



**MESSAGE BY**

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**ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY**

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On 10 December 1948, history was made when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). As members of the United Nations, African Member States are part of the commemoration of this very important day in the international human rights calendar.

At the time of its adoption, the UDHR was perceived as an instrument to put an end to the human rights atrocities and violations which the world witnessed during the Second World War. The Declaration was perceived, at the time, to be also the framework that would close political divides and to create a sense of tolerance and oneness across the nations of the world. Today, the UDHR is still central to efforts directed at securing human rights, thus bearing testimony to the extraordinary foresight and vision of its drafters. It continues to be a "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" aimed at securing the universal recognition, observance and realization of human rights.

The African Human Rights System with its various instruments paved the way for the advancement of human rights respect and protection in Africa. It also led to the creation of strategic measures to accelerate the attainment of respect for human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent. Such instruments have an undeniable moral force and provide practical guidance to States in their conduct. The value of the African Union Human Rights Instruments and Mechanisms rests on their recognition and acceptance by Member States and indeed they may be seen as declaratory of broadly accepted goals and principles within Africa.

As part of the efforts made to enhance the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights on the Continent, the AU Organs with a human rights mandate adopted the Human Rights Strategy for Africa. The purpose of the Strategy is to strengthen the African human rights system aiming at deepening the culture of democracy and human rights in conformity with the objectives of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and other relevant instruments. The Strategy seeks to address the current

challenges of the African human rights system in order to ensure effective promotion and protection of human rights on the continent.

This year's commemoration also marks the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Women Protocol). This Protocol is a groundbreaking women's rights legal instrument came into force in 2005, and the African Union Commission has worked closely with Member States and CSOs to ensure its ratification and domestication by African nations, so that the rights set forth in this instrument can be realized. To date, 36 of 54 African countries have ratified the Protocol.

The UN OHCHR is celebrating this year's International Human Rights Day under the theme "**20 Years Working for Your Rights**", celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In support of this year's theme, we must stand together to remember all the fallen human rights victims as well as the victims of discriminatory practices and human rights violations.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) compels us to ensure that human rights are secured for every human being and for all peoples in Africa and elsewhere. These rights must be protected without any distinction or discrimination based on nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We must use this opportunity to renew our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights as being indivisible, interdependent and inalienable entitlements of every human.

**Addis Ababa, 10 December 2013**