



**MESSAGE BY
H.E. DR. AISHA L. ABDULLAHI
COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE COMMEMORATION OF THE AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

**UNDER THE THEME:
“HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL, FOR A PEACEFUL AND SECURE AFRICA”**

**21 OCTOBER 2014
ADDIS ABABA - ETHIOPIA**



The African continent has witnessed decades of numerous human rights challenges resulting from a diverse range of factors, which include, inter alia, war, poverty, impunity, corruption, autocratic governance. It is against this background that Member States of the then Organization of African Unity (OAU), solemnly resolved to promote and safeguard freedom, justice, equality and human dignity in Africa by putting in place instruments to enforce these values.

The African Human and Peoples' Rights System with its various instruments and mechanisms paved the way for the advancement of human rights promotion and protection in Africa. It also led to the creation of strategic measures to accelerate the attainment of respect for the right to development as well as measures to assist Member States to respond to development as a human rights issue. Such instruments have an undeniable moral force and provide practical guidance to States in their conduct. The value of the African Union Human and Peoples' Rights Instruments and Mechanisms rests on their recognition, acceptance and

effective implementation by Member States and indeed they may be seen as declaratory of broadly accepted goals and principles within the African Community.

The protection and promotion of Human Rights are keys for sustainable development on the continent and are an integral part of the African Shared Values. The promotion and protection of human rights has been a priority for Member States of the African Union and has been articulated as a priority in a number of the AU Instruments and Pronouncements. The principles and objectives of the AU's Constitutive Act of 2000 emphasise the need to promote and protect human rights on the continent. This Act includes a number of provisions placing human and peoples' rights on top of the agenda of the organization. In its Article 3 (h), the Act states that African leaders are determined to "promote and protect human and peoples' rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and other relevant human rights instruments". In Article 4 (m), the Act commits African leaders to the "respect for democratic principles, human rights, rule of law and good governance".

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) was adopted by the OAU on 27 June 1981 and entered into force on 21 October 1986, a day which is celebrated annually as the Africa Human Rights Day. This instrument forms the foundational stone for the African Human and Peoples' Rights System. The African Charter is unique to other regional human rights instruments in that it not only covers internationally accepted human rights norms and standards, but also recognizes the values and principles that are unique to the African continent. It covers Civil and Political Rights, Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Peoples' and Group Rights as well as a set of duties of the individual to society.

The Africa Human Rights Day is an opportunity for AU Member States to affirm their commitment to the fight against impunity in Africa in conformity with Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act which authorises the Union to intervene within each Member State in cases of war crimes, genocide, mass atrocities and crimes

against humanity. It is on this basis that commemorating Africa Human Rights Day is an opportunity to urge all African Union Member States to honor their obligations under the African Human and Peoples' Rights System and take all necessary measures to ensure the respect, promotion and protection of all human rights.

This year's theme of "***Human Rights for All, for a Peaceful and Secure Africa***" is timely and pertinent. Implicit in the theme is the recognition, on the one hand, that Africa still faces huge challenges of conflict, instability, poverty and diseases; but on the other hand, the theme is reflective of a ray of hope that through the promotion of human and peoples' rights in Africa, sustainable peace and development can be achieved.

As we commemorate Africa Human Rights Day this year, I wish to reflect on the Decision of the African Union Summit (Assembly/AU/Dec. 423 (XIX)), which mandated the African Union Commission, in close consultation with the AU Members States and the Regional Economic Communities, to identify Africa's priorities for the post-2015 Development Agenda. This was followed by the Summit Decision (Assembly/AU/Dec.475(XXI)), of May 2013, which decided to establish a High-Level Committee (HLC) of Heads of State and Government to sensitize and coordinate the activities of African leaders and build regional and inter-continental alliances on the Common African Position (CAP) on the post-2015 Development Agenda.

The CAP highlights substantive issues of importance to Africa and arrives at a consensus on Africa's key priorities, concerns and strategies to be reflected in the outcomes of the post-2015 negotiation process. The CAP identifies Africa's development priorities which are grouped into six pillars as follows: (i) structural economic transformation and inclusive growth; (ii) science, technology and innovation; (iii) people-centred development; (iv) environmental sustainability natural resources management, and disaster risk management; (v) peace and security; and (vi) finance and partnerships. Indeed, the post-2015 Development

Agenda presents a unique opportunity for Africa to articulate its common priorities, opportunities and challenges.

Going beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it is important to tackle the necessary instruments and mechanisms required for a new set of wider goals. It is also important to bring the right of the African people to development to the forefront of the negotiations as a human rights issue in order to achieve the social and economic rights stipulated in the global and continental human rights instruments.

Another challenge to note at this point is the lack of political will by the development partners to take full responsibility for addressing the right to development as a human rights issue. In fact, in many cases the debate is not on whether development is a right or not, but it aims at responding to the controversial question of whether development and economic and social rights are competitive or complementary goals. Therefore, the efforts by the AU Members States to develop the Common African Position on post- 2015 Development Agenda, is an accurate conception, which treats the right to development as an economic and social right.

Today, we are all witnesses to the international trend where the indivisibility and interdependency of human rights has become the norm. The notion of justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights which divided the world during the years of the Cold War, is beginning to be embraced by many countries. The concepts of the right to development and the right to peace, hitherto regarded as mere academic talk, have today been admitted as indispensable to the effective enjoyment of all human rights. Africa indeed can and has led the way in shaping the international human rights discourse.

On another hand, I wish to report that the Department of Political Affairs is relentlessly pursuing the implementation of the Action Plan of the Human Rights Strategy for Africa, which was adopted in 2011. The key objective of the Strategy

is to address current weaknesses within the human rights system in Africa, as well as to bring about convergences and synergies in the workings of the human rights institutions and actors on the continent. The Strategy focuses on Transitional Justice to deal with issues of post conflict reconstruction, peace and development. The Department of Political Affairs is collaborating with the relevant AU Organs, partners and other stakeholders to finalize the development of an AU Transitional Justice Policy Framework for Africa, which will be endorsed during the June Summit of 2015.

As we commemorate the Africa Human Rights Day, I wish to seize this opportunity to express my sincere condolences to bereaved families and those affected by the Ebola outbreak in the western region of Africa. At the same time, I wish to express appreciation to all who have worked and continue to address this serious health problem with its devastating socio-economic and political ramifications.

The time has come for all stakeholders promoting and protecting human rights on the continent, and in particular, Member States, to take stock of what they have done to establish a culture of respect for human rights on the continent, and what they can do to enhance the enjoyment of human rights and peace in Africa. It is important to bear in mind that there is no peace without respect for human rights, and security and development can only thrive where there is durable peace.

The level of responsibilities varies from one stakeholder to another, but we should always commit ourselves both individually and collectively towards ***“Human Rights for All, for a Peaceful and Secure Africa”*** in the spirit of the Africa Agenda 2063, Africa’s long-term development vision over the next fifty years.

I thank you.