

Côte d'Ivoire | Civil society welcomes government decree to protect defenders, urges adequate resourcing

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The Ivorian Coalition for Human Rights Defenders (ICHRDs/CIDDH), the West African Human Rights Defenders Network and the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) welcome Côte d'Ivoire's adoption of a decree on the application of Law 2014-388 of 20 June 2014 on the promotion and protection of Human Rights Defenders in Côte d'Ivoire.



The decree was adopted by the Council of Ministers at the Presidential Palace in Abidjan, under the presidency of Alassane Ouattara, on 22 February 2017.

The organisations emphasised the need for the government to now work closely with civil society and the national human rights institution to mandate and adequately resource an effective protection mechanism.

The National Coordinator of the ICHRDs, Pedan Marthe Coulibaly, said that the [decree](#) clearly explained how to implement [Law 2014-388](#) of 20 June 2014 on the promotion and protection of human rights defenders. 'We congratulate the Ivorian government for adopting the decree, which provides a concrete solution to the needs of human rights defenders through the national protection mechanism,' she added.

'Article 18 of the Decree stipulates that the protection of defenders is assured by the State with the assistance of the Côte d'Ivoire National Human Rights Commission,' explained Coulibaly. Concerning the functioning of the protection mechanism, the ICHRDs strongly recommends collaboration that includes the active participation of civil society organisations as they are most aware of the promotion and protection needs of defenders.

ICHRDs congratulated the commendable collaboration between the Ivorian Ministry of Justice and the Côte d'Ivoire National Human Rights Commission during this project. Coulibaly also thanked partners such as ISHR, the Human Rights Section of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and the International Center For Not-For-Profit Law (ICNL), for their unwavering support during the drafting and adoption processes of both the national human rights defenders law and the implementation decree.

The Programme Director of the West African Human Rights Defenders Network, Mélanie Sonhaye Kombate, said she was proud to see that, through the advocacy of civil society, the Côte d'Ivoire decree gave due recognition to the needs of women human rights defenders. 'We hope that other countries that are currently drafting similar protection laws will follow this example,' she continued.

The decree specifies the rights of defenders and reasserts their freedom to carry out their work in Côte d'Ivoire. In particular, it prescribes that defenders shall not be prosecuted, investigated, arrested or detained for opinions expressed and reports published in the course of their activities. As a result, the State is obliged to protect defenders and to facilitate the exercise of their activities.

ISHR's director of Africa advocacy, Clément Voule, said that he welcomed the adoption of this decree. 'The decree strengthens the implementation of the human rights defenders law, however we are concerned about the lack of clarity regarding the mechanism by which the State intends to protect human rights defenders'. In fact, Article 18, which deals with the human rights defenders protection mechanism, stipulates that the State is entrusted with the protection of human rights defenders with the assistance of the Côte d'Ivoire National Human Rights Commission. 'It is important that any mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders be structured, effective and independent in order to allow victims to use it to assert and claim their rights', Voule said. 'We call on the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to mandate the national human rights commission to establish such a mechanism with a specific mandate, including advising the various State structures on measures to better protect human rights defenders,' Voule continued.

In February 2016, 28 human rights experts from around the world endorsed a [Model Law](#) on the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders. 'It is important that States use this model law as a basis for drafting their national laws protecting human rights defenders,' Voule added.

In his recent [report](#) for the 34th Human Rights Council session, the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Michel Forst, stressed the need to raise awareness of successful initiatives and good practices regarding the protection of defenders. The Côte d'Ivoire national protection mechanism deserves visibility as much can be learnt from the Ivorian case.

The three organisations CIDDH, WAHRDN and ISHR commend the African Commission's Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders and other key partners for their hard work, commitment and persistence. They urge the Côte d'Ivoire government to continue to promote and protect human rights and reiterate their availability to continue to support the Côte d'Ivoire authorities in this process.

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