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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL  
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Agenda item 3

**PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL,  
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS,  
INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT**

**Information presented by the Network of African National Human  
Rights Institutions on behalf of “A”-status national human  
rights institutions in Africa**

**Note by the Secretariat**

The Secretariat of the Human Rights Council hereby transmits the communication submitted by the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions on behalf of “A”-status national human rights institutions in Africa,\* reproduced below in accordance with rule 7(b) of the rules of procedures described in the annex to Council resolution 5/1, according to which participation of national human rights institutions is to be based on arrangements and practices agreed upon by the Commission on Human Rights, including resolution 2005/74 of 20 April 2005.

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\* Reproduced in the annex as received, in the language of submission only.

## ANNEX

### **Written contribution by the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions to the Panel on the right to truth**

**Human Rights Council, 13<sup>th</sup> session, 1<sup>st</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

#### **The concept of truth**

In order to know what a right to the truth entails, there needs to be some understanding as to what is meant by truth. A commonly accepted definition of truth is the agreement of the mind with reality. True ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. In other words, the truth is measured by way of evidence. The definition of truth accepts that judgment needs to be involved in ascertaining the truth, but a judgment is only said to be true when it conforms to the external reality.

This theory is clearly represented in some of the implementing mechanisms of the right to the truth, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, which by virtue of their mandate often formulate their inquiries into the “truth” of past events with an eye to how the truth-seeking process will contribute to reconciliation.

The right to truth is a fundamental emerging principle of international human rights law, and central to the project of confronting transitions to democracy and the legacy of massive human rights violations. International law entitles the families of disappeared persons to know the totality of circumstances surrounding the fate of their relatives and imposes an obligation of investigation — the right to truth — on states.

The right to truth is an integral part of the right to justice, despite moves to separate truth from criminal conviction. The right to the truth has emerged as a legal concept at the national, regional and international levels, and relates to the obligation of the state to provide information to victims or to their families or even society as a whole about the circumstances surrounding serious violations of human rights.

The origins of the right to truth may be traced to the right under international humanitarian law of families to know the fate of their relatives, recognized by Articles 32 and 33 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, as well as obligations incumbent on parties to armed conflicts to search for persons who have been reported missing. Broadly speaking, the right to the truth is closely linked at its inception to the notion of a victim of a serious human rights violation. Like procedural rights, it arises after the violation of another human right has taken place, and would appear to be violated when particular information relating to the initial violation is not provided by the authorities, be it by the official disclosure of information, the emergence of such information from a trial or by other truth-seeking mechanisms. The rationale for such a right would appear to lie in the right of victims or of their families to be informed about the events in question so as to aid the healing process. Among other things, it would offer a sense of closure, enable their dignity to be restored and provide a remedy and reparation for violations of their rights and/or the loss suffered. In addition, the right to the truth has been a safeguard against impunity. For this reason, it has been used to contest the

validity of blanket amnesty laws shielding perpetrators of gross violations of human rights under international law, as well as to encourage more transparent and accountable government.

In the aftermath of armed conflict or periods of internal strife, the right to the truth has often been invoked to help societies understand the underlying causes of conflicts or widespread violations of human rights. Many countries have sought to implement this right by establishing truth commissions or commissions of inquiry. Arguably, the right to the truth may also be implemented by other processes, such as public trials, the disclosure of state documents and the proper management of archives, and by ensuring public access to information.

### **African National Human Rights Institutions**

Participants at the Seventh Conference of African National Human Rights Institutions, convening in Rabat, Morocco, from 3rd to 5th November 2009 under the theme: “Peace and Justice: Role of National Human Rights Institutions”, under the auspices of the Advisory Council for Human Rights of Morocco in cooperation with the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions and with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), and the Commonwealth Secretariat, noted that the Nairobi Declaration on the role of NHRIs in the Administration of Justice adopted by NHRIs in 2008 underlined the crucial role of NHRIs in relation to access to justice, the judiciary, law enforcement and correctional and detention facilities as part of their contribution to a peaceful and human rights respectful society,

The conference recognized the need for comprehensive approach when addressing the legacy of large scale abuses, comprising of investigations and prosecutions, truth seeking processes, reparations programs, and vetting processes; and that any such combination must be in conformity with international legal standards and obligations, and take into account national context;

As a result, the conference resolved:

