

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE
FORUM ON THE PARTICIPATION OF NGOs IN THE 85TH ORDINARY SESSION
OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS
THEME: THE YEAR OF REPARATIONS: “Justice for Africans and People of African
Descent through Reparations”
1st Draft 26th August 2025

Background and Justification

The concept of reparations encompasses acknowledgment, redress, and compensation for historical and contemporary injustices. For Africa and its diaspora, reparations are tied to centuries of slavery, colonialism, systemic racism, and the exploitation of people and resources. Reparations are not limited to financial compensation but also include recognition of the past violations, restitution, rehabilitation, guarantees of non-repetition, and symbolic measures that restore dignity and promote healing.

According to the Global Slavery Index (2023), over 50 million people globally live in modern slavery, with Africa accounting for nearly 7 million of those affected.¹ Country-specific data shows the magnitude of the problem: Nigeria has an estimated 1.61 million victims of modern slavery (7.8 per 1,000 people),² Ethiopia has 727,000 (6.3 per 1,000), Egypt has 442,000 (4.3 per 1,000), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has 407,000 (4.5 per 1,000)³. These figures highlight how systemic exploitation continues to affect millions across the continent.

Child marriage, another rights violation, remains widespread. In Nigeria, around 43% of girls are married before age 18 and 17% before 15; in Ethiopia, 40% before 18 and 14% before 15; and in the DRC, 37% before 18 and 10% before 15. Such practices perpetuate cycles of poverty, exclusion, and gender inequality, reinforcing the urgency of reparations frameworks that are gender-sensitive and inclusive.

Illicit financial flows (IFFs) are another obstacle to justice and development. The African Union estimates that the continent loses US\$88.6 billion annually through IFFs, equivalent to 3.7% of Africa's GDP⁴. These losses drain resources that could be invested in health, education, human rights protections, and reparations mechanisms.

Across the continent, Africa continues to face governance, economic, and human rights challenges that deepen structural inequalities. These include unconstitutional changes of government, shrinking civic space, impunity for violations, manipulation of electoral processes, environmental degradation, and continued violations against women, youth, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples. The NGOs Forum preceding the 85th Ordinary Session of the ACHPR will be a continuous discussion of the previous forum and also provide a space to reflect on these pressing concerns through the lens of reparations and broader human rights advocacy.

¹ [Global Slavery Index | Walk Free](#)

² [GSI-Snapshot-Nigeria.pdf](#)

³ [The Global Slavery Index 2023 \(Walk Free\)](#)

⁴ [Africa could gain \\$89 billion annually by curbing illicit financial flows | UN Trade and Development \(UNCTAD\)](#)

Objectives of the Forum

- To enhance understanding of reparations as a pathway to justice, healing, and empowerment for Africans and people of African descent.
- To provide a platform for NGOs and other stakeholders to engage in dialogue on the state of human rights in Africa.
- To develop strategies linking reparations to issues such as governance, civic space, environmental justice, and the protection of vulnerable groups.
- To strengthen networking and build alliances among civil society actors for collective advocacy.

Thematic Focus

- 1. Reparations: Historical Justice and Contemporary Relevance**
Reparations for slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism remain central to the human rights agenda. Beyond symbolic recognition, reparations are critical for addressing intergenerational trauma, economic inequalities, and the restitution of stolen cultural heritage. Calls for restitution have grown stronger, with global advocacy demanding that reparations be integrated into development and justice frameworks.
- 2. Unconstitutional Changes of Government in West and Central Africa**
In recent years, West and Central Africa have witnessed repeated unconstitutional changes of government, including in Mali, Guinea, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Gabon. These power shifts undermine democratic principles, destabilize societies, and exacerbate human rights violations. Addressing these crises requires accountability and measures to restore trust in governance systems.
- 3. Shrinking Civic Space and Restrictions on Freedoms**
Civil society continues to face repression, with governments across Africa restricting freedoms of assembly, association, and expression. Reports from countries such as Cameroon, Ethiopia, Angola, Kenya, and Egypt highlight systematic crackdowns on human rights defenders, journalists, and NGOs. Shrinking civic space undermines the role of civil society in promoting reparative and transformative justice.
- 4. Elections, Democracy, and the Third-Term Phenomenon**
The manipulation of constitutions to allow third presidential terms has become an emerging threat to democracy in Africa. This phenomenon, observed in several states, weakens democratic institutions and erodes public trust. The Forum will highlight the human rights implications of electoral manipulation and authoritarian entrenchment.
- 5. Impunity for Human Rights Violations**
Across the continent, impunity persists for gross human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence. Reparations cannot be meaningful without accountability, and addressing impunity is key to ensuring non-repetition and transitional justice.
- 6. Environmental Rights and Protection of Indigenous Peoples**
Environmental degradation, climate change, and exploitation of natural resources

disproportionately affect indigenous communities and marginalized groups. Land dispossession, deforestation, and extractive industries have led to widespread displacement. Linking environmental justice with reparations ensures that vulnerable communities receive redress for the destruction of their livelihoods and ecosystems.

7. People of African Descent and Reparations

Diaspora communities continue to demand reparations for slavery and colonial exploitation. Global initiatives have highlighted the need for restitution, cultural recognition, and acknowledgment of the role of Africans in shaping global history. Strengthening solidarity between Africa and its diaspora is essential in advancing the reparations agenda.

8. Global Political and Economic Challenges

Illicit financial flows, exploitation of natural resources, and debt burdens continue to deprive African states of critical resources for development. Reparations must be connected to global economic justice, including the fair distribution of wealth and resources.

