

Check against delivery

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Statement by  
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**Honourable Chairperson**  
**Honourable Commissioners**  
**Distinguished delegates**

I am greatly honoured to deliver remarks on behalf of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the opening of the 73rd session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, especially at the time when the international community celebrates 35 years since the establishment of your esteemed institution in 1987. On behalf of the High Commissioner, I congratulate you for the sterling work you have done for the past 35 years, including establishing yourselves as the central pillar for the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in Africa. Our Office values the good cooperation that it has enjoyed over the years that was formalised through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2019. OHCHR looks forward to seamless cooperation as our institutions continue to complement each other in our respective mandates to promote and protect human rights on the African continent.

**Honourable Chairperson**  
**Honourable Commissioners**  
**Distinguished delegates**

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cooperation and implementation of joint activities by our institutions slowed. However, OHCHR stands ready to ramp-up efforts to implement joint activities in light of the lifting of the various COVID-19 restrictions.. The recent technical consultation that OHCHR organised with African Union organs with a human rights mandate in Lusaka, Zambia, on 10 and 11 July 2022, provided us with the opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding, to identify and draw up a workplan of joint activities.

I am also pleased to report on three key areas that our Office has been able to focus on in collaboration with your institution and other AU organs. **First, on early warning and conflict prevention,** I note that your study on ‘Addressing human rights in conflict situations’ has clearly identified the critical importance that human rights play in all phases of the conflict cycle. The study’s recommendations, your resolution 332 and various other resolutions by the African Union Peace and Security Council recognize the urgent need for institutionalizing a human rights-based approach to conflict prevention, management, and resolution on the continent.

There is similar recognition within the UN on the inherent preventive power of human rights. The UN Secretary-General has noted that the ‘*[T]he best prevention tool we have is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – and the treaties that derive from it. The rights set out in it identify many of the root causes of conflict, but equally they provide real world solutions through real change on the ground*’. The UN Secretary-General’s Call to Action for Human Rights, launched in February 2020 as a transformative vision of human rights for the UN system as a whole, reiterated the important point that prevention is the best form of protection.

I am delighted to note the positive and growing collaboration between your institution and OHCHR’s Regional Office in East Africa, based in Addis Ababa, in supporting efforts to strengthen the African Union’s continental early warning and conflict prevention system. This partnership, which is supported by the joint AU/OHCHR/World Bank programme, seeks to advance human rights integration in early warning and conflict prevention. I am confident that this partnership will greatly contribute to further strengthen the innovative and pioneering African Union continental early warning and conflict prevention system.

**Second**, this year we are celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **Addis Ababa Roadmap signed in 2012**.

The Addis Ababa Roadmap provides a guiding framework to encourage special procedures mechanisms of the United Nations and of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to strengthen cooperation in a number of ways, including by conducting joint activities, issuing joint statements, undertaking joint country visits, exchanging information on upcoming events, and strengthening follow-up to recommendations.

As you know, the Addis Ababa Roadmap was formally reviewed in 2014 and periodic stocktaking of progress and challenges in its implementation has been carried out in the past decade. These reviews have not only provided useful and practical suggestions, but have also served to re-affirm commitment for our respective institutions to accelerate cooperation and joint action.

The implementation of the Addis Ababa Roadmap has witnessed many achievements but has also remained constrained by challenges, some of a structural nature and others more functional and programmatic. This anniversary thus gives us a unique opportunity to reflect on these challenges and strengthen the vision for the Addis Ababa Roadmap for the next decade. A vision that our Office hopes will be innovative, inclusive of different actors' contributions; nimble and agile — to be able to respond to the many human rights challenges.

**Third**, OHCHR promotes human rights mainstreaming, including the **right to development in trade and investment agreements** to foster their contribution to sustainable development in Africa. International trade law has largely grown in isolation from human rights norms and standards, despite the profound impact that trade liberalisation may have on human rights. Human

rights provide guidance and tools for States to ensure that these agreements lead to inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

Jointly with the Economic Commission for Africa and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, OHCHR has undertaken an *ex-ante* human rights impact assessment of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) and continues supporting a human rights-respectful and people-centered implementation of the AfCFTA in line with its objective to contribute to inclusive and sustainable development in Africa. OHCHR is currently working on a checklist and guidance for relevant stakeholders on human rights safeguards in the design and execution of national strategies for the implementation of the AfCFTA.

OHCHR is pleased to have supported the NGO Forum and the Forum of the National Human Rights Institutions that took place immediately before this session, which discussed the interlinkages between trade and human rights; and made recommendations that are important in supporting efforts to mainstream human rights into the AfCFTA processes.

### **Honourable Chairperson**

This year also marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. These funds have been providing vital assistance to victims of grave human rights violations through yearly grants to civil society organizations.

This year alone, projects funded by the Funds are providing direct assistance to more than 46,000 victims of torture and 13,000 victims of slavery, respectively. The Torture Fund has continued to provide emergency assistance and conduct human rights outreach those in need, including to survivors of

conflict in Ethiopia. The Slavery Fund is providing support to build the capacity of grassroots organizations addressing the needs of survivors of traditional and decent-based slavery in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

I call on States to continue to support the Funds, including by joining the Group of Friends of Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

**Honourable Chairperson,**

I would be remiss if I do not mention the various human rights challenges that the continent continues to face in the post-COVID-19 context such as threats of war and actual conflict, unconstitutional changes of government, popular discontent with governments; and extreme poverty, largely arising from human rights violations and the failure to realise social and economic rights. I wish to underscore the criticality of your institution in holding States to account for their human rights obligations as the continent continues to bear the brunt of the human rights impacts of unconstitutional changes of power, rising inequalities, climate change, COVID-19, forced and perilous migration. There is no doubt that human rights protection is one of the critical responses to these multiple challenges.

**Honourable Chairperson,**

I am aware that you have a heavy programme ahead of you for the next three weeks. I, therefore, would like to extend the best wishes from the High Commissioner to all of you for a successful and productive session. Thank you for your attention.

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