



**STATEMENT BY**

**HER EXCELLENCY MRS. JULIA DOLLY JOINER  
COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS  
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**AT THE**

**LAUNCHING OF THE  
COMMEMORATION OF THE 30<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE AFRICAN CHARTER  
ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS**

**12<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2010: BANJUL, THE GAMBIA**

Allow me to begin by expressing my deepest appreciation for the invitation accorded to me to be a part of this Launching Ceremony for the activities earmarked for the celebration of 30 years since the adoption of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. This initiative, led by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, is very significant and necessary as it serves to restate a collective commitment to the African Charter and will be, in my view, very instrumental in reaffirming our dedication towards attaining the vision on human rights that is embodied in the Charter.

In as much as the celebration creates an opportunity for deeper and more dedicated action, it also provides us with the prospects of creating a new dawn in our human rights efforts and an optimism for what is to come. Whilst the human rights we want to affirm and witness may be the same today, as they were 30 years ago, the realities of the world we live in suggest that our approach to securing these rights cannot be the same. There is much that has changed and today we stand before an endless range of possibilities on initiatives that can be taken to carry out our mission of realising the rights enshrined in the African Charter and related instruments.

During the Opening Ceremony of the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, I made a special appeal that there be wider ownership over the Charter and Human Rights in Africa. This appeal must and should find expression in the willingness of all to engage in activities that are complementary to those that will be initiated by the African Commission. Civil Society Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, Multilateral and Partner Organisations, Member States and individuals need to use the opportunity of the 30<sup>th</sup> year since adoption of the Charter, to further deepen efforts directed at promoting the Charter amongst all peoples of our Continent. Collectively, we must and should establish initiatives to ensure that our Charter is upheld and serves as an inspirational guide to all for positive action directed at securing human and peoples' rights.

Although we are most often inclined to commemorate by focusing on all that is good and by engaging in activities that are celebratory in nature, it is imperative that we also focus some efforts on reflections that serve to create innovative actions and perhaps different ways of thinking and acting. New skills, new approaches, new networks and new technologies allow us to fulfil our mandates in more effective and efficient ways. These require that we move beyond traditional approaches and that we be accommodative of demands for higher levels of performance. The simple reality is that we have to do more with less and make certain that we move with the times and act with higher levels of integrity and responsiveness.

Whilst our Charter has stood the test of time, the actions we take and have taken within the parameters of the Charter have changed. Evidently, we have moved from a stage where African Commission Sessions were largely the only available opportunity for contact, to a stage where interactions take place on a continuous basis. Now, more than ever, our people are demonstrating a willingness to take ownership in the efforts directed at upholding the contents of the Charter and correctly, do not wait for Commission Sessions to raise matters of concern. The challenge for us is to ensure that we are always responsive and indeed find ways of making the Commission's Sessions a continuous process.

As we begin the year long celebratory activities, allow me to make a special appeal to all that we devote added attention on how we can close the gap between the rhetoric we read or hear and the realities that our people continue to live with. I am, as I am sure you all are, always struck by the gaps that we continue to witness between expectations and reality. Indeed, the Chairperson of the Commission highlighted many of these in her Opening Statement for the 48<sup>th</sup> Session and Member States and NGOs present have expressed the complex realities and challenges that many continue to face on the ground. Even as we must appreciate the advocacy that takes place, we have to accept that it is much easier to articulate the problem than it is to be a part of the actual solution. Whilst rhetoric will always have a place, it is solutions and deeds that would change the world we live in.

It is by no means a small coincidence that the 30 year celebration would unfold at the same time as the African Union Commission drives forward the process for adopting and implementing the African Human Rights Strategy. The Strategy is futuristic, builds on past experiences and as is fundamentally about how all of us can work together for common purpose. In this respect, four specific objectives have been established for the Strategy and these are: **firstly**, to enhance coordination, complementarities and synergy among continental, regional and national human rights institutions in Africa as well as the enforcement of decisions, commitments and resolutions; **secondly**, to strengthen the capacity of institutions with a human rights mandate at continental, sub-regional and national levels; **thirdly**, to deepen the culture of human rights and democratic governance to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa and **finally**, to harmonise human rights instruments at continental and regional levels. The Draft Strategy is comprehensive and establishes a focused approach towards enhancing human rights capacity and complementarities across our vast Continent. Furthermore, it is results-oriented and as the process unfolds, I would urge all to engage with its content and thereby ensure that it is indeed a collective strategy that brings us together.

It is my hope that the Strategy will stand at the centre of the collective efforts to deepen human rights promotion and protection in Africa and would further galvanise us all for celebration and action. With these few words let me thank you all for the attention and wish us all as we collectively engage in activities to commemorate and celebrate the 30 years since adoption of the African Charter.