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THE AFRICAN CHARTER: WORDS ARE NOT ENOUGH

As the Organization of African Unity (OAU) celebrates the 10th anniversary of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights today, unlawful killings, "disappearances", torture and other human rights violations in many African countries are occurring, Amnesty International said.

"Despite the formal commitment by member states of the OAU to the protection and promotion of human rights, the last decade in Africa has been marked by an increasing number of tragedies and the failure of governments to hold accountable those responsible for these violations," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International delegates attending the 20th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights from 21-31 October 1996, in Grand Bay, Mauritius, are urging the Commission to review its effectiveness at this important milestone.

The organization is calling on the Commission to undertake a critical review of its effectiveness. In Angola, Burundi, Nigeria and other African countries, the Commission should make a determined effort to tackle the explosive human rights situation. As a matter of urgency, the commission should send a mission to Burundi, where already critical human rights situation may be moving into a new and alarming phase.

The Commission should also undertake a mission to Angola where increased protection for human rights is needed if the peace process is to succeed. The actual context of bitterness, mistrust and lack of accountability should not prevent the establishment of mechanisms for protection and promotion of human rights.

It is also time for the Commission to address the issues of refugees and internally displaced persons and to adopt strong resolutions calling on African states to end impunity which encourages continuing human rights violations. This meeting presents an historic opportunity to encourage these states to support the establishment of a permanent international criminal court, which can step in when national authorities are unwilling or unable to bring perpetrators to justice, and to provide concrete support for the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

"Over the past ten years the Commission has adopted many resolutions but these have had little or no impact on the human rights situation in African countries. The Commission should immediately be strengthened and able to act in order to face the challenges of its second decade," Amnesty International said.

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