



African Human Rights Day Statement 21 October 2020

Today we mark African Human Rights Day, at a time when many Africans are struggling to come to terms with the devastating effects that Covid-19 has had on their lives. While many have lost their jobs, business, and different sources of income, others have been victims of human rights violations including rape and other gender-based violence, abusive policing, discrimination based on their race, social class, or sexual orientation.

While the lockdowns and emergency measures taken by some African governments to address the pandemic may have helped mitigate the spread of the virus, they have also exposed and exacerbated human rights violations such as abusive law enforcement practices, unlawful detention, arbitrary arrests, silencing of human rights defenders and killings of peaceful protesters.

Furthermore, the spread of Covid-19 increased the strain on fragile health systems and weak economies. Covid-19 has laid bare Africa's underlying structural deficiencies, not only in the health sector but in other socio-economic areas. The pandemic has exacerbated challenges in a region already grappling with some of the world's largest humanitarian crises, involving over nine million forcibly displaced people. While the number of confirmed Covid-19 fatalities remains small relative to other parts of the world, we urge African Union (AU) Member States to address healthcare deficiencies to meet the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing healthcare needs of their populations. They should act to ensure everyone's right to health is in line with international human rights law, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

We recall the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission) Press Statement on Covid-19 of 28 February 2020 calling upon States Parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Charter) to assume their obligations under Article 1 of the Charter and to take appropriate measures to give effect to the rights, duties, and freedoms enshrined in the Charter including through taking steps necessary for preventing threats to the life, safety, and health of people.

We further recall the goals and objectives of the AU-Africa Joint Continental Strategy for Covid-19 Outbreak of 20 March 2020.

We urge all African states to abide by their responsibilities under the AU Constitutive Act and human rights instruments they are Parties to.

We strongly remind the AU Member States that ten months after the spread of the Covid-19 on the continent, it is now time to take stock of the challenges and progress made while implementing their respective policies.

We also urge AU policy organs and AU human rights organs, especially the African Commission, to undertake the same assessment so as to ensure the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens in the midst of Covid-19.

We urge AU member states to put in place strategic plans which take into consideration lessons learned during the past ten months and improve measures and policies in addressing Covid-19.

We further urge AU Policy organs and AU member states to address the Covid 19 pandemic in line with the Inspiration 3 of the Agenda 2063 in ensuring an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law.

We also urge AU Policy organs to abide by the Constitutive Act and AU member states to comply with the provisions of the Charter, especially Article 4 on the right to life, Article 9 on the right to access to information, and Article 16 on the right to health as well as to address the issue of discrimination during governments' enforcement measures aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19. AU member states should also hold perpetrators of human rights violations to account.

While the pandemic took Africa and the entire world by surprise, governments should learn from their experiences over the past the ten months and ensure that their ongoing and future efforts to address the pandemic are carried out in accordance with AU human rights instruments and principles.

The Coalition for the Independence of the African Commission (CIAC) is a collective of organizations and individuals who seek to protect the independence of the African Commission. The efforts of CIAC are based on the premise that both regional and international human rights bodies and civil society play an essential role in holding states accountable for commitments made through ratifying human rights treaties.

