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2024

General conversation on the state of anti-rights activities in the ACHPR

Venue: Thematic Room 4,
Sir Dawda Karaiba
Jawara Conference Hall
Date: 16 October, 2024
Time: 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Concept Note

Organisers:

Africa Civil Society Engagement (ACSE)

Background

Over the past decade, there has been a growing push of essentialist notions of culture, religion, and gender to either regress or hamper human rights progress as anti-rights actors exert their influence in multilateral spaces including at the African Commission. These actors, as shared in ACSE's first event on countering anti-rights at the African Commission at the 77th session, include extremist groups, government sponsored groups, religious organizations, and others with vested interests in conservatism at the African Commission and beyond. Anti-right actors exploit multilateral spaces to advance progressive agenda, perpetuate discrimination, suppress dissent, and to question the legitimacy of such spaces and a human rights framework. They use tactics that range from co-opting decision-making processes, to disseminating disinformation and inciting violence against marginalized communities. Anti-rights actors' influence extends beyond national borders, exacerbating regional tensions and impeding collective efforts to address systemic human rights violations.



Anti-rights actors and conservative states work within multilateral institutions to co-opt their processes and embed ultra-conservative norms and policies within these systems. Anti-rights discourse has gained ground in Europe with rollbacks of progressive laws in several European Union (EU) countries including the abortion ban in Poland; creating obstacles to same-sex couples in Hungary among others.¹ The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) International has been very vocal against the 2014 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) and a number of states have either announced their intentions to withdraw or have delayed ratifying it, echoing elements of the 'gender ideology' concept pushed by anti-rights actors. In the Americas the Coalition of Human Development (a Human Life international led group composed of 45 pro-life organizations throughout the Americas) holds membership at the Organization of American States (OAS) Assembly as a CSO. The group was successful in 'neutralizing multiple attempts to include abortion in as a right in policy resolutions most prominently, the Declaration on the Protection and Integration of Migrant and Refugee Children'.²

The entrenchment of anti-rights discourse within multilateral spaces calls into question the credibility and effectiveness of the African human rights mechanisms, which undermines general public trust and confidence and international institutions. Relevant stakeholders such as human rights CSOs, governmental bodies and regional blocs are either not fully informed on the anti-rights insidious creep into spaces such as the African Commission, or they are reluctant to confront the threats on human rights posed by anti-rights actors regionally and at the African Commission. The lack of adequate awareness and the reluctance or refusal to challenge anti-rights discourse emboldens the anti-rights actors and as a result, perpetuates regressive discourse on equality and non-discrimination/human rights.

Building upon the insights from our first exploratory event, this event aims to dive deeper into the strategies and the impact of anti-rights organizing in Africa and its effects on advocacy at the African Commission. We aim to foster a collective comprehensive understanding of the threats and the challenges posed by anti-rights actors and explore collaborative strategies to counter their influence within the African Commission.

1 <https://www.reneweuropengroup.eu/news/2024-04-26/renew-europe-sounds-the-alarm-on-the-growing-threats-from-anti-rights-movements>

2 <https://www.hli.org/press-releases/pro-life-advocates-block-dangers-oas/>



Event: This panel discussion shall enhance awareness and understanding of anti-rights organising and strategies in Africa among regional civil society actors. This session shall underscore the threats to the regional human rights mechanisms posed by anti-rights work and answer the following questions:

- **Who are the groups that applied for observer status en-masse? ‘**
- **What have they done in different countries on the continent?**
- **What have they done in international and other regional mechanisms?**

The session shall be moderated by Robert Amofo, Advocacy Manager at the African Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (Pan Africa ILGA). He served as the Country Director of Amnesty International Ghana from 2018 to 2021, where he led strategic campaigns, advocacy, and community engagement initiatives. Robert holds a Master of Philosophy in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa from the University of Pretoria, South Africa, a Bachelor of Arts in English and Information Studies from the University of Ghana, and a Certification in Face-to-Face Facilitation from the Learning and Performance Institute.

Objectives:

- Underscore the threats to the regional human rights mechanisms posed by anti-rights work and the importance for all CSOs working within the mechanisms to be aware of their strategies
- Monitor and document the activities of anti-rights actors at ACHPR sessions to expose and counter their tactics through strategic reporting.

Target audience:

CSOs active within the ACHPR, Policymakers working in the ACHPR, International organizations and other stakeholders committed to human rights promotion and protection at the ACHPR.

