

EU Ambassador to the Gambia

**Remarks at public session of 73rd Ordinary Session of the African Commission for
Human and People's Rights**

21 October 2022

Your Excellency the Vice President of the Gambia Alieu Badara Joof,
Honorable Ministers,
Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and People' Rights,
Esteemed Commissioners,
Excellency the Chief Justice and Acting Head of AGA,
Members of the press,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great privilege to be with you today representing the European Union and to address the opening ceremony on this 73rd session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic the Commission has not interrupted their work and it is indeed a joy to see in-person sessions resume, as they allow for more fruitful interactions. What a suitable celebration of the 35th Anniversary of the Commission, marking its steadfast engagement on behalf of the citizens of the continent.

During these 35 years the Commission has worked for the promotion of Human and Peoples' Rights, protection of these rights and contribute to the interpretation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Your 2021-2025 Strategic plan clearly articulates the activities which aim at that, be they connected to sensitization and information dissemination, to the complementarity with other organs (here represented today) and to the strengthening of legal systems and institutional frameworks, such as National Human Rights Institutions (also present here), of which more than 30 already

have an affiliated status. Your Special mechanisms, Working groups, promotion missions have continued to raise awareness to the rights of Women, forced disappearances, conditions in prisons, among many other subjects.

You are also working on enhancing the monitoring, follow-up and tracking of compliance by State Parties. Sadly not all Member States have submitted reports, but you have bravely continued your work against the lack of political will and the difficulty of implementing your findings and recommendations at national level. You have continued to work on behalf of African citizens, using your urgent appeals in matters posing an imminent danger of irreparable harm to individuals. In a world where human rights violations continue to be an ugly dark reality you have kept the light on, showing your State Parties how to do better for its citizens.

The European Union's relationship with Africa is one of strategic partnership with shared interests as well as proximity. It covers a multitude of layers, including human rights, peace, security, good governance, trade, investment, development, climate change, digitalization, migration and human mobility. We reaffirmed these commitments at our 6th EU-AU Summit last February, making public our Joint Vision for 2030. This renewed partnership keeps human rights and democracy at its core, as we reiterated our commitment to respect and promote compliance with human rights and to work together to promote effective multilateralism within the rules-based international order.

Our annual human rights dialogue is a concrete demonstration of the seriousness of our commitment to promote and protect human rights on both continents, and worldwide. Our 18th EU-AU Human Rights Dialogue is just around the corner, taking place on December 5th. Commissioner Bankole will be co-chairing with our EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore. After two years of virtual format, the Dialogue will now be held in person in Brussels and we are hoping that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights will be able to participate.

The last editions of our Human Rights Dialogue have confirmed our common interest together advance the human rights agenda on both continents, in particular the abolition of the death penalty, the right to development, gender equality and women's empowerment and how to better protect electoral and democratic integrity. We intensified our discussions on business and human rights,

needed worldwide in order to prevent, address and remedy negative human rights impacts caused by business activities. We congratulate the AU and UNDP for holding the first African Business and Human Rights Forum some weeks ago in Accra. We have also discussed transitional justice and will follow on this discussion with a dedicated expert seminar next November, taking place here in Banjul.

We must maintain an open dialogue with civil society, based on mutual trust and transparency. The contribution of the civil society of crucial importance in all our human rights work, which includes access and receive accreditation to Human Rights Organs for organizations representing persons in vulnerable positions. We are therefore very happy that, as happened before the pandemic, Civil society organizations from both continents will this year meet again ahead of the Human Rights Dialogue. This 10th edition of their forum shall review recommendations, guiding us in better ways to work together moving forward.

We would like to reiterate that the participation of AU human rights organs, including this Commission, is critical to the success of the Dialogue. Your engagement and strategic cooperation with the EU is crucial to us, in addition to the essential work you do supporting the AU. In recognition of the importance of your action we are continuing to support programme, now on its second edition.

Like the African Union, the European Union was founded to foster peace and prosperity and it is our experience that peace and prosperity in one Member State leads to the same in others – no country or region operates in a vacuum.

We all know that respecting human rights is not a political choice for countries or governments. It is a legal obligation rooted in international and regional human rights instruments, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which last year celebrated its 40th anniversary.

We look forward to continuing our cooperation with the AU and its Human Rights Organs as we are stronger and most resilient when we work together. It is an honour to join you at this Commission session, by the side of the United Nations, the National Human Rights Institutions, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Non-governmental organizations and representatives of State Parties, including our host, the government of The Gambia.

Thank you for the honour of participating in your opening session. On behalf of the European Union, I wish you all the best for your deliberations in this 73rd ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.