Strengthening Popular Participation in the African Union

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African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR)

The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) was established in 1986 in accordance with the provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and works to protect and promote the rights set out in the Charter. Its secretariat is located in Banjul, Gambia. The 11 Commissioners, who are nominated by Member States but serve in their personal capacity, meet in ordinary session twice a year. The Commission can also call extraordinary sessions, and did so in 1995 following the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria, and in 2004 in response to the crisis in Darfur (as well as on other occasions for more procedural matters).

States are supposed to report to the Commission every two years on the measures they have taken to give effect to the rights in the Charter, but many are in default of this obligation.

African and international human rights organisations can obtain observer status with the African Commission. Once they have observer status, they can submit documentation and speak at the Commission’s sessions. An NGO forum is also usually organised in advance of each African Commission session. NGOs are very often co-opted by the Commission to contribute to the work of its special mechanisms (special rapporteurs and working groups) or to help in organising seminars. Many of the important documents adopted by the Commission have been drafted with the assistance of human rights NGOs. Individuals, or organisations on their behalf, can lodge complaints with the Commission of violations by Member States of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. Since it first met, the Commission has ruled against Member States on a wide range of issues.

The Commission reports to the Executive Council at each summit, and its decisions on individual complaints are not public until they have been adopted by the Council and Assembly.

African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights:
www.achpr.org
**NGO Action:** NGOs working with the African human rights institutions

The Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa and the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies are both NGOs based in Banjul, close to the secretariat of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and work to facilitate civil society engagement with the ACHPR and other African human rights bodies.

The African Centre has for many years hosted NGO forums in advance of the sessions of the Commission; while the Institute has conducted trainings on the African human rights system for African human rights activists, worked with the Commission and with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on the drafting of their procedures, and has also brought individual communications to the Commission and Committee of Experts.

Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa: www.africaninstitute.org
African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies: www.acdhrs.org