

AFRICAN UNION

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STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION ON AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Addis Ababa, 21 October 2017: Today, we commemorate the 2017 Africa Human Rights Day. This is a special day for Africans: the commitment to universal human rights, adopted by the United Nations, is the foundation of the equality of people of all races, and the freedom of all nations. It is also a reminder that although we, as Africans, have cast off the shackles of colonial and racist oppression, we need to do more to ensure the full respect of the rights of our people.

Commemorating human rights means remembering the victims of human rights abuses, including mass atrocities and genocide. We have a modest memorial to the victims of human rights abuses and genocide in Africa in our compound.

Thirty years ago, in the spirit of furthering the advancement of our people, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights was established. The task of making these aspirations into reality is a long one, but we are confident that it will be achieved.

The past twelve months have marked a significant turning point in the struggle to achieve Human and Peoples' Rights in Africa. It was the Africa Year of Human and Peoples' Rights with emphasis on the Rights of Women. The last year has also helped shape the future of our continent with the Declaration by the AU Assembly of the next 10 years as the Human and Peoples' Rights Decade in Africa.

This year, 2017, is dedicated to youth rights as it was declared the year of "Harnessing Youth Demographic Dividends through Investment in the Youth". The focus on youth rights is a culmination of the African Union's sustained move towards deepening all dimensions of the human and peoples' rights culture in the continent.

Africa's population is currently 1.2 billion and it is expected to more than double by 2050. 60% of the continent's population are under 25 years of age. In 2050, Africa will be home to 452 million youth between the ages of 15 and 24. The youth drive, ambition and potential provide our member states with an extraordinary asset.

Through this year's Human Rights Day theme "*Enhancing Youth Contribution - Towards Effective Implementation of the Action Plan of the Human and Peoples' Rights Decade in Africa*", our Union is confirming that its priority is to empower its teeming youth population to play a central role in key areas of the continent's engagement. Having the youth assuming a lead in policy formulation and implementation, as well as managing its rightful political, economic and social spaces, is paramount to shaping their future and ensuring a more prosperous present and future for Africa.

The AU is therefore committed to engaging its member States in order to take the necessary bold steps by developing youth-driven human and peoples' rights policies and programmes. In this regard, the African Union is urging all its Member States, as well as the Regional Economic Communities, to embark on similar exercise at the national and sub-regional levels.

On behalf of the African Union Commission, I wish everyone, particularly the African youth, a happy Africa Human Rights Day.

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