



## African Union Human Rights Memorial (AUHRM)

### Concept Note

#### Overview

This concept note focuses on the significance of erecting a human rights memorial at the African Union based on the belief and decision of the African Union that memorialisation of the victims of human rights violations in Africa is a process that honours those victims and serves as a means to examine the past and address contemporary issues. The initial phase of the project puts emphasis on the victims of Rwandan genocide, Ethiopian Red Terror, Apartheid, the slave trade, colonialism and civil wars.

#### Context

After 39 years of existence, and in the wake of the Rwandan genocide as well as the ending of Apartheid in South Africa, the Organisation of African Union (OAU) was transformed into the African Union (AU) in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002. A principal aim of the new beginning was to make the AU a people-based organisation. Now the AU has as one of its aims the promotion of democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance. The AU, unlike its predecessor, has the right to intervene if there is genocide and war crimes, and also has the right to suspend the membership of a government that has come to power through unconstitutional means. Following on its decision to build its new headquarters and conference centre on the site of the former central prison formerly known as *Alem Bekagn* (Farewell to the world), the AU made a historic move towards honoring victims of past violations.

**AU Decision:** In April 2004, on the tenth anniversary of the commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda, the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the AU passed a resolution, sponsored by Rwanda, deciding to make 7 April an annual event in the AU calendar, and also to preserve part of *Alem Bekagn* as a human rights memorial museum, dedicated in the first instance to the victims of the Red Terror and the Rwanda Genocide.

**First Consultative Meeting:** On November 15, 2010, the AU convened a Consultative AUHRM expert meeting. In the meeting it was decided that there should be both permanent and temporary memorials, as well as efforts that inform the AU, continental and international audiences through exhibits and events concerning human rights issues at the AU Headquarters. The purpose of these efforts was articulated as honouring the duty to remember by providing a place of remembrance

and mourning, and the duty to overcome denial, silence and forgetting by providing opportunities for education and awareness-building. The AU expressed the desire that the memorial and related events should make clear and intimate linkages between human rights and peace.

**Second Consultative Meeting:** The group of experts held a second meeting on November 4, 2011, to work out an action plan for the project. The group recommended that the memorial should include identifying an external space dedicated to the memory of the victims of *Alem Bekagn* central prison, creating permanent memorials to the Rwanda Genocide, Apartheid and slavery, and holding an inaugural event to commemorate those who perished during the Red Terror campaign and victims of other human rights violations. Moreover, it was proposed that the AUHRM would include temporary exhibits to memorialize human rights violations across the continent, to be chosen by a regular process of competition. A decision was reached that those who were present at the meeting will constitute a Technical Group and the AU itself will establish a mechanism for follow-up.

**Unveiling of AUHRM Foundation Stone:** On January 28, 2012, the new AU headquarters, a state-of-the-art conference centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia was inaugurated. The foundation stone for the AUHRM project was unveiled on the same day. The Foundation Stone was unveiled by Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, Benin's President Thomas Yayi Boni, and many more dignitaries. The inscription reads as follows:

*For all the victims of human rights abuses in Africa, including those of the slave trade and colonialism, and particularly the genocide in Rwanda (1994), the Alem Bekagn prison massacres (1937 and 1974), the Red Terror (1977-78) in Ethiopia and Apartheid in South Africa.*

*Unveiled on the occasion of the commissioning of the AU conference and office complex, 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government.*

*Addis Ababa, 28 January 2012.*

## **Rationale for the Proposed Project**

Establishing the AU Memorial is a reminder and recognition of a dark past, an affirmation of the resolve to respect the dignity of humankind, and a commitment to prevent future recurrence of such acts. As the AU pursues and intensifies its efforts towards the promotion of peace and human rights on the continent, the Memorial will emphasize the inseparable linkages between these issues, and build upon progress made by African people and institutions. By raising the profile of memorialisation within the AU, current and future generations will be informed about the causes, consequences and lessons of past wars and episodes of dictatorship and human rights violations. The memorial will build the general historical knowledge of Africans concerning these issues and will:

- Increase public information concerning genocide and human rights violations, and thereby raise awareness of about these issues;

- Shine a light on the workings of African governments and regional institutions in responding to genocide and human rights violations;
- Facilitate opportunities to discuss and promote African people's involvement in democratic citizenship;
- Promote norms of good citizenship, tolerance and transparency, and discourage intolerance, authoritarianism and hatred.

## **Project Goals and Objectives**

The overarching goal of the AUHRM project is to contribute to the establishment of an AU memorial which will significantly sponsor a cultural shift by educating and inspiring the present and future generations of Africans to embrace and advocate for peaceful alternatives to war.

The AUHRM project will:

- Manifest both the duty to remember, providing a continental place of recognition and mourning; and the duty to overcome denial, silence and forgetting by providing opportunities for education.
- Incorporate the input of survivors of genocide and conflict, to give attention to concerns about justice and gender equity, and to undertake practical efforts to promote access to knowledge, while engaging visitors actively.
- Identify African role models for peace, inspire new generations to work to end conflicts, and demonstrate to the world that citizens of the African continent value peace and non-violence.

## **Project Strategy**

In 2004, the Permanent Representatives Council of the AU resolved that there should be established a permanent memorial to the victims of human rights violations including genocide. It is also to be noted that the African Union held a seminar on African Union Human Rights Memorial (AUHRM) on 15 November 2010 to address the duty of remembering past conflicts in Africa, which culminated in the agreement to erect both permanent and temporary memorials and exhibits as well as hold events concerning human rights at the AU Headquarters.

Funds will be raised by the AUC for the construction of the memorial site. Experts, researchers, architects, construction companies will be commissioned to carry out activities for its development. The memorial centre will engage in modest business activities to generate funds for its continued maintenance.

## **Project Activities**

The project will have the following components:

- Erect a permanent human rights memorial on the premises of AU's new headquarters;
- Build an educational centre within or near the premises of AU, which will provide African countries with the necessary historical background to past violations and serve as communication centre for researchers and Universities working on human rights.

- Create a virtual presence (website) that will function as a hub for survivors, various memorial centres, museums, academic institutions, donor agencies and other interested parties.
- Conduct relevant research and studies.

## **Expected Results**

- A place of mourning and remembrance will be established;
- An education centre that archives survivors stories will be established;
- Increased awareness of the bearings of conflicts and dividends of peace will be created;
- Knowledge based on the history and impact of past conflicts will be increased through the production of various educational materials;
- Timetable of dates for observing commemorative events will be established;
- Engagement of numerous civil society organisations from throughout Africa will be increased.
- An AUHRM Website as a resource hub of information for survivors and the general public will be set up;
- The number of participants on the project; individuals, interested groups, continental and international organisations knowledgeable of the reasons, the historical component, and the price of conflicts in Africa will be increased.
- A self-sustaining centre that secures income from project-related merchandise will be established.

## **Organizational Background**

### The African Union:

The AU, with its 53 Member States has its headquarters Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It is a Pan-African Organisation whose goal is to propel a united continent towards peace and prosperity. Its vision is that of 'an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena'. The AU can authorise peacekeeping missions and is poised to resolve situations which include genocide and crimes against humanity.