

Madame Reine ALAPINI-GANSOU  
Chairperson of the African Commission on  
Human and Peoples' rights  
04 BP 0608  
Cotonou  
Bénin

5 April 2011

Dear Honourable Chairperson,

As civil society organizations and human rights defenders concerned about the neglect and lack of legal recognition of economic, social and cultural rights in many parts of Africa, we welcome the commitment by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Commission) to enhance the protection of these human rights in the region.

We believe that adopting the Principles and Guidelines on the Interpretation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights can contribute to addressing poverty, discrimination and insecurity in many African countries. As the Principles and Guidelines state, "without access to economic, social and cultural rights, the dignity of the individual and of peoples is threatened" and "economic deprivation and marginalisation of peoples, communities and groups results in increased social conflict and instability."

The Principles and Guidelines clarify the scope and content of economic, social and cultural rights, including, amongst others, the rights to health, adequate housing, water and education, and the corresponding obligations on states to ensure that these rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

Building on the work of the African Commission and other treaty monitoring bodies, especially the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Principles and Guidelines provide detailed guidance to states on how to implement their obligations and enforce economic, social and cultural rights.

The Principles and Guidelines also set out the important role that civil society groups and national human rights commissions can play in the legal enforcement of these rights. They provide civil society groups and human rights defenders with a legal and advocacy tool to press states to adopt national legal frameworks and to strengthen accountability and implementation mechanisms. We would be able to use the Principles and Guidelines in the protection of people's economic, social and cultural rights and in building awareness of particular cases of violations of these rights.

Increased engagement by civil society groups with the African Commission would also contribute to expanding the Commission's important interpretative role and its jurisprudence in this field.

The Principles and Guidelines can also enhance access to effective remedies for victims of violations of economic, social and cultural rights, and improve the enforcement of these rights.

We therefore urge the African Commission to adopt the Principles and Guidelines at its 49th ordinary session in Banjul, Gambia in April 2011, and to widely disseminate them among States Parties to the African Charter.

Yours sincerely,

Action Group for Health, Human Rights and HIV/AIDS (AGHA), Uganda

Action Humaine pour le Développement Intégré au Sénégal

Action pour l'Humanisation des Hôpitaux (ACTHU), Cameroun

Amnesty International

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Association Participation au Développement Economique et Social, Mauritanie

Association pour le Développement et la Promotion des Droits Humains, Mauritanie

BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, Nigeria

Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales

Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR)

Centre for Employment of Persons with Disabilities (CEPD), Ghana

Centre for Social and Corporate Responsibility (CSCR), Nigeria

Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), Nairobi Regional Office

Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Nigeria

Collectif Inter-Africain des Habitants (CIAH), Cameroun

CONCERN Universal

Dejo Olowu, Professor, South Africa

Dignity International

Economic & Social Rights Centre (Hakijamii), Kenya

Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme

Gender and Child Rights Initiative

Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Global Rights and Development Initiative (GRDI), Nigeria

Global Welfare Association (GLOWA), Cameroon

Habi Center, Egypt

Hope for Hopeless Global Initiative, Nigeria

Human and Environmental Development Agenda, Nigeria

Human Rights Law Service (HURILAWS), Nigeria

Human Rights Social, Development and Environmental Foundation (HURSDEF), Nigeria  
Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL), Nigeria  
International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)  
International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law (Intersociety), Nigeria  
JUNCTION Senegal  
Kisumu Social Right Association, Kenya  
Kituo Cha Sheria, The Gambia  
Labour, Health and Human rights Development Centre, Nigeria  
Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP), Nigeria  
Nairobi People Settlement Network (NPSN)  
Nepal International Consumers Union  
Organisation nationale pour l'Environnement et la Santé et la lutte contre la Pauvreté, Mauritanie  
Pamoja Trust, Kenya  
Peoples Governed by Sharia Rules (PGSR) Nigeria  
PRAWA, Nigeria  
Ray of Hope Africa (RAHA), Uganda  
Réseau Marocain pour le Droit à la Santé  
Right to Education Project, Action Aid  
Rural Initiatives for Self Empowerment Ghana  
Safehaven International, Nigeria  
Social Justice Advocacy Initiative (SJAI), Nigeria  
Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC), Nigeria  
Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), Nigeria  
Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI)  
Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), Nigeria  
Stephanie Peace building and Development Foundation, Nigeria  
Stepping Stones Nigeria Child Empowerment Foundation (SSNCEF)  
Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM), Ghana  
WITNESS

Women Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON)

Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights Philippines

Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights

ZI Teng, Hong Kong

Cc: Vice Chairperson, Chairperson of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and access to information in Africa, Chairperson of the Working Group on the Death Penalty, Special Rapporteur on Prisons and Conditions of Detention in Africa, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, Chairperson of the Working Group on the rights of older persons in Africa, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa, Chairperson of the Working Group on Economic, Social and Cultural rights in Africa, Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, IDPs and Migrants in Africa, and Executive Secretary to the Commission