



**OPENING STATEMENT BY
H.E. MR. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 67TH ORDINARY SESSION OF
THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS
(ACHPR)**

13 NOVEMBER 2020



Honourable Dawda Jallow, Attorney-General and Minister of Justice of the Republic of The Gambia;

Honourable Commissioner Solomon Dersso, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR);

Honourable Justice Sylvain Oré, President of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

Honourable Maria Mapani-Kawimbe, Member of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC);

Honourable Commissioners of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights;

Your Excellences, Ministers and Heads of Delegation, Delegates of States Parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;

Your Excellences, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Representatives of the African National Human Rights Institutions;

Representatives of the UN Agencies;

Representatives of the Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations;

Distinguished Guests;

Colleagues from the African Union Commission; and

Staff of the African Union institutions with a mandate on Human and Peoples' Rights;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of H.E. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, I feel greatly honoured and privileged to be afforded the opportunity to address this august assembly on this auspicious occasion of the 67th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, taking place virtually despite the challenges faced by COVID-19 Pandemic.

I wish to begin by congratulating Honourable Commissioner Dr. Solomon Dersso, the Chairperson of the Commission, together with all Honourable Commissioners of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for the diligent manner with which this Ordinary Session has been organized. I also would like to recognize and thank members of the Secretariat of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for their hard work and for being the catalyst for the effectiveness of the Commission.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to all delegates of Member States and other participants for making the time to attend this important session. It is my believe that the deliberations and the outcomes of this Ordinary Session will go a long way in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Human and Peoples' Rights System in Africa, particularly, during this time of pandemic crisis.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) was adopted by the OAU on 27 June 1981 and it entered into force on 21 October 1986. This instrument represents the foundational stone of the African Human Rights System. It is unique to other regional human rights instruments in that it covers internationally accepted human rights standards while also recognizing unique African values peculiar to our continent. The Charter also provides for Civil and Political Rights, Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, Peoples' and Group Rights and all these include duties and responsibilities of the individual in the society.

This 67th Ordinary Session of the ACHPR is taking place as our continent and the entire world are grappling with a serious crisis of COVID-19. Therefore, it is an opportunity to consolidate on the gains made so far in reposing to this Pandemic. But most importantly, to harp on the responsibility of AU Member States in upholding the human rights of their citizens without any discrimination or abuses. The Session is also an opportunity to further remind all AU Member States on the need to develop strategic response to COVID-19 guided by the principles enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

It is also important to note that this Ordinary Session is taking place following the commemoration of the Africa Human Rights Day, which was held on 21 October 2020. This year, the celebration took place under the theme **“Silencing the Guns and Deepening the Culture of Human and Peoples' Rights: the Opportunities and Challenges of COVID-19 in Africa”**, which is specially crafted to promote the AU's agenda of silencing the guns in Africa, bearing in mind the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, and to maximizing every opportunities therein to deepen the culture of human and peoples' rights in Africa. Thus, this year's celebration, was meant to, among other things, consolidate on the gains made so far in silencing the guns in Africa. But most importantly, to harp on the responsibility of AU Member States to bring peace and tranquility in each and every part of the continent.

Excellences, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

The African continent has witnessed decades of numerous human rights challenges resulting from a diverse range of factors, which include, among others, war, poverty, corruption, autocratic governance and exclusion of marginalized groups. Therefore, as we proceed with the implementation of the 10-Year Action Plan that will support our Member States to fulfil their human rights obligations, it is important that we redouble our efforts to ensure that the African people enjoy the right to food, the right to safe water and sanitation, the right to health, the right to housing, the right to education, the right to decent clothing, the right to clean environment, to mention a few.

The promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights is indeed a collective responsibility, however, it is important to recognize the challenges faced by all African Member States during this time of COVID-19 Pandemic. This require our collective resolve to reflect on how best to advance rights that address underdevelopment, poverty, inequality, marginalization and exclusion on our continent as we make concerted efforts towards effective implementation of Agenda 2063 for the Africa we Want and the Africa we Deserve.

The vision of a peaceful, united and prosperous Africa set out in Agenda 2063 can only be achieved through sound planning and results-oriented policies and actions. The realization of our common vision of a united and prosperous Africa anchored on a culture of human rights as envisaged by Agenda 2063 requires our common resolve. Our gathering here today is evidence of our collective dedication and commitment to this goal.

I wish to seize this opportunity to call on all AU Member States to cooperate with all the Organs that they put in place such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR), the AU Board Against Corruption (AUABC) and other relevant bodies, to ensure that human rights and dignity are fully reinforced across the continent. In this regard, Member States are urged to submit regular reports to those institutions they have put in place so as to facilitate the smooth implementation of the Human Rights Agenda thus upholding the values and tenets enshrined in our African Shared Values instruments.

As the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is preparing itself during this Session to take actions and to make recommendations for the promotion and protection human and peoples' rights in Africa, I wish to seek the support of its members to explore the possibility of issuing a set of guidance that will assist our Member States to have a human rights approach in responding to COVID-19.

Once again, I would like on behalf of the African Union Commission to express our appreciation to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for taking the initiative to organize this important gathering, and invite you to contribute your ideas and suggestions on how we can move forward together and make this Session a success.

I thank you for your kind attention.