

EU Special Representative Olof Skoog
Remarks at Opening segment of the 79th Ordinary Session
of the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights
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(Check against delivery)

**Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Honourable Remy Ngoy,
Esteemed Commissioners,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is a great privilege and honour to address this opening ceremony of the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights. Having recently started my functions as EU Special Representative for Human Rights it is indeed of great importance to join you on this occasion, as we address matters of universal relevance.

Like the African Union, the European Union was founded to foster peace and prosperity and to bring well-being to our populations. This is why we place human rights at the centre of our policies, both internally and globally. Upholding human rights for all, without any discrimination, is key to ensure peace and prosperity. It is also a precondition to achieve inclusive and sustainable development.

Today, we find ourselves in a very difficult juncture in human history. Everywhere you look, the universality and indivisibility of HR is increasingly challenged. Accountability for violations has become an exception. The multilateral system and the norms and laws that underpin it are flouted and undermined just when we need the system the most. We are backsliding on the SDGs. The global resurgence of authoritarianism, shrinking civic spaces, growing intolerance, economic hardships, social inequalities and escalating disinformation campaigns are among the many challenges that pose a grave threat to the kind of world that we strive for and for what we represent.

Global tensions are growing, as well as the sheer number of conflicts that put aside the most fundamental principles of humanity and civility. Close to you are the volatile situation in the Sahel, the ongoing violence in Sudan and DRC. Terrorism and violent extremism are posing real and present dangers to many African countries. Climate change adds to the strains of an increasing number of people – all of which not only leads to a greater regional instability, but also has global implications.

Closer to us here in Europe is the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine that continues unabated and the severe crisis in the Middle East that are killing thousands – both posing major threats to peace, to an international order based on respect for established norms and legal obligations.

Our neighbourhood is your neighbourhood. Your neighbourhood is ours.

All of these challenges require joint and coordinated efforts by all of us who understand to put human rights and dignity at the centre of our mission.

In these difficult times we need more than ever to stick together and build strong partnerships in order to protect the fundamental and universal rights of our people. Nationally, regionally and globally. The Summit of the Future in September is an opportunity to recommit to that agenda and to the HR Economy as proposed by the HCHR.

The European Union's relationship with Africa is one of strategic partnership with shared values, shared interests and a proximity that binds us, be it geographically or through the connections between our populations. It covers a multitude of layers, including human rights in all its dimensions – political, economic, social and cultural, peace, security, democracy, 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, making public our Joint Vision for 2030. At the core of this renewed partnership lies a joint commitment to human rights and democracy and to work together to promote effective multilateralism.

It is in this spirit that we continue strengthening cooperation with the ACHPR and with other African Union human rights organs. Our support to the African Governance Architecture has been steadfast, and we are appreciative of the progress registered in the last few years, including on coordination between this Commission, the African court on human and Peoples' rights and the African committee of Experts on the Rights and welfare of the child. Allow me to express a particular word of appreciation also to the work of all AU human rights organs, and the invaluable role of civil society which is essential to advance human rights anywhere.

We see the synergies that connect the structures of the AU in Addis, the Governance Architecture in the whole of Africa (including also civil society and national human rights institutions) and the important work being conducted from Banjul to ensure the respect of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights advancing on everything from protecting democracy to human rights defenders and the advancement of womens rights and equality.

The growing collaboration of the ACHPR with the PRC Subcommittee on Human Rights, Democracy and Government (as shown by your recent Joint Retreat last December); and Your recent inaugural Joint forum on Special Mechanisms have confirmed the essential place of ACHPR and the importance of your work within the broader ecosystem of Human rights promotion and protection on the African continent. We encourage **AU Member states to be more actively engaged into this debate**, especially given the challenges faced by HR organs, when it comes to ratification of human rights instruments, compliance with decisions, monitoring and reporting, but also when financial and human resources are at risk.

The importance of your work is visible also during our annual Human Rights Dialogue with the AU, on which the participation of organs is essential to testify to the broader spirit of collaboration that joins our Unions. The 19th dialogue was held last January in Addis Ababa, co-chaired by Commissioner Bankole and my predecessor EUSR Gilmore. It

counted with active participation of ACHPR, also on the civil society event on the protecting of civic space that preceded it. I am looking forward to continue these high-level engagements and hope that my future trip to an ACHPR Ordinary session can be testament to that.

Advancing HR is work in progress everywhere. We cannot let our guards down. Holding each others' feet to the fire in order to avoid backsliding is what partners do. Growing intolerance, restrictive legislation against minorities – ethnic religious or sexual, or limiting the checks and balances of our democratic institutions are warning signs. We will continue to warn against the death penalty and discriminatory laws, incl on female genital mutilation.

But the main take away needs to be a positive and optimistic one. We have made huge advances together. Lets keep that momentum going on an ever closer collaboration bilaterally and on the world stage.

The challenges we face may be daunting, but they are not insurmountable. Through solidarity, cooperation, and unwavering determination, we can build a future where democracy thrives, human rights are upheld, and every voice is heard.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you productive deliberations.