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## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

### @CAMPAIGN FOR THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

"It is up to Africans to see that the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights becomes common knowledge in rural and urban areas, among women, the illiterate and children, because the rights are there to protect them."

Seri Remy, executive secretary, AI Côte d'Ivoire

### CAMPAIGN FOR THE CHARTER

Amnesty International is calling on organizations throughout Africa to join in the campaign to raise awareness of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and to mark African Day of Human and Peoples' Rights on 21 October 1992.

The call comes a year after Amnesty International launched a campaign to mark the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the African Charter with the aim of encouraging the 10 countries which had not yet ratified the charter to do so and to make the charter more widely known throughout Africa.

Throughout the year, Amnesty International members in Africa and elsewhere held a wide range of publicity activities, African organizations joined in the promotional campaign, and several governments took steps to ratify or act on the charter.

### THE RIGHTS

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights covers a wide range of individual rights, such as the right to life, freedom of conscience, the rights to speak freely and the right to join organizations such as trade unions and political parties -- rights that are similar to those in other international or regional human rights declarations.

### JOURNALISTS AND THE CHARTER

The media played an important role in spreading the word about the basic human rights guaranteed by the charter. A day-long media event on the charter was held in Benin and AI's members in Cameroon joined a major radio program to debate the charter. In Lesotho the National Council of Women put out a statement pledging themselves to "a relentless pursuit of the basic principles of the charter."

In Côte d'Ivoire Amnesty International joined forces with local organizations including the Ligue Ivoirienne des Droits de l'Homme to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the charter. Many people said they heard about the charter in broadcasts in French and local languages - Attie, Baoulé, Bété, Dioula. A television debate there among journalists, law students and teachers was held in the Tagbana language with the result, according to an Amnesty International organizer, "that many people understood that the charter was written for them."

### APPEALING TO THE PUBLIC

Reaching out to the public was essential to boost awareness of the charter, and in a number of countries public meetings were held to draw to together human rights leaders and others in the community. Amnesty International members in Ghana held a symposium which drew members of the police force, prisons department, judges, lawyers, churches and others. In Cote d'Ivoire a public

conference was held featuring a member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the body which monitors implementation of the charter. In Chad the newly-formed Association Tchadienne pour la Promotion et la Défense des Droits de l'Homme organized a series of weekend workshops to teach people about their rights, focusing on the African Charter. And In Namibia, the arts association held a poster exhibition in 1991 and this year is marking 21 October by distributing Amnesty International's guide to the charter. Outside Africa, Amnesty International's section in the Netherlands drew 250 people to a conference which featured the Malawian poet and former prisoner of conscience Jack Mapanje.

#### THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

Religious leaders in some countries sent a message to their congregations during the campaign, letting them know more about the charter and what action they could take. In Sierra Leone, a church newsletter printed the text of the charter and a number of Imams preached about the charter in Friday prayers. In Burundi the charter was translated into Kirundi and published by a Catholic newspaper. In Mozambique the Islamic Council promised to post the charter at the entrances of mosques.

#### GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

Throughout the year, Amnesty International and other organizations in Africa translated, printed, and sent the charter to thousands and thousands of people to get the message to as many people as possible. Amnesty International members in Benin, Mauritius, Sierre Leone and elsewhere sent copies of the charter to local and national groups, including religious organizations, legal institutions, women's groups, and students. Other organizations such as Caritas distributed copies in Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome, where they said it was useful after the first democratic elections. Outside Africa, Amnesty International members in Japan, Mexico, Norway and the USA contacted a range of groups to get them involved in distributing the charter within Africa.

#### GOVERNMENTS' RESPONSE

By the end of 1991, Djibouti had acceded to the African Charter and in 1992 Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho and Mauritius followed suit. There are still five governments however that have yet to accede to the charter: Ethiopia, Madagascar, Namibia, Seychelles and Swaziland.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

##### TO HELP PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA

1. **Share information about human rights:** Distribute the African Charter and AI's explanatory Guide to friends, relatives, colleagues, and members of organizations to which you belong. Urge journalists to make information about the African Charter public, particularly on 21 October.
2. **Talk about the African Charter:** publicize different articles of the African Charter on the radio, in the languages of your country.
3. **Action to protect human rights:** appeal to your government to ensure that human rights are respected in your country in law and in practice. If

your government has not yet ratified the African Charter, urge it to do so.

4. **Join Amnesty International's campaign to promote respect for human rights in Africa:** contact the local AI section or group in your country to find out more about how you can help.

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