



**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS  
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**AT**

**THE CONSULTATIONS WITH THE COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND  
HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PAN AFRICAN PARLIAMENT**

**ON**

**THE HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGY FOR AFRICA**

**Midrand, SOUTH AFRICA**

**6th March 2012**

## **Chairperson**

### **Honourable Members,**

The regular consultations between the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission and the Pan African Parliament represent important opportunities to reaffirm the link between shared or common values and the overall integration process in the Continent. Indeed the organization of this Meeting, taking place as it is in the first quarter of this Year of Shared Values, undoubtedly reflects a renewed commitment to the Human Rights Agenda of the Continent, which is in itself an intrinsic component of the Shared Values orientation of the AU. Let me therefore say how pleased I am to be once again with you all, at the Headquarters of the Pan African Parliament as we engage in reflection on the adopted Human Rights Strategy for Africa.

Our meeting affords me the opportunity to recognize and commend the efforts of the Bureau of the Pan African Parliament and the members of the Committees on Justice and Human Rights and Cooperation, International Relations and Conflict Resolution who are helping to shape our thinking on Governance in the Continent in general and Human Rights in particular. Needless to say, the Strategy that is under consideration would never have seen the light of day without your expressed interest and commitment to human rights protection and promotion. Before going any further therefore, I would like to say a big 'THANK YOU' for your individual and collective commitments. 'Thank you' to all of you for keeping human rights in the vanguard of our development efforts!

## **Chairperson**

### **Honourable Members,**

The history of the African Human Rights System is the history of Africans yearning for dignity and respect. In adopting the Human Rights Strategy for Africa, the various stakeholders in the African Human Rights System sent a strong message to the African Peoples i.e. WE CAN INDEED MAKE A DIFFERENCE. In as much as the Strategy is the finality of the developing consensus on the operational parameters of the collaboration between the various stakeholders that comprise the said Human Rights System, it goes without saying, it is just the beginning of a difficult but exciting journey ahead. The challenge and this I would say loud and clear is that in adopting such a Strategy, we should all stand committed to discharge to the fullest the heavy responsibility that we have collectively assumed.

## **Chairperson**

### **Honourable Members,**

Having said this, the Human Rights Strategy and the AU Governance Agenda nexus is a subject that demands sober reflection as we proceed with our deliberations. Reflecting on the relevance of the Strategy and on how it should fit into the AU broader orientation towards democracy promotion, peace, security and development is critical but first let me begin with what the Strategy is not about and the process of its elaboration.

The Strategy, as some of you know, is the culmination of a process that began in 2006 in Bahar Dar, Ethiopia and the subsequent series of consultations arranged by the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission to identify existing and potential areas for cooperation and dialogue between all actors of the African Human Rights System. From Bahar Dar to Arusha through Banjul, Addis Ababa, Nazareth and finally Banjul in April last year, the combined efforts by the AU Organs and RECs, in addition to highlighting the great work accomplished by the African Human Rights mechanisms in promoting and protecting human rights, underscored the need for more coherent and regular cooperation between them.

A significant conclusion resulting from these meetings was that a Human Rights Strategy for Africa should be developed, with the aim of enhancing cooperation at the continental, regional and national levels to better protect and promote human rights in Africa - a Strategy that would also allow the African Human Rights mechanisms to fulfill their human rights mandate more effectively.

As you will be engaging on the detailed technical elements of the Human Rights Strategy for Africa, allow me to center my remarks on the policy context within which this work unfolded. In fact, to understand some of the challenges that necessitate wider African coherence in Human Rights, we need to look no further than the discussions and outcomes of the July 2010 African Union Summit in Kampala, Uganda. Whilst the engagements on issues pertaining to Human Rights were varied, there was, in my view, wide support for the work of the organs and mechanisms that have been established to focus on Human and Peoples' Rights. Within those diverse interactions, there appeared to be a consistent message on the need for greater African coherence in international engagements. In as much as there might have been different motivations for such a call, it would seem to me that Member States were merely asking for greater African leadership and for more opportunities for internal dialogue on matters that we are confronted with at the continental and global levels. One cannot but conclude therefore that the developed Human Rights Strategy for Africa provides the best hope for coherence and voice in all our engagements.

## **Chairperson**

### **Honourable Members,**

The significance of the Strategy will for Member States, reside in the visible improvements it would make for all our peoples and for human rights in general and not only for what it would do for the affected institutional entities. In thinking of Member States' needs, we would also be pushed towards recognizing and articulating the meaning such a Strategy would have for the peoples of our Continent. In other words, it was important that within the Strategy we articulate in a clear manner, the benefits of the African Human Strategy for all stakeholders in the Continent. Coordination and the establishment of complementarities are important, but they cannot be ends in themselves and need to speak to a higher purpose.

