

**Public Session of 77th Ordinary Session of the
African Commission for Human and People's Rights**

20 October 2023

Ms Christine GRAU, Ambassador of the European Union to Tanzania and EAC,

Remarks on behalf of EU Special Representative for Human Rights

**Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and
Peoples' Rights, Honourable Remy Ngoy,**

Esteemed Commissioners,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to be with you today and to address this opening ceremony of the **77th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.**

Like the African Union, the European Union was founded to foster peace and prosperity and to bring well-being to our citizens. Human Rights is at the core of this objective and therefore guides our action both within the EU and worldwide.

We must work on this together, upholding the human rights of all, to ensure the sustainable peaceful development of our countries.

The European Union and Africa are not only neighbours, but partners and we have shared interests. Our partnership covers a multitude of layers, including human rights, peace, security, good governance, trade, investment, development, climate change, digitalisation, migration and human mobility.

We reaffirmed these commitments at our **6th EU-AU Summit in February 2022**, as expressed in our **Joint Vision for 2030**. Governance, human rights and democracy will also be a key feature of the discussions with the African Union at the upcoming **EU-AU Ministerial on 20 November** in Brussels.

However, in many parts of the world, we see a deterioration of the respect for human rights and democratic backsliding. No achievements can be taken for granted. We have seen several

negative developments only this year in a number of African countries.

We see for example the concrete negative impact of the overthrowing of governments on the human rights situation in these countries, which underlines the importance of stable democratic systems for the full enjoyment of Human Rights by their populations. We saw the violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law against civilians, including an increase in gender-based violence committed by armed groups and military personnel. Growing pressure on the freedom of opinion and expression and of the press is also worrying in many countries. The shrinking of civic space, the attacks on human rights defenders and civil society by state and non-state actors remain problematic.

The EU held the **18th edition of the EU-AU Human Rights Dialogue on 4 May**, co-chaired by the EUSR for Human

Rights Eamon Gilmore and Commissioner for Political affairs,
Peace and Security Adeoye Bankole.

This annual human rights dialogue is a concrete demonstration of our joint commitment to respect, protect and promote human rights and remains an important exchange. We had the pleasure of welcoming Honourable Commissioner Janet Ramataulle Sallah as part of the AU delegation.

The Dialogue reconfirmed our common interest to **jointly advance the human rights agenda**, in particular the abolition of the death penalty in Africa, upholding human rights in the digital transformation, business and human rights, transitional justice and election observation.

As a follow up to the dialogue, we jointly organized an event in Addis Ababa to mark the **21st World Day against the Death Penalty**. With speakers from both continents, at government and civil society level, the celebration highlighted the recent developments on the abolition of death penalty in

Africa; demonstrating that the African continent is on the path to abolition.

We were pleased to see the support displayed by African States for the **adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Abolition of the Death Penalty.**

In recent years we have also intensified our discussions **on business and human rights.** We congratulate the AU and UNDP on the holding of the second African Business and Human Rights Forum in September and your recent discussions on this matter.

Another important part of our dialogue is our **relationship with civil society.** Civil society's work to protect and defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law is key. We need to continue working together to ensure a safe and enabling civic space, both in Europe and Africa.

We commend you for the central role you give to civil society within your deliberations and also for your close work with National Human Rights institutions and other organs of Human rights working on the continent.

We look forward to our **continuing cooperation with the AU and its Human Rights Organs** as we are strongest and most resilient when we work together.

On behalf of the EU, I would like to commend the work of your Commission to uphold human rights for all individuals, without any discrimination on any grounds, in particular in the current difficult circumstances and pressure on universal human rights, and I thank you for the opportunity of addressing your opening session of the Commission.

I wish you all the best for your deliberations in this 77th ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.