

## **Protect and consolidate civil society space within the African Commission**

26.11.2015

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(Banjul, The Gambia) - 'Civil society space within the African Commission proceedings must be protected and consolidated,' said Clément Voulé, Head of ISHR's Africa Programme in a statement delivered at the 57<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

Mr Voulé expressed concern at the numerous statements given by civil society organisations at the NGO Forum, illustrating the growing trend of attacks against civil society space at both the national level and the Commission level. The recent decision of the African Union calling[1] the ACHPR to withdraw the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) observer status and to review its criteria of granting observer status to NGOs illustrates this trend at the regional level.

The contribution of civil society is very important in the work of the ACHPR and their space needs to be protected and consolidated, he said.

During the interactive dialogue, Mr Voulé welcomed the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders' call for States to repeal restrictive laws and enact legislation to create a safe and enabling working environment for civil society organisations.

Giving the specific example of Burundi, the Special Rapporteur Commissioner Gansou also expressed concern about the risks faced by human rights defenders (HRDs) during and after the recent presidential elections, which has further reduced the space for civil society to operate.

To enhance the protection of women HRDs in such cases as in Burundi, 'States must create a public database to record attacks against women HRDs,' says Mr Voulé in a statement that called on States to train the judiciary and security authorities of specific risks and protections for women HRDs.

Lastly, Commissioner Gansou was asked what her focus would be on with regards to celebrating the African Union Year of Human Rights, which will have a special focus on women in 2016. In particular, the question of how national human rights institutions and civil society organisations can best support the process was raised.

[Download the full ISHR ACHPR Item 11 statement here.](#)

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[1] [View/Download the African Union Executive Council's decision here](#)