- a. To promote the inter-dependency of peace and justice,
- b. To promote and disseminate relevant international and regional human rights instruments and standards, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; and to promote their wide implementation,
- c. To raise awareness about international instruments and standards as well as best practices relating to transitional justice and combating impunity,
- d. To raise awareness of transitional justice mechanisms and lessons learned, to engage relevant stakeholders, including civil society and institutional actors in transitional justice discourse, and to mobilize the society’s action in this area,
- e. To facilitate the national consultations for the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms in close cooperation with other national and international stakeholders, and ensure participation of victims, and other vulnerable or marginalized groups, and make appropriate recommendations to ensure an open and transparent process,

- f. To engage in information gathering and documenting of human rights abuses, and cooperate with transitional justice mechanisms in investigation of human rights violations,
- g. To ensure preservation and protection of information on human rights abuses, including through appropriate archiving,
- h. To interact with and reinforce the justice mechanisms and ensure that cases of human rights violations are submitted to the justice system and adequately addressed,
- i. To cooperate in the design and, as appropriate, in implementation of transitional justice mechanisms, and to ensure the centrality of victims in such processes,
- j. To ensure that the establishment and operation of any transitional justice mechanism is in compliance with international human rights standards and practices,
- k. To ensure that the rights of those facing transitional justice mechanisms, including alleged perpetrators and victims, are respected,
- l. To promote provision of assistance to victims and witnesses participating to transitional justice processes, so they are informed of their rights and responsibilities and have access to medical and psychosocial care; and to promote provision of victims and witness protection;
- m. To monitor and report on the implementation of the recommendation of transitional justice mechanisms,
- n. To recommend to the relevant authorities legislative and administrative reforms to ensure their compliance with international standards, and to prevent recurrence of human rights abuses and to restore respect for the rule of law and trust in government institutions,
- o. To engage and interact with international and regional human rights mechanisms, including by submitting reports, and making statements, and following up of recommendations related to transitional justice and human rights in general,
- p. To participate in the development and revision of education programs to include aspects on culture of peace, conflicts prevention, tolerance and fight against discrimination and human rights.

### **Role of NHRIs**

- a. NHRIs play a vital role in reviewing and commenting on the human rights aspects of truth and justice commissions' legislation and in emphasizing the importance of adopting long term measures and policies to rectify inequity, injustice, inequality and insecurity so as to reduce the potential for terrorism and violent conflict.
- b. NHRIs should examine violations of human rights committed by the State during violent conflict and advocate against the establishment of national ad hoc tribunals and decision making bodies like truth and justice commissions. They should also examine infringements of rights by non-state actors in the context of violent conflict and identify potential areas of conflict in a timely and accurate manner.
- c. Subsequently, NHRIs should provide human rights and humanitarian law related advice to conflicting parties, or otherwise apply, facilitate and support the utilization of alternative as well as traditional methods of dispute resolution, including mediation.
- d. NHRIs and States should integrate these conflict resolution tools into plans, strategies and mechanisms for the peaceful and negotiated resolution of conflict. These strategies should include elements of truth and reconciliation processes and the role that NHRIs

- should play in this respect. Particular attention should be paid to the establishment of a victims fund and payment of appropriate compensation.
- e. NHRIs should act in a proactive way by placing human rights concerns in a broader societal context so as to focus not only on the manifestations of violent conflict but also on their underlying causes.

ANNEX: Rabat Declaration

SEVENTH CONFERENCE OF  
AFRICAN NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS  
Rabat, 3-5 November 2009

RABAT DECLARATION

*Participants at the Seventh Conference of African National Human Rights Institutions, convening in Rabat, Morocco, from 3 to 5 November 2009 under the theme: “Peace and Justice: Role of National Human Rights Institutions”, under the auspices of the Advisory Council for Human Rights of Morocco in cooperation with the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions and with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), and the Commonwealth Secretariat,*

*Acknowledging with appreciation the welcome and hospitality of the Government and people of Morocco in the hosting the Seventh Conference,*

*Expressing their warm gratitude to the Advisory Council for Human Rights of Morocco for its notable organization and hosting of the Conference,*

*Expressing their appreciation for the presence at the Conference of the Registrar of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, OHCHR, and the Chair of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions,*

*Noting with gratitude the continued support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) towards the strengthening of the Permanent Secretariat of the Network, and welcoming the assistance given by the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights in hosting it,*

*Reaffirming their commitment to the Kigali Declaration of 10 October 2007 and its attachment to the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace (1984), the [African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance](#) (2007), and various other international instruments concerning human rights to which their States have subscribed and ratified,*

*Recalling* the need for all the African national human rights institutions to function independently and in full conformity with the Paris Principles as adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993,

