

ACDHRS NGO Forum Newsletter

Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations

Venue: Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre, Banjul, The Gambia

Dates: 17–19 October 2025

Organized by: African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)



INTRODUCTION

The 2025 Forum on the Participation of NGOs in the 85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) convened from 17th to 19th October 2025 in Banjul, The Gambia, under the theme *"Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations."*

Organized by the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), the Forum brought together more than 250 participants from across the African continent and the diaspora, including government officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), academics, traditional and religious leaders, and representatives of regional and international institutions.

For three days, the Forum served as a space for dialogue, reflection, and advocacy — reaffirming civil society's vital role in advancing justice, equality, and reparations in Africa. Through plenary discussions, thematic panels, and Special Interest Group sessions, participants examined critical issues affecting human rights on the continent: historical injustices, governance, impunity, gender equality, environmental justice, digital transformation, and the protection of human rights defenders.

DAY ONE – OPENING CEREMONY: A CALL FOR REPARATIVE JUSTICE



The opening ceremony set the stage for three days of deep and transformative discussions. In her welcoming address, Mrs. Hannah Forster, Executive Director of ACDHRS, reaffirmed the Centre's enduring commitment to promoting democracy, equality, and justice in Africa. She emphasized that reparations must be understood not only as financial redress but as a holistic process of truth, acknowledgment, restitution, and structural reform.

Representing Justice Solomy Bossa, the ACDHRS Governing Council Chair, Mr. Mabassa Faal noted the growing threats to civic space and the persecution of human rights defenders across the continent. He praised the resilience of African civil society and the growing activism of youth movements demanding transparency and accountability.

Ms. Corlette Letlojane, speaking on behalf of the NGO Forum Steering Committee, lauded the African Union for dedicating the year to reparations and urged governments to confront systemic racism, displacement, and economic exclusion affecting Africans and their descendants.

Other speakers, including Mr. Gilbert Sebihogo, Executive Director of NANHRI, and Ms. Yvonne Masarakufa of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in The Gambia, stressed the need for genuine commitment to justice and inclusivity.

Delivering the keynote address, Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Chairperson of the ACHPR, described the Forum as “a beacon for African voices,” urging civil society to continue pushing for transparency and accountability. As he marked his final Forum as Chairperson, he expressed gratitude for the partnership between the ACHPR and ACDHRS, highlighting that “justice for Africans must be fearless, inclusive, and rooted in truth.”

PANEL DISCUSSIONS: EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF INJUSTICE



The inaugural discussions unpacked the meaning of reparations in contemporary Africa, linking it to development, peace, and human dignity. H.E. Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang, former Vice President of The Gambia, joined other panelists in calling for a continental reparations framework to address the enduring legacies of slavery and colonialism.

Participants from Mauritania and North Africa shared firsthand experiences of systemic inequality, displacement, and repression, reminding the Forum that the pursuit of reparations is inseparable from the struggle for freedom and justice today.

The sub-regional reports revealed ongoing threats to human rights in all corners of the continent: shrinking civic space, arbitrary arrests, and suppression of dissent. Participants called for stronger regional cooperation, institutional reform, and independent oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability.



The day concluded with a compelling session on Environmental Justice and Indigenous Peoples' Rights, linking ecological destruction to human rights violations. Speakers from Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana underscored that environmental degradation and resource exploitation disproportionately affect women, youth, and rural communities. Calls were made to integrate indigenous knowledge into climate adaptation and to criminalize "ecocide" as a crime against humanity.

DAY TWO – ACCOUNTABILITY, INCLUSION, AND PEACEBUILDING



Day Two of the Forum was anchored on advancing accountability and inclusion as cornerstones of Africa's human rights future. Participants delved into complex topics such as impunity, reparations, vulnerable groups, and environmental justice, all tied to the broader theme of reparative development.

The discussions reaffirmed that ending impunity for human rights violations is central to restoring public trust and building sustainable peace. Panelists highlighted the persistent problem of unpunished abuses — from extrajudicial killings to gender-based violence and enforced disappearances — and called for independent investigative bodies, gender-sensitive justice systems, and stronger regional monitoring.



The session on the CERD's proposed General Recommendation on Reparations provided a unique platform for Africa to articulate a united stance. Speakers argued that reparations should address historical and structural injustices that continue to shape Africa's socio-economic realities. They proposed the creation of an African Reparations Fund and the return of looted artifacts, linking restitution to sustainable development and social equity.

