



Africa human rights defender protection law seminar

Theme: Working together towards legal recognition and protection of HRD in Africa

Hotel: La Rose Blanche

Final Communiqué

(Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire) Civil society organisations, representatives of governments, parliaments and national human rights institutions from across Africa strategise to enhance legal protection of human rights defenders across the continent.

On 12 and 13 April 2017, 48 representatives of civil society organisations, national human rights institutions, parliament and governments came together for a two-day consultation on the development and implementation of national laws for the protection of human rights defenders in Africa. The seminar brought together representatives from 17 countries, across all regions of Africa.

This seminar built on two recent developments relating to the protection of human rights defenders. The first was the adoption of a law for the protection of human rights defenders in Côte d'Ivoire in 2014, and its Implementation Decree adopted in February 2017. This law was the first of its kind, and has since inspired other governments and civil society coalitions, including in Burkina Faso, Niger, Sierra Leone, DRC, Guinea, Uganda and Mali to engage in processes for the development of similar laws.

The second was the launch of a model law for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders in June 2016. The model law is intended to guide and assist States, civil society and national human rights institutions to ensure the full and effective implementation of the United Nations and African Commission Declarations on human rights defenders at the national level.

During the seminar participants discussed challenges faced by human rights defenders across Africa. Representatives from civil society, national human rights institutions and government from Sierra Leone, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire shared experiences and lessons learnt from their experiences to date in the development of national laws for the protection of defenders. These representatives also discussed strategies and next steps to further enhance the development and implementation of national protection laws.

Participants agreed that legal recognition and protection of defenders is crucial to ensuring that they can work in a safe and supportive environment, while being free from attacks, reprisals and unreasonable restrictions. Human rights defenders serve and pursue the interests of rights holders, victims of violations, and society as a whole; their legal recognition and protection contribute towards the broader goals of upholding human rights.

Participants discussed procedures and strategies towards the effective development of national laws for the protection of defenders. While it was acknowledged that strategies should be adapted to the particular context in a country, one common element was that all stakeholders should to be involved in the entire process from the earliest stage.



While laws recognising that the enactment of a specific human rights defender protection laws is a vital, such laws need to be accompanied by high-level political support and adequate resources for their implementation. As well as strong, independent and effective judiciaries and national human rights institutions, close attention to the particular situation and protection needs of women human rights defenders, and safe and open access to United Nations and regional human rights mechanisms.

The United Nations and African Commission Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders participated in the consultation. The Special Rapporteurs committed to supporting national processes for the development of laws for the protection of human rights defenders, and to work with all stakeholders in that regard.

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