*Recalling also* that the effective promotion of and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms require that States ratify United Nations instruments concerning human rights, reinforce them and forward periodically, in conformity with these instruments, reports to the respective monitoring committees,

*Noting* that the Nairobi Declaration on the role of NHRIs in the Administration of Justice adopted by NHRIs in 2008 underlined the crucial role of NHRIs in relation to access to justice, the judiciary, law enforcement and correctional and detention facilities as part of their contribution to a peaceful and human rights respectful society,

*Convinced* that justice, peace and democracy are mutually reinforcing imperatives and that accountability is an important aspect for preventing future violations,

*Concerned* by the recurrence of armed conflict in many African countries, and the crackdowns on democracy resulting from the lack of accountability and existence of impunity which further represent threats against peace,

*Recognizing* the need for comprehensive approach when addressing the legacy of large scale abuses, comprising of investigations and prosecutions, truth-seeking processes, reparations programs, and vetting processes; and that any such combination must be in conformity with international legal standards and obligations, and take into account national context;

*Recognizing* the important role NHRIs, especially those in line with the Paris Principles, have been playing in transitional justice processes, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation, and considering that this role could be further strengthened,

*Recognizing* the need to address the root-causes of conflict, and to ensure the protection and fulfilment of all rights, including economic, social and cultural rights,

*Recognizing* the need to promote political and economic good governance as the basis of a peaceful democratic society,

*Aware* of all the above issues concerning human rights,

1. Resolved:

- a) To promote the inter-dependency of peace and justice,
- b) To promote and disseminate relevant international and regional human rights instruments and standards, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the [African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance](#); and to promote their wide implementation,

- c) To raise awareness about international instruments and standards as well as best practices relating to transitional justice and combating impunity,
- d) To raise awareness of transitional justice mechanisms and lessons learned, to engage relevant stakeholders, including civil society and institutional actors in transitional justice discourse, and to mobilize the society's action in this area,
- e) To facilitate the national consultations for the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms in close cooperation with other national and international stakeholders, and ensure participation of victims, and other vulnerable or marginalized groups, and make appropriate recommendations to ensure an open and transparent process,
- f) To engage in information gathering and documenting of human rights abuses, and cooperate with transitional justice mechanisms in investigation of human rights violations,
- g) To ensure preservation and protection of information on human rights abuses, including through appropriate archiving,
- h) To interact with and reinforce the justice mechanisms and ensure that cases of human rights violations are submitted to the justice system and adequately addressed,
- i) To cooperate in the design and, as appropriate, in implementation of transitional justice mechanisms, and to ensure the centrality of victims in such processes,
- j) To ensure that the establishment and operation of any transitional justice mechanism is in compliance with international human rights standards and practices,
- k) To ensure that the rights of those facing transitional justice mechanisms, including alleged perpetrators and victims, are respected,
- l) To promote provision of assistance to victims and witnesses participating to transitional justice processes, so they are informed of their rights and responsibilities and have access to medical and psychosocial care; and to promote provision of victims and witness protection;
- m) To monitor and report on the implementation of the recommendation of transitional justice mechanisms,
- n) To recommend to the relevant authorities legislative and administrative reforms to ensure their compliance with international standards, and to prevent recurrence of human rights abuses and to restore respect for the rule of law and trust in government institutions,
- o) To engage and interact with international and regional human rights mechanisms, including by submitting reports, and making statements, and following up of recommendations related to transitional justice and human rights in general,

- p) To participate in the development and revision of education programs to include aspects on culture of peace, conflicts prevention, tolerance and fight against discrimination and human rights.

Participants at the Conference:

2. *Call* for direct contributions from African NHRIs and continued assistance, substantive and financial, by international and regional intergovernmental organizations, including OHCHR and OIF, UNDP and other partners to the Permanent Secretariat of NHRIs in Nairobi, Kenya,

3. *Note* that a number of national human rights institutions in Africa have affiliate status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and call on others that have not attained such status to do so, and urges the African Commission to expedite the establishment of the Unit on NHRIs as recommended in the report on the role of NHRIs in strengthening the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights published in May 2009,

4. *Reaffirm* their commitment to cooperate with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in the area of the promotion, protection and enforcement of human rights,

5. *Resolve* to work with international and regional organizations, including the African Union through the Peace and Security Council, in the promotion, protection and enforcement of democracy, rule of law and human rights,

Agree to hold their next bi-annual conference in South Africa in 2011.

Adopted in Rabat , 5 November 2009.

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