The adopted Human Rights Strategy for Africa therefore defines the measures and approaches that the AU and its partners will undertake to address the current weaknesses of the African Human Rights System. Within the context of a policy orientation to strengthen and facilitate the development of coordinated continental human rights promotion and protection, the Strategy seeks to transform the African Human Rights System from being a mosaic of instruments and institutions to concrete actions that will enhance enforceability and effective implementation. As part of the African Governance Architecture, the Strategy aims at complementing the primary responsibility of AU Member States to promote and protect human rights.

Against this backdrop, the Strategy is not a policy instrument and it is not about reinventing current initiatives in the terrain of human rights. It is premised on principles, standards, norms and instruments that permeate the various policy instruments of the AU within the realm of democracy, governance and human rights. The African Governance Platform, to be launched soon, is expected to provide the overall mechanism for implementation of the Strategy, building on existing arrangements amongst AU Organs and Institutions with a formal mandate on Governance and Human Rights.

Being the outcome of a process that was meant to develop consensus on how to collectively deliver on the differentiated mandate of all the principal stakeholders, it would be churlish in this sense to regard the Strategy as perfect. The Strategy is not a static instrument. Rather, the nature of the African Human Rights System suggests a continuous and evolving process that is rooted in our concerted effort. As such, our deliberations should not focus on the principles and operational parameters of our collaboration as embodied in the Strategy. The central thrust of the Strategy lies in effect in the Plan of Action which attempts to identify and prioritize activities that through

collective action, can address some of the challenges associated with Human Rights in Africa.

## **Chairperson**

### **Honourable Members,**

This leads me to the other important aspect that all too often is a challenge. The real value of the Strategy resides in its implementation. The zeal and consensus that has guided its development needs to be translated into concrete commitment to collectively deliver on the identified activities. There is no doubt about the expectations of Africans and the concomitant commitment of our leaders. We must and should not disappoint Africans and our leaders by renegeing on the mandate that has been entrusted to us.

Without prejudging the outcomes of the process, to me, it would seem important that in addition to responding to the expressed need for coherence and leadership, we should also aim at working through some of the content elements of human rights in Africa. Much as some of the issues embedded in human rights deliberations are sensitive and difficult, particularly as they relate to contestations about African particularities and the universalism of Human Rights, we cannot avoid these issues and would need to engage with them, to demonstrate the importance of this initiative.

As part of the Shared Values orientation, the Strategy is situated within the broader efforts of democracy building and consolidation. It is thus important the Strategy adopts a preventive approach, which does not only seek redress but assures prevention. A narrow or strict implementation of the Strategy without any appreciation of the broader polity might risk compromising its impact. Building a human rights culture in Africa is contingent on anchoring the ongoing practices in unambiguous and predictable processes and strong democratic institutions supported by popular participation. Human rights violations and the challenges of electoral conflicts and political violence reflect the problems of transitions to democracy associated with preventing human rights abuses, managing elections and building institutions of competition that are widely accepted by winners and losers.

Within the context of the AU comprehensive policy approach to issues of human rights, democracy and governance, I am pleased to announce to this gathering that the 18<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union approved the establishment of an African Governance Platform. This decision is most significant as the Platform would not only provide a basis for strengthening the African Governance Architecture, but would be a central vehicle to facilitate dialogue and complementarities between all AU structures and African Regional Economic Communities involved in

Governance and Human Rights, including the African Commission and Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Pan African Parliament, the African Peer Review Mechanism and other stakeholders. This is in addition to another decision calling for 2012 to be named the Year of Shared Values.

## **Chairperson**

### **Honourable Members,**

Before concluding, allow me to briefly re-emphasize three quick points:

Firstly, to fully appreciate and express the value of our work at a continental level, it is imperative that we place ourselves at the points at which the defence of human rights becomes a matter of immediate significance. To do this effectively, we would need to think out of the box and would have to listen to and incorporate the voices of all stakeholders and the peoples who would be most affected by the Strategy.

Secondly, the complementary nature of the African human rights protection system is a great asset. It is our conviction that it is only through systematic and regular cooperation that we will be able to confront squarely the many human rights challenges we face in Africa. Through the adopted Strategy, a clear and unambiguous message has been sent and that is that we are ready to deliver as one.

Lastly, having placed emphasis on the need to locate the unfolding work within the wider policy context and process, allow me to conclude with a further note of encouragement for the opportunities that stand before the Human Rights community that we all represent in these consultations. It is important to recognize that we all stand to be part of a process that would serve to take forward the African Human Rights Agenda from a mosaic of good intentions towards being a defining and visible element of African shared values. The choice of either just being a critical bystander or being part of the process of taking collective responsibility for the Strategy is ours to make. I remain most confident that we are in this together.

With these introductory remarks stating the background to the Human Rights Strategy for Africa and the policy context within which it was developed and is indeed evolving, I thank you again for inviting the Department of Political Affairs to this forum and your willingness to engage directly with the adopted Strategy. Mr. Salah Hammad, Human Rights Expert and Focal Point will now make a brief presentation on the elements of the Strategy and also introduce the Plan of Action that has been developed.