

## **Cote d'Ivoire – Adopt an inter-ministerial decree establishing the protection mechanism for human rights defenders**

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**Following the adoption of the law in 2014 and its implementing decree in 2017, the Ivorian civil society, in collaboration with the National Human Rights Council, engages in the process of setting up the protection mechanism for human rights defenders. Establishing this mechanism is a crucial step to keep reinforcing the protection of human rights defenders in Cote d'Ivoire.**



The workshop, co-hosted by the National Human Rights Council (NHRC), the Ivorian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (ICHRD/CIDDDH) and ISHR, took place in Abidjan on 24 September 2019. It focused on discussing and validating the draft interministerial decree and the rule of procedure of the human rights defenders' protection mechanism. The participants included 15 civil society organisations, the Special Rapporteur of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on the situation of human rights defenders and the NHRC.

Since the adoption of the law in 2014, an implementation decree was adopted in 2017. This decree specifies in its article 18 that "the protection of human's right defenders is ensured by the State, with the assistance of the National Human Rights Commission of Cote d'Ivoire ". However, to ensure this mechanism has the trust of civil society, as indicated in section 34 in the [model law](#), it remains important that it is hosted and led through an independent mechanism such as the NHRC. In order to effectively implement the mechanism and for such a power to be delegated to the NHRC to host the mechanism, an interministerial decree must be adopted by the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defence, State Secretariat for Human Rights and the Ministry of Interior , who explicitly mention it.

During the opening ceremony, Marthe Coulibaly, the Coordinator of ICHRD mentioned that "this workshop is a very important and logical step following the various working sessions between the ICHRD and the NHRC supported by ISHR since August 2017. We really hope that the Ministers will take the necessary actions for the establishment of the protection mechanism soon after this workshop in order to ensure an effective protection of human rights defenders in Cote d'Ivoire."

"ISHR is pleased to have been able to support this process and bring its expertise through close collaboration with civil society and national authorities at the different stages. Côte d'Ivoire is already seen as a pioneer in the protection of human rights defenders in Africa as it was the first country on the continent to adopt a national law to protect defenders. This status will be further reinforced once the protection committee is established and running. This mechanism is essential to guarantee the law is implemented especially with a general trend which tends towards the restriction of civic space" added Adelaide Etong Kame, ISHR's Africa Advocacy Consultant.

"Something really special started in West Africa and more specifically Cote d'Ivoire when it comes to the protection of human rights defenders. This document will take this protection further by establishing a protection mechanism. I can only support your willingness to all work together and join you in convincing the government that they have to keep implementing the engagement they made at the international and regional levels" said the ACHPR Special Rapporteur Remy Ngoy Lumbu.

The content of the interministerial decree was extensively discussed during the workshop. Among other things, participants agreed that the mechanism should be hosted within the NHRC and composed of 7 permanent and 2 non-permanent members including 3 members from civil society. They put an emphasis on those designated to be permanent members who must be experts on gender and human rights defenders' issues. Indeed, it is vital that members from the government have experience with the specific human rights violations' women fall victim off as article 9 of the law provides them with a specific protection.

Following the workshop, the ACHPR Special Rapporteur, the NHRC, the ICHRD and ISHR met with the Secretary of State to the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Aimée Zebeyoux, in order to share the

outcomes of the workshop and urge her office to act on the adoption by all concerned Ministers of the interministerial decree. This was also the opportunity to remind her of the important role her country has to play in the region and more largely on the continent as a precursor regarding the protection of human rights defenders.

ISHR, ACHPR Special Rapporteur, ICHRD and NHRC, encourage the Ivoirian authorities to continue their work to guarantee the protection of human rights defenders. To this end, they reiterate their willingness and availability to support the authorities through this process.

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