



The Observatory
for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders

Panel: Trends in the repression of human rights defenders

On the occasion of the publication of the Observatory's annual report

October 25, 2011

Sheraton Hotel. Banjul, Gambia

Speech by Ms. Lucy Asuagbor, ACHPR Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint FIDH and OMCT program, is a longstanding partner of the ACHPR, particularly my mandate.

Let me first draw attention to the fact that the Observatory, along with other organizations, was responsible for creating the Focal Point of the Commission on Human Rights Defenders, transformed since 2004 into the position of Special Rapporteur. The Observatory has never ceased to be of tremendous support to the work of the Commission on the issue of defenders.

In order to support and strengthen this mandate, I repeatedly stress that we must be able to grasp the situation of human rights defenders in Africa, particularly those experiencing threats and harassment. This is precisely what the Observatory does when it systematically sends urgent appeals and investigative reports – researched and objective documents on which I can rely to challenge States and call on them to respect the human rights enshrined in the Charter.

For many years, I have invited human rights defenders to participate in the Commission's meetings, joining my expertise and theirs to share their concerns with other commissioners and State representatives present, to recommend the adoption of resolutions on the subject, and to invite countries presenting their periodic reports to answer questions related to the protection of the right to freedom of association, expression and protest.

The Observatory is also an important ally for the preparation of my promotion and protection missions, through making valuable civil society contacts available in the countries concerned.

Thanks to this program, the mandate could also be represented in June at a round table on human rights defenders organized in Kinshasa (DRC), bringing together civil society organizations, as well as representatives of the Ministries of Justice and the Interior and the international community, to discuss, among other issues, the bill on the protection of defenders before its submission to the Congolese Parliament. Given the plight of defenders in this country, this type of initiative is welcome to allow for better recognition of the role of international human rights and their essential contribution to the protection of the rule of law.

In addition, for over three years, the Observatory has carried out the important task of cooperating with all regional and international mechanisms to protect the rights of defenders, combining our expertise and experience and multiplying our ability to act in favor of defenders. The arrival of Ms. Margaret Segagya, UN Special Representative on human rights defenders, during the session of the ACHPR in Swaziland in 2008, was part of this

process, as will be my presence in mid-November in Kampala, where I will present the mechanisms. In this regard, I invite you all to visit the inter-mechanism website, facilitated by the Observatory, which clarifies all of our mandates.

The launch of the Observatory's annual report is a long-awaited moment. This single document, a compilation of all cases handled by your organization, is an essential instrument for understanding the trends of repression against defenders. It is a great enhancement of the work carried out daily by defenders of the rights of the Charter. The report is also extremely useful in considering ways of acting to remedy violations of defenders' rights.

It is with great pride that I am involved now in its presentation. This is an opportunity to call all States to protect the rights enshrined in the UN Declaration of 1998 on the defenders of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

I wish the continuation and strengthening of cooperation between my office and the Observatory.