Attention also turned to the rights of vulnerable groups, including persons with albinism, persons with disabilities, refugees, and older persons. Discussions highlighted the alarming rise in ritual killings of people with albinism and the persistent exclusion of people with disabilities from education and employment. Governments were urged to ratify and implement the African Disability Protocol and appoint a Special Envoy for Persons with Albinism.

Parallel sessions on environmental justice reaffirmed the connection between environmental destruction and human rights violations. Participants called for legal recognition of ecocide, inclusion of indigenous communities in environmental decision-making, and funding for grassroots-led adaptation projects.

The day's Special Interest Group (SIG) discussions deepened the dialogue, covering topics such as youth unemployment, migration, peacebuilding, and freedom of assembly. Across all themes, participants reaffirmed the importance of solidarity, transparency, and intergenerational engagement in advancing the human rights agenda.

DAY THREE – TECHNOLOGY, GENDER, AND THE PROTECTION OF DEFENDERS



The final day of the Forum highlighted emerging human rights issues and reaffirmed civil society's role in shaping Africa's future.

Morning discussions centered on the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG), described by panelists as a transformative framework to combat gender-based violence and promote equality. Speakers emphasized the urgent need for ratification, domestication, and awareness at grassroots levels. They called for survivor-centered approaches that prioritize dignity, justice, and reparations for victims.

Later sessions explored the intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI), human rights, and governance, examining both opportunities and risks. Participants agreed that while AI can enhance transparency and service delivery, it also poses new threats to privacy, surveillance, and data ownership. Calls were made for ethical AI governance, continental data protection laws, and investment in digital literacy.

The closing discussions addressed the protection of human rights defenders in an increasingly restrictive environment. Panelists and activists from across Africa decried arbitrary arrests, digital harassment, and the misuse of national security laws. The Forum urged states to repeal repressive legislation, ensure independent investigations, and strengthen the ACHPR's Special Rapporteur mechanism.

The day ended with the launch of the Senegal Human Rights Defenders Report, symbolizing renewed solidarity and advocacy for those who risk their lives defending fundamental freedoms.

ADOPTED RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Following extensive deliberations, the Forum adopted 11 thematic resolutions and 7 general recommendations, covering:

- Economic and Inclusive Development: promoting equitable access to resources and tackling inequality.
- Civic and Political Rights: ensuring open political space and peaceful elections.
- Environmental Justice and Ecocide: urging legal recognition of ecocide as an international crime.
- Civic Space and HRDs: calling for protection of activists and unrestricted access to digital freedoms.
- Abolition of the Death Penalty: reaffirming opposition to capital punishment and urging ratification of the ICCPR's Second Optional Protocol.
- Education and Human Rights Awareness: integrating human rights education into national curricula.

Country-specific resolutions addressed critical human rights situations in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, Liberia, The Gambia, and the DRC, urging states to uphold the rule of law, end arbitrary detentions, and ensure accountability for violations.

CLOSING CEREMONY: A RENEWED MANDATE FOR ACTION



The Forum concluded with a moving closing ceremony that reflected the spirit of unity and shared purpose. Traditional leaders, civil society representatives, and international partners expressed deep appreciation to ACDHRS for convening an inclusive and impactful gathering.

Dr. Linda, representing traditional leaders, spoke passionately about the need to align cultural leadership with human rights values, describing the Forum as “a bridge between tradition and justice.”

Ambassador Teneng Mba Jaiteh, newly appointed to the ACDHRS Governing Council, praised the Forum for its inclusivity and insight, calling it “a journey through a landscape of passion and purpose.”

Delivering remarks on behalf of Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Hon. Commissioner Litha Musyimi-Ogana commended the Forum as “the beating heart of Africa’s human rights system.” She reaffirmed the Commission’s commitment to partnership with civil society and urged participants to turn the Forum’s resolutions into tangible reforms.

The ceremony closed with an invitation to all participants to engage actively in the 85th Ordinary Session of the ACHPR, beginning on October 21st, 2025, in Banjul.

LOOKING AHEAD

As the 2025 NGO Forum came to a close, one message resonated clearly: Africa's pursuit of justice and equality must be relentless, inclusive, and forward-looking. The Forum reaffirmed that true reparations go beyond compensation — they demand acknowledgment, reform, and solidarity.

Through collective action, civil society continues to stand as the moral compass of the continent, ensuring that every African's right to dignity, justice, and peace is protected and upheld.

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