



**Ordinary session of the African Commission on Human
and Peoples' Rights
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Regional Office and to the African Union**

Honourable Chairperson,

Honourable Commissioners,

Distinguished Delegates

I bring to you warm greetings from Mr. Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. I wish to begin by expressing his unwavering support for the critical work undertaken by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. On behalf of our Office, it is an honour and a privilege to address you at the opening of this session, focusing on the theme "*Educating an African Fit for the 21st Century.*" This theme resonates deeply with the standards and objectives of our Office as we continue to stand in solidarity with Africa's efforts to promote education, a fundamental pillar for empowerment, progress, and sustainable development.

The right to education as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights seeks to foster the development of all humans and to enhance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Specifically, article 28 requires states to guarantee everyone free and mandatory elementary education, in addition to making technical, professional, and higher education available equally to all based on merit.

Reflecting on this year's theme, we are reminded of the transformative power of education. It is not just a tool for individual development but a crucial driver of broader socio-economic transformation. Education equips individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. Moreover, it is a powerful catalyst for sustainable development, social cohesion, and the realization of human rights.

However, the journey to providing quality education for all is filled with challenges. Persistent inequalities, entrenched poverty, ongoing conflicts, and

the displacement of vulnerable populations continue to deprive millions of their right to education. These barriers fuel cycles of marginalization and poverty, hindering our shared goal for a more just and equitable society. It is these challenges that bodies such as this Commission were established to address in order to guarantee everyone equality in access to services and opportunities.

Our Office remains committed to promoting the right to education, even in the most challenging circumstances. Our work extends from conflict zones to refugee camps, where we work to ensure that even the most vulnerable individuals have access to quality education. Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for peace, dignity, and prosperity.

Honourable Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates

In light of some of the ongoing challenges with regard to education, our Office has actively engaged with National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and civil society organizations to bolster the capacity of key stakeholders in advancing human rights education. During the NGO Forum that preceded this session, our Office facilitated several capacity-building initiatives, including:

- **Panels on human rights education** aimed at ensuring meaningful participation in and the fair distribution of benefits from the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

- **Capacity-building workshops on reporting to the Human Rights Council for NGOs**, designed to equip civil society organizations with the knowledge and tools needed to engage effectively with international human rights mechanisms.

Similarly, at the NHRI Forum, our Office conducted capacity-building sessions focused on **enhancing the reporting capabilities of NHRIs** to the Human Rights Council. These initiatives are part of our ongoing efforts to strengthen human rights mechanisms and empower local actors to advocate for fundamental rights more effectively.

Despite the many challenges relative to education, it is crucial to acknowledge the resilience and innovation demonstrated by communities across Africa. Civil society organizations, educators, and policymakers are working tirelessly to expand access to education and improve learning outcomes, even in the most challenging environments. Nevertheless, the digital divide remains a significant obstacle, limiting the full potential of digital technologies to ensure inclusive, quality education. In this context, Agendas 2030 and 2063 provide essential frameworks to help accelerate progress towards bridging these gaps.

Honourable Chairperson,

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The connection between this year's theme on education and last year's theme of *“Accelerating the Implementation of the AfCFTA”* is clear. Both emphasize Africa’s socio-economic development and competitiveness in the global economy. To fully benefit from AfCFTA and meet the demands of the 21st-century economy, Africa requires a skilled workforce proficient in critical thinking, digital literacy, problem-solving, entrepreneurship, and adaptability to technological advancements.

In contexts of migration and conflict, education provides stability and psychological support, especially for children coping with trauma. For migrants and refugees, education serves as a gateway to social inclusion, equipping them with the language skills, cultural understanding, and qualifications necessary for integration and employment.

Honourable Chairperson,

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As we engage in discussions on critical human rights issues, I wish to highlight the **presentation by the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID)**, scheduled to take place on 23 October. The Working Group will present its findings following its visit to the judicial and human rights organs of the African Union and other sub-regional bodies. The report offers important insights and recommendations for enhancing accountability and human rights protections across the continent.

In addition, our Office is organizing key side events during this session, including:

- A **colloquium between our Office and this Commission** focusing on "*Realizing Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR) in Africa*," with a particular emphasis on the right to education.
- The **launch of the Platform of Independent Experts on Refugee Rights (PIERR)**, which will explore pressing issues related to asylum seekers and refugees.

These events aim to stimulate dialogue and foster collaboration on some of Africa's most pressing human rights challenges. Our Office is committed to strengthened cooperation in these areas.

Honourable Chairperson

Distinguished delegates

In conclusion, I wish to recall that we stand at a critical juncture, where education must be prioritized as a fundamental right and a tool for development.

We are collectively responsible for addressing the root causes of inequality, promoting inclusive and equitable education systems, and harnessing the transformative potential of education to build a sustainable future for all Africans.

As we embark on the discussions of this session, I urge us all to reaffirm our commitment to education as a catalyst for sustainable development and peace. Education has the power to change lives, build resilient societies, and unlock the full potential of Africa's people. Together, we can create a future where every African is empowered to contribute meaningfully to the continent's progress.

**Honourable Chairperson,
Honourable Commissioners**

I acknowledge the significant work that lies ahead during this session. On behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, I extend my best wishes for a successful and productive session. I am confident that the decisions and deliberations made here will strengthen the foundation for human rights, peace, and prosperity across Africa. Thank you for your attention.