Final Communiqué
First African Union Conference of National Human Rights Institutions
18th - 21st October 2004
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia


The objectives of the Conference were to encourage states who have not yet established National Human Rights Institutions to do so, to exchange ideas between existing National Human Rights Institutions and identify areas were National Human Rights Institutions could improve in their work as well as work out mechanisms for implementing existing African Human Rights Instruments. Participants at the conference included representatives of existing National Human Rights Institutions in Africa, representatives from countries contemplating the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution, African Union Commissioners and staff, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations. National Human Rights Institutions that took part in the conference adopted the following communiqué.

Preamble

Reaffirming their adherence to the principles of human and peoples’ rights and freedoms contained in declarations, conventions and other instruments adopted by the African Union and the United Nations;

Convinced of their duty as National Human Rights Institutions to promote, protect and monitor the fulfilment of human rights and freedoms in their respective countries;

Further convinced of the significant role that National Human Rights Institutions can play in the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and in developing and enhancing awareness of rights and freedoms;

Appreciating the growing interest shown world wide and in Africa in particular in the establishment of National Human Rights Institutions;

Recalling the relevant resolutions by the United Nations General Assembly concerning National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights;

Recognising the relevance of the Paris Principles in the establishment of National Human Rights Institutions;
Disturbed by the continuous violation of the rights of women, girls and children in Africa;

Concerned by the continuing armed conflict and civil conflict in some parts of Africa and consequent gross violations of human rights and the production of large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons;

Further concerned by the lack of human security in Africa due to the prevailing conditions of armed conflict, poverty and under-development in the continent;

Considering that the enjoyment of rights and freedoms also implies the performance of duties on the part of every one concerned, adopt the following:

I. The participants

1. Express their sincere gratitude to his Excellency Alpha Omar Konaré Chairperson of the African Union Commission, for hosting the conference.

2. Also expresses their sincere appreciation to Mrs Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for the technical support provided to the conference through her Addis Ababa Regional Representation.


II. To National Institutions

4. Urge National Human Rights Institutions to continue to seek effectiveness in the delivery of their mandate through capacity building, professional staffing and self-funding.

5. Taking note of the value added of networking among National Human Rights Institutions, call on all existing National Institutions to reinforce collaboration among themselves.

6. Encourage the adherence of National Human Rights Institutions to the Paris Principles and to continue to seek ways to self-fund themselves as a strategy to overcome the challenge of financial control from their respective governments.

7. Reaffirm the need to support emerging National Human Rights Institutions.

8. Reaffirm the need for better cooperation among National Human Rights Institutions, the African Union and its organs, the African Commission on
Human and Peoples Rights, non-governmental organisations, and other institutions with human right agendas.

9. Reiterate the need for National Institutions to address issues of democratic governance, peace and security and the right to development.

10. Encourage National Human Rights Institutions to introduce a rights based approach in their operations and make effort to ensure that this concept is known by the various institutions and State Organs.

11. Call on National Human Right Institutions to press their governments to prevent the erosion of human rights in the fight against terrorism.


13. Underscore the importance of promoting a human rights culture and call on National Human Rights Institutions to indigenise the language and meaning of human rights without derogating from the universal principles.

14. Deeply concerned by the continuous violation of the rights of children, women and displaced persons, call on National Institutions to prioritise the protection of vulnerable people and to collaborate with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNIFEM and other specialized international and African institutions.

15. Encourage all National Human Rights Institutions to include the implementation of the Grand Bay and the Kigali Declaration in the action plan and actively promote these declarations.

16. Call on all National Human Rights Institutions to apply for affiliate status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, attend its sessions and provide or assist their governments to reports regularly to the Commission.

III. To the Commission of the African Union

17. Call on all member states of the African Union who have not yet established Nation Human Rights Institutions to do so without further delay in conformity with the Paris Principles.

18. Call upon the African Union to convene bi-annually a conference of National Human Rights Institutions.
19. Invite the African Union Commission, and in particular its Chairperson, to speak out on behalf of National Human Rights Institutions to their respective governments, to provide them with juristic, material and financial resources to enable them to effectively carry out their mandates.

20. Call on African states to dispose of more political will in order to build a culture of human rights on the continent.

IV. Non African States, the International Community and International NGOs

21. Urge non-African states, international non-governmental organisations and the international community at large to recognise the legitimacy of National Human Rights Institutions and the challenges they face and provide them with support to strengthen them.

22. While appreciating their support, call on development partners and donor agencies not to attach strings nor require National Human Rights Institutions to set aside their agendas when they offer financial assistance.