9. Rights of Vulnerable Groups

Women, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and survivors of gender-based violence remain disproportionately affected by inequality and discrimination. Gender-sensitive and inclusive reparations frameworks are critical for ensuring justice that addresses the needs of all vulnerable groups.

10. The African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

The African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, adopted as a landmark instrument, reflects the continent's commitment to eliminating all forms of gender-based violence and harmful practices. It seeks to harmonize legal frameworks, strengthen accountability, and provide comprehensive measures for prevention, protection, and survivor-centered responses across Member States. This Convention is pivotal to advancing gender equality, human rights, and sustainable development in Africa.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel 1: Reparations – Justice for Africans and People of African Descent

- This panel will explore the moral, legal, and economic foundations of reparations, addressing both historical wrongs and present-day injustices. It will discuss intergenerational trauma, systemic inequalities, structural hierarchies, social stratification, Patriarchal and the restitution of cultural heritage, emphasizing how reparations can promote healing and empowerment.

Focus areas:

- Historical roots of reparations: slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism.
- Contemporary relevance: economic inequality, cultural restitution, and intergenerational trauma.
- Practical frameworks for implementing reparations at national and regional levels.
- multidimensional responses to historical injustice.

- persistent discriminatory practices and perceptions in societies.

Panel 2: Governance and Unconstitutional Changes of Government

Examining the recent spate of coups in West and Central Africa and their negative impact on democracy, human rights, and regional stability, this panel seek to highlight the role of civil society and regional bodies in restoring democratic legitimacy.

Focus areas:

- Case studies of recent coups in Mali, Guinea, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Gabon.
- Impact of unconstitutional changes on democracy, stability, and human rights.
- Role of regional mechanisms in restoring legitimacy and accountability.

Panel 3: Civic Space Under Threat

The Forum under this panel will address the shrinking civic space across Africa, where human rights defenders, journalists, and NGOs face increased repression. It will explore strategies for safeguarding civil liberties and ensuring meaningful participation in democratic processes.

Focus areas:

- Shrinking freedoms of assembly, association, and expression.
- Examples from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Angola, Kenya, and Egypt.
- Strategies for protecting civic actors and advancing advocacy under repression.

Panel 4: Democracy, Elections, and the Third-Term Syndrome

Exploring how constitutional manipulation to enable third-term presidencies undermines democracy, weakens institutions, and fuels political instability, the deliberations will examine the role of civil society in promoting transparent and fair elections.

Focus areas:

- The phenomenon of third-term presidencies and constitutional manipulation.
- Human rights consequences of electoral malpractice.
- Civil society's role in safeguarding democracy.

Panel 5: Ending Impunity for Human Rights Violations

Highlighting the dangers of entrenched impunity for gross violations such as extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence, this Panel will underscore the importance of accountability as a cornerstone for justice and meaningful reparations.

Focus areas:

- Persistent impunity for extrajudicial killings, torture, and SGBV.
- Reparations as part of transitional justice and guarantees of non-repetition.
- Strengthening accountability through regional and international frameworks.

Panel 6: Environmental Justice and Indigenous Peoples' Rights

This panel will examine the intersection of environmental degradation, climate change, and human rights, focusing on how indigenous and marginalized communities bear the brunt of exploitation. It will highlight the importance of reparations in addressing ecological harm and protecting livelihoods.

Focus areas:

- Environmental degradation and land dispossession.
- Impacts on indigenous peoples and vulnerable communities.
- Reparations for environmental harm and resource exploitation.

Panel 7: Diaspora and Reparations

Underscoring the pivotal role of people of African descent in championing reparations, restitution, and global solidarity, the diaspora serves as both a living testament to historical injustices and a powerful force for mobilizing international advocacy, this panel will seek to strengthen Diaspora advocacy for reparations.

Focus Areas:

- Building bridges between local African struggles and global movements.
- Amplifying African voices on the world stage through solidarity networks.

Panel 8: Global Economic Justice and Reparations

Situates reparations within broader debates on global economic justice, highlighting illicit financial flows, debt burdens, and resource exploitation. Reparations are framed as a tool for redress and redistributive justice.

Focus Areas:

- Addressing illicit financial flows and economic exploitation.
- Linking reparations to redistributive justice and resource sovereignty.
- Exploring reparations as a driver of structural transformation and Agenda 2063.

Panel 9: Protecting the Rights of Vulnerable Groups

Stresses that reparations must be inclusive, gender-sensitive, and responsive to marginalized communities to foster healing, social cohesion, and human rights.

Focus Areas:

- Addressing the needs of youth, women, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI and rural communities.
- Ensuring inclusivity in reparations processes so no one is left behind.
- Increased awareness on the centrality of reparations in achieving justice and healing for Africans and people of African descent.

- Strengthened advocacy for accountability, governance, and the protection of human rights.
- Enhanced networking and partnerships among civil society actors.

Panel 10: The African Union Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls

This panel will concretely explore how the AU Convention can be leveraged to strengthen the fight against Transnational Organized Crimes (TOC). Many forms of TOC such as trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, and contemporary forms of slavery disproportionately affect women and girls, making the Convention a vital tool for accountability and protection.

Focus Areas:

- Strengthening legal and policy frameworks to criminalize all forms of TOC and gender-based violence.
- Mobilizing resources and partnerships for survivor-centered services and access to justice.
- Enhancing monitoring and accountability mechanisms at national and regional levels.

Target Audience

- African and international NGOs
- Human rights defenders
- Policymakers and government representatives
- Regional and international organizations
- Academia and researchers
- Civil society networks
- Media practitioners

Languages: TBC

Date: 17th -19th October 2025

Venue: TBC