishes to also express its **gratitude** to the Government and people of The Republic of Cote D'Ivoire, this land of warm hearted Africans, for their hospitality, in

facilitating the activities of this landmark session, the 52nd Ordinary Session and to reiterate the appreciation of the participants of the Forum of NGOs for the warmth afforded them during the preparatory mission, and moreover since their arrival in Cote D'Ivoire. We note, with admiration that Cote D'Ivoire is hosting this momentous session of the ACHPR and has also taken it in its stride to present its initial state report to the African Commission, despite the challenges and austerity measures this beautiful land has been going through.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Forum on the Participation of NGOs in the 52nd Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, was held from the 6-8 October, 2012, just before this historic Session of the African Commission.

In keeping with the celebration of twenty-five years of the African Commission this year, the Forum adopted the theme 'Celebrating 25 years of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights'.

The Forum noted that while Africa has seen significant and positive developments in the human rights and democracy situation on the continent, it is worthy to observe an improvement in the respect for human rights, good governance and the rule of law. The African Commission has indeed developed various instruments, made decisions and mechanisms to match this growing tide. This august body has been able to adopt its rules of procedure streamlining its operations and clarified various provisions of the Charter to States Parties and other stakeholders; developed guidelines setting minimum standards for compliance with the Charter; established mechanisms which have contributed to the building of jurisprudence as well as to the provision of information to the Commission; made laudable contributions to international human rights law in its communications; examined the states reports of about 40 states parties; granted affiliate status to National Human rights Institutions and observer status to Non Governmental Institutions; among

other developments. Moreover, we are all here today, witnesses at this momentous silver jubilee session of the African Commission and would like to take this opportunity to salute, most especially, all past and present Commissioners. We congratulate the current Chairperson, HE Catherine Dupe Atoki and Members of the African Commission; the Secretary and Members of the Secretariat for continuing to keeping the torch of human rights shining; to all State Parties and indeed the people of Africa for whom this treaty body was established.

The role of the African Union in strengthening the continental framework to promote and protect human and peoples' rights in Africa has spurred the pursuit of human rights which has become an integral responsibility, by ensuring that the Human Rights Strategy for Africa is at the heart of the African Governance Architecture. The increased involvement of civil society organisations in the consultative processes are exemplary and commendable and have indeed gone a long way to enhance partnerships and promote ownership of the various processes by the African people.

While applauding these developments, the Forum asserted that Africa continues to face serious human rights challenges characterised by conflict, insecurity and violence. Poverty, disease, internal political strife, resulting in the taking up of arms by rebel groups, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings continue to bring hardships to the majority of citizens of the affected countries, especially the women and children. The situation in some States have remained a cause for concern, including Mali, Sudan and DRC where serious and massive human rights violations are being perpetrated against civilian population, serious challenges which call for a constant and increasing strengthening of the protective and promotional mandate of the Commission. The 'Marikana incident' in South Africa; the increasing and continuing Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria were also among the issues discussed.

Furthermore, the treatment of prisoners especially those on the death row brought the recently related cases that took place in The Gambia to the fore. As a result the Forum called on States to respect the right to life and the moratorium on the death penalty.

The Declaration of the Forum will be forwarded, for the kind consideration of your august body, as our contribution to your deliberations at this 52nd Session.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the participants, please allow me to reiterate the readiness of the NGO community to work with these mechanisms in the realization of their mandates. As partners in the process, we are committed to putting all our expertise and resources at the disposal of the African Commission in the realization of the various objectives.

In the true spirit of the African Union's Constitutive Act in which the Heads of State of Africa professed a 'common vision of a united and strong Africa, energised by partnership between governments and all segments of civil society', representatives at this Forum reaffirmed their commitment to the reinforcement of this partnership with the African Union and all its organs, not the least, the African Commission, in the furtherance of human rights, good governance and the rule of law in Africa. The Forum participants have continued to demonstrate their dedication to the work of the African Commission by their enthusiastic and passionate contributions to the preparations leading to their participation in this Session.

The Forum, while pleased with the progress made by the African Commission notes that serious challenges with the potential to affect its effectiveness persist. I would like to take this opportunity to launch an appeal to states and indeed the international community to continue to **support the strengthening of this institution, which will, no doubt, go a long way towards the effective implementation of its mandate.**

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of ACDHRS and indeed the participants of the Forum of NGOs, allow me to wish The Honourable Chairperson and all the Members of the Commission, fruitful deliberations and a successful silver jubilee session.

Thank You for your kind attention.

HJF,

ACDHRS,

October 2012