

Joint Civil Society Statement on Rwanda's Withdrawal of its Article 34(6) Declaration from the Protocol on the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

The recent decision by the government of the Republic of Rwanda to withdraw its article 34(6) declaration of the Protocol on the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Protocol) represents a significant setback for human rights protection in the country and across Africa.

As members of African and international civil society we have a vested interest in ensuring a strong and independent African human rights architecture to promote and protect human and peoples' rights on the continent. The ability for individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to file cases directly before the African Court – the principal human rights tribunal on the continent – significantly reduces barriers of entry for survivors and victims of human rights violations seeking redress and significantly increases the capacity of the Court to carry out its crucial mandate.

Previously Rwanda had been commended for being one of the first states to accept the jurisdiction of the African Court to hear cases brought directly by individuals and NGOs. However, particularly at a time when African states are demanding “African solutions to African problems” this unprecedented decision to withdraw an article 34(6) declaration and the Rwandan government's failure to subsequently participate in proceedings before the Court substantially undermines region-wide efforts to strengthen African human rights institutions and sends an alarming message about the Rwandan government's commitment to justice and human rights in general.

We call upon the African Union and all African states committed to the continued development of the African Human Rights System to join us in urging the Rwandan government to retract its withdrawal of its article 34(6) declaration; and we call upon all African states to strengthen the African Court's role for the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights throughout the continent by ratifying the existing Protocol and depositing declarations allowing individual and NGOs direct access to the Court.

Signatories:

African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), Sudan
African Court Coalition
Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy (AJPD), Angola
Association Malienne des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH), Mali
Association rwandaise pour la Défense des droits de la personne et des libertés publiques (ADL), Rwanda
Association Tchadienne pour la Promotion et la Défense des droits de l'Homme (ATPDH), Chad
Centre for the Study of Violence and Conciliation (CSVR), South Africa
Chapter Four, Uganda
DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)

Ditshwanelo - The Botswana Centre for Human Rights, Botswana
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), Egypt
Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), Uganda
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA)
Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), Kenya
Lawyers for Justice in Libya, Libya
Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), South Africa
Ligue Algérienne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (LADDH), Algeria
Ligue Bissau Guinéenne des Droits Humains, Guinée Bissau
Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l'Homme (LCDH), Central African Republic
Ligue des Droits de la Personne dans la région des Grands Lacs (LDGL), Rwanda
Ligue des Electeurs, Democratic Republic of Congo
Ligue Ivoirienne Des Droits De l'Homme (LIDHO), Cote d'Ivoire
Ligue Sénégalaise Des Droits Humains (LSDH), Senegal
Ligue Tchadienne des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH), Chad
Media Legal Defence Initiative (MLDI)
Minority Rights Group International (MRG)
Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples (MBDHP), Burkina Faso
Observatoire congolais des droits de l'Homme (OCDH), Congo
REDRESS
Regional Watch for Human Rights, Liberia
Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO), Senegal
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (RFK)
Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), Nigeria
Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)
Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights), Zimbabwe
Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, Zimbabwe
Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association, Zimbabwe