

DECLARATION BY THE ASSEMBLY ON THE THEME OF YEAR 2016

We, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU), meeting at the 27th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union in Kigali, Rwanda, from 17 to 18 July 2016, and after having debated the theme of the year, namely, **‘The African Year of Human Rights with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women’**;

Recalling the Decision *EX.CL/Dec.842(XXV)*, which was endorsed by the 25th Ordinary Session, held from 20 to 24 June, 2014, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, which decided to “...declare 2016 as the African Year of Human Rights with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women...”

Inspired by Africa’s continued quest for the promotion and protection of human and people rights as well as Africa’s contribution to the universal principles of governance, democracy, and human rights;

Reiterating our commitment made in the Banjul Declaration on the 25th Anniversary of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights adopted during the 7th Ordinary Session of the Assembly to ensure respect for human and peoples’ rights as a prerequisite for the attainment of our common vision of a united and prosperous Africa;

Re-affirming our commitment to the African Shared Values embodied in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which, amongst others, emphasise the significance of democratic governance, popular participation, the rule of law and human and peoples’ rights;

Re-committing ourselves to the promotion and protection of human and peoples’ rights in Africa as part of the African Shared Values, which is one of the pillars of the AU Agenda 2063, through which the Member States, through the technical support of the Commission of the African Union seeks to implement the vision of the Union;

Cognizant of the critical role of women, youth and civil society in the promotion and protection of human and peoples’ rights and the importance of securing and enhancing their participation in the popularization and domestication of these values;

Determined to protect and promote women’s human rights as embodied in the Protocol on the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa which specifically addresses rights that are particular to women in Africa and rooted in the Constitutive Act of the African Union;

Desirous of the need to continue to promote and encourage democratic practices, good governance and the rule of law, promote and protect human and peoples’ rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for the sanctity of human life and international humanitarian law, as part of the efforts to prevent conflict on the Continent;

Convinced that the AU Organs with a human rights mandate are well positioned to fulfil their mandate to promote and protect human and peoples' rights in Africa as stipulated in the Human Rights Strategy for Africa of 2011;

Further convinced that the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and their regional institutions constitute the building blocks in the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in Africa based on the African Shared Values;

Mindful that the Continent still faces many challenges in promoting and protecting human and peoples' rights as well as ratifying, domesticating and implementing human rights instruments and recognizing that there are a number of obstacles that need to be overcome in furtherance of the Africa Shared Values;

Now, hereby:

1. **AFFIRM** that Human Rights and the rights of women in particular are a Collective Responsibility of all in Africa;
2. **COMMIT** ourselves to enhancing efforts aimed at entrenching and reinforcing deeper understanding of the culture of human and peoples' rights, in particular the rights of women, and their promotion and popularization amongst the African peoples by declaring the next ten years as "**the Human and Peoples' Rights Decade in Africa**" and its Action Plan;
3. **RE-COMMIT** ourselves to expedite the ratification, domestication and implementation of all human and peoples' rights instruments, in particular the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in African (Maputo Protocol), and call upon the African Union Commission (AUC) to put in place measures and modalities to support Member States to establish the required capacities and processes for monitoring and review of the domestication efforts;
4. **REITERATE** our unflinching determination to promote and protect human and people's rights and all basic freedoms in Africa and the need for the consolidation and the full implementation of human and peoples' rights instruments and relevant national laws and policies as well as decisions and recommendations made by the AU Organs with a human rights mandate;
5. **UPHOLD** firmly the principles of universality, objectivity and non-selectivity in the consideration of human rights and elimination of double standards and politicisation;
6. **ALSO UPHOLD** our common position that the promotion and protection of human rights should be based on the principle of cooperation and genuine dialogue aimed at strengthening the capacity of Member States to comply with their human rights obligations;

7. **CALL UPON** the Commission to ensure the independence and integrity of AU organs with human rights mandate by providing adequate financing and shielding them from undue external influence;
8. **ALSO REITERATE** our commitment to eliminate violence and all forms of every discrimination against women and to ensure the protection of the rights of women as stipulated in the Maputo Protocol and the international declarations and conventions as well as empowering women by granting their full rights;
9. **FURTHER REITERATE** our commitment to promote the right to development (including the right to water and sanitation, health, shelter and education) as an inalienable human and peoples' right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized;
10. **EXPRESS** great satisfaction at the positive contributions made by the AUC and AU Organs with a human rights mandate and **REQUEST** them to ensure greater synergy between the African Governance Architecture and the African Peace and Security Architecture in order to ensure that the developments in the terrain of human rights feature prominently on the agenda of the Peace and Security Council;
11. **ENCOURAGE** the Commission and AU Organs with a human rights mandate to strengthen the African system for the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights through wider communication and information sharing, coupled with direct support of Member States, by ensuring the strengthening of human rights institutions and putting in place all the necessary measures so that success is documented and challenges noted to ensure that there is on-going review of progress in the implementation of adopted human rights instruments;
12. **CALL UPON** the RECs to work closely with the Commission and other AU Organs with a human rights mandate in harmonizing their instruments and further urge them to collectively promote and protect human and peoples' rights on the Continent;
13. **ALSO CALL ON** the Commission and AU Organs with a human rights mandate to identify modalities for the participation of African Research Institutes, Universities, Civil Society and the Media in promoting the culture of human rights in Africa including the protection and promotion of the rights of women;
14. **FURTHER CALL ON** the Commission and AU Organs with a human rights mandate to identify the obstacles that have hindered implementation of human and peoples' rights instruments and our previous commitments relating to human rights with special focus on the rights of women and to propose modalities for addressing them;
15. **NOTE WITH APPRECIATION** the support provided by our bilateral and multilateral partners and call on them to continue working closely with us to build and enhance the

capacity of the AU and its Member States to promote and protect human and peoples' rights;

16. **REQUEST** the Commission and AU organs with a human rights mandate to take necessary steps to establish the Pan-African Human Rights Institute (PAHRI) and to encourage Member States to commit to host it;
17. **ALSO REQUEST** the Commission to report regularly on the implementation of this Declaration.

