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## **NETWORK OF AFRICAN NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS**

**Statement at the 68<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights**

**PRESENTED BY**

**Dr. Elasto Hilarious Mugwadi, NANHRI Vice Chairperson**

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**The Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Dr. Solomon Dersso;**

**Distinguished Representatives of AU Member States**

**Honorable Members of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights;**

**Distinguished Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

**All protocols duly observed**

On behalf of the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions, I feel greatly honored to address this 68<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The 68<sup>th</sup> Session is taking place 27 years since the 1994 Rwandan genocide of Tutsis, in which more than 800,000 Tutsis were systematically butchered in the 100 days onslaught. Other atrocities included torture, maiming, rape and defilement.

Although Rwanda has risen to prove to the world that a failed past does not deter a bright future, all measures should be put in place to prevent a repeat **in Africa or anywhere else of similar atrocities**. Our collective strength will not be judged on our performance on recovery, but on prevention of grave, catastrophic and irreversible events like the Genocide against Tutsis. We say **never again should this happen in Africa or anywhere else**.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;**

Crimes against humanity and other atrocities were the reasons the African human rights mechanisms were established to complement other institutional measures in the dispensation of justice at the subregional and regional levels.

NANHRI, being a regional body of National Human Rights Institutions has found it necessary and meaningful to bring together local actors to strengthen their working relations for the benefit of our common rights holders.

The 68<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session should, therefore, be an opportunity to evaluate the progress we are making, and also identify gaps and opportunities for further collaboration in fulfilling our broad human rights mandate.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;**

From the agenda of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session, it is gratifying to note that matters relating to the rights of women are given centre stage. State reports and other discourses have also prioritised women because of the central and progressive role they play in shaping African society, and in the ***Africa we want*** as envisaged in Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

In this regard, I am pleased to report that members of the Network of African NHRIs held the second NHRIs Forum on April 8-9, 2021 and discussed the ***Role of NHRIs in promoting the realisation of indigenous women's rights in Africa.***

The virtual meeting was held in the context of the African Union's theme of the year 2021, which is ***"Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want"***.

In the discussions it was clear that Africa is not short of legal and other forms of frameworks for promoting and protecting the rights of women. In addition to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, there is the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) and various national legal provisions relating to the rights of indigenous women.

Although the Maputo Protocol enjoys ratification by 42 Member States, reporting on implementation and fulfillment has been very low.

Reporting on the Maputo Protocol, remains minimal notwithstanding the fact that millions of women are displaced across the continent due to armed conflicts and kidnappings as brides for terrorists and 'goods for trade' by human trafficking syndicates and weapons of war in the form of rape and defilement. Indigenous women disproportionately suffer in these situations because of their vulnerability and operation of our archaic patriarchal social systems as well as offensive cultural practices.

The outcomes of the Forum including its Declaration and Action Plan will be officially shared with the African Commission in due course.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Away from the Maputo Protocol, NANHRI expresses concerns over the deteriorating human rights situation on the continent particularly increased armed conflicts and intensified terrorist activities in old and new spots across Africa.

The Boko Haram in Nigeria has been targeting innocent and defenceless students in learning institutions, who are abducted, raped or killed. Another barbaric Islamic group is reigning terror in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado Province, where dozens of locals and international expatriates were recently killed following the overrunning of Palma by the Isis-linked Al-Shabaab terror group, which has claimed responsibility for the attack. All this has caused turmoil and limited enjoyment of basic fundamental rights leading to massive internal displacements of the people.

We are also concerned by the situations in Cameroon and Ethiopia where governments are on the offensive against armed groups. In Ethiopia, forces involved have been accused of excessive use of force and other gross human rights violations.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

The situations has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 health crisis, which has diverted the attention of State and non-State human rights actors and limited their movement through preventive and containment protocols.

As a continent, we cannot pride in Agenda 2063 of a peaceful and prosperous Africa when institutions of good governance, accountability and peace enablers remain stooges and caricatures of what they are meant to be as impunity thrives and drives State actions.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

For this to change, partnership between and among State and non-State actors becomes a critical *sine qua non* remedy.

At the NANHRI level, we have developed a quick reference handbook and a number of tools on HRDs, including a regional national action plan, a national action plan template, and short, medium and long-term strategic methods for addressing reprisals. We appeal for technical and financial partnerships in implementing outcomes of these plans and engagements.

We also call on States to not only support NHRIs in ensuring they deliver on their mandate, but also allow the other non-state actors to work, as this contributes to helping the States fulfil their obligations.

In conclusion, **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**, we re-affirm our commitment to deepening our partnership with the African Commission and the other organs of the AU towards an Africa that treasures, invests and secures its today and tomorrow in empowering its women and girls.

**I Thank you!**