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Amnesty International's African human rights defenders meet in Côte d'Ivoire

Amnesty International campaigners from over 20 African countries will meet at Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, tomorrow, 22 March, for four days to discuss human rights issues affecting Africa and the rest of the world.

"African human rights defenders play a vital role in promoting and developing a greater awareness of human rights among regional intergovernmental organizations, governments and civil society," Patrice Vahard, Director of Amnesty International's Regional Office in Kampala, said.

"The presence of so many different nationalities at the meeting illustrates the depth and vitality of the human rights movement in Africa. It reaffirms the concept that human rights are a global phenomenon and that cultural diversity is a source of enrichment to the universality and indivisibility of human rights."

Among the topics being discussed at the meeting will be the role of Amnesty International's newly-formed ECOWAS group set up to lobby the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Secretariat and member states on human rights issues such as human rights education and torture.

The participants will also present their ideas on how to strengthen ties with other non-governmental organizations in the Southern Africa Development Community region to work together to promote respect for human rights.

One of the major areas of discussion at the meeting will be the arms trade and the proliferation of weapons throughout the continent.

"Many of the conflicts that are currently plaguing Africa are fuelled by the readiness of governments and international companies to supply arms and other military equipment for their own political or financial ends," Patrice Vahard said.

Amnesty International's delegates will be discussing strategies and campaigning methods to halt this trade in arms and other military and police equipment which are used to kill, maim and torture thousands of men, women and children in Africa each year.

"This second meeting of Amnesty International's African campaigners is a chance to reflect on what we have still to achieve and how we can approach our campaigning on human rights issues more effectively and dynamically," Patrice Vahard added.

"Until there comes a day when human rights are respected and upheld universally, Amnesty International's campaigning cannot and will not stop," he concluded.

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Note to Editors

Amnesty International campaigners from the following countries will be attending the meeting:
Benin, Burkina Faso, Botswana, Chad, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Senegal,
Nigeria, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Liberia, Nigeria, Mali, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zambia,
Zimbabwe, Mauritius.

**For more information, please call Diomanté Papis in Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, on
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