

Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders makes informal visit to Burundi

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Ms. Asuagbor is on informal visit to the country, facilitated by civil society organisations including ISHR and Forum pour le Renforcement des Organisations de la Société Civile (FORSC). While in Burundi, she has met with several groups of human rights defenders, as well as representatives of the new Independent National Commission on Human Rights.

During the panel discussion, the Special Rapporteur called on the Government of Burundi to recognise the legitimate role of human rights defenders as partners in the State's efforts to promote and protect human rights. She also proposed the development of a specific law on the protection of human rights defenders, with input from the defenders themselves, to support the efficient and effective implementation of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

In response to this suggestion, the country's minister of internal affairs promised to consult other members of the Government with view to extending an invitation for an official visit by the Special Rapporteur. This would complement the informal meetings held this week and allow all stakeholders to continue the dialogue.

"This meeting is an important sign for the human rights defenders in Burundi that the African Commission is listening to them," says Clement Voulé, ISHR's Regional and National Programme Manager.

"The Government's commitment, demonstrated by the minister of internal affairs who attended the panel discussion, shows a growing awareness of the importance of human rights and those who defend them.

"Effective protection mechanisms, for example, supported by the new Independent National Commission on Human Rights, are absolutely crucial in the context of the increasingly serious threats faced by human rights defenders in Burundi," he says.