



Statement attributable to Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa

57th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

Banjul, 04 November 2015

Honorable Minister of Presidential Affairs, Secretary-General and Head of the Civil Service of the Republic of the Gambia

Honorable Ministers

Honorable Members of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Excellences representing the State Parties to the African Union

Excellences Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps accredited to the Republic of the Gambia

The distinguished Secretary to the Commission

Senior Government Officials of the Republic of The Gambia here present

Distinguished Representatives of National and International Human Rights Institutions

Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society Organizations

Distinguished invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to express my gratitude to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for inviting me on the occasion of its 57th Ordinary Session. I feel greatly honored to address this august assembly on behalf of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

I wish to congratulate the Chairperson, as well as the Honorable Members and the Secretary and her Staff of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for the efficient organization of this 57th Ordinary Session. I salute your efforts and dedication to the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know well, the promotion and protection of human rights remains a challenge across the continent. We continue to witness numerous civil liberty-related issues resulting from a diverse range of factors, which include war, poverty, bad governance and much more. It is against this background that member states of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), solemnly resolved to promote and safeguard freedom, justice, equality and human dignity in Africa by setting up the relevant instruments to enforce these values. However, despite efforts undertaken within the African Union (AU), as well as by sub regional bodies and the international community as a whole, conflicts and reprisals persist in many parts; Somalia, Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, Libya and Mali continue to battle terrorism within their respective territories. Innocent victims of these atrocities are still hoping that their suffering will end and still expecting justice to be served.

Similarly, in spite of commendable efforts to curb the Ebola virus disease, it has continued during 2015 to threaten the health, life and dignity of people in ways never imagined before. The Ebola epidemic has eroded infrastructural and developmental gains that had been achieved and deprived communities of their livelihoods. Now that we are getting close to the end of this scourge, it is essential that we join our efforts with the assistance of the international community to develop strategies for early recovery, and plan ahead with regard to development in affected countries.

Despite all these challenges, positive developments have also been registered with regard to human rights promotion and protection. - The level of ratification and submission of reports to international and regional treaty bodies has increased; - African states are greatly contributing to the functioning of the Universal Periodic Review, by participating in sessions, following up on recommendations, developing national action plans. It is very encouraging to notice that most African states have established National human rights institutions. These institutions are crucial in reinforcing democracy and the rule of law. Accordingly, I would like to encourage all countries that have set up these institutions to provide adequate financial support to enable them to implement their mandated responsibilities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This session is taking place in the context of electoral cycles in some African countries. We should commend those countries which have recently organized peaceful and democratic elections. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the African Union as well as regional institutions, including ECOWAS and the Mano River Union for their utmost efforts to accompany all concerned countries in conducting peaceful elections in West Africa.

As you all know, free and fair elections play a crucial role in fostering peaceful and democratic transformation that leads to develop and reinforce stability and peace. Liberties as well as the freedoms of speech, assembly and association are fundamental for an election to be free and fair.

In return, democracy provides a natural environment for the protection and effective recognition of human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we express our support for the work of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, it is important that we also recognize with appreciation the efforts of all those who are active on the terrain of human rights in Africa. Human rights defenders play a critical role in the promotion and

protection of fundamental liberties, especially at country level. Unfortunately, many human rights militants continue to be victims of harassment and reprisals both by the State and the communities they serve.

The UN is therefore reiterating its call upon State Parties to the African Charter to desist from engaging in reprisals against human rights defenders. The UN wishes to remind State Parties that human rights defenders are entitled to enjoy the right to equal protection of the law just like any other citizens of their countries. They need to be guaranteed this right to enable them to serve their societies without putting their lives or welfare at risk.

As you are aware, the UN continues to support governments and Civil Society's efforts and initiatives to foster environments in which political actors, civil society organizations, men, women, youth, indigenous people, ethnic minorities and other excluded categories can participate and be fairly represented.

I also wish to seize this opportunity to join the call for and to urge the AU Member States to ratify and implement all human rights and governance-related instruments they have signed, and to encourage governmental and non-governmental organizations to continue advocating for the full ratification and domestication of these instruments.

The declaration of 2016 as the "African Year of Human Rights with Special Focus on the Rights of Women" provides an opportunity for the entire continent to take stock of the human rights situation on the continent in general, and the rights of women in particular. I'm seizing this opportunity to reiterate that while the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights is the responsibility of every AU member state, we should also be mindful of our individual responsibility, which is crucial for building a culture of promoting and safeguarding human rights on the continent.

Before I conclude, I would like, on behalf of the UN system in West Africa, to express my appreciation to the People and the Government of the Republic of The Gambia for hosting this important meeting. I invite all participants to this session to make this conference a success. I strongly assure you of the fullest cooperation of the United Nations Office for West Africa. We appreciate the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for being a true advocate and UN partner's in our joint effort to build peace by strengthening human rights and human values.

I look forward to the conclusions of this session as I'm confident that our deliberations will undoubtedly contribute to reinforce a culture of human rights, good governance, democracy and peace on the African continent.

Thank you for your attention.