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African Union: A new opportunity for the promotion and protection of citizens' rights

"As the African Union (AU) replaces the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in early July, it is essential for African leaders to recognize the centrality of human rights and the need to incorporate it in all the work of the organization," Amnesty International said today at the beginning of preparatory meetings in Pretoria, South Africa, for the launch of the AU.

"Human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights remain unrealised for the vast majority of Africans, despite the adoption of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in 1981, and its subsequent entry into force in 1986." Amnesty International said.

"The great challenge is to ensure that the African Union becomes a tool to deliver real change for ordinary Africans," the organization added.

In *African Union: A new opportunity for the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa*, Amnesty International examines the Constitutive Act of the AU in terms of the potential of the political and other organs of the Union to reinforce the promotion and protection of human rights in the continent.

The Act expresses the determination of member states to promote and protect human and peoples' rights, consolidate democratic institutions and culture and to ensure good governance and the rule of law.

The challenge now is for African governments to show that the Union can make a difference in the realization of peoples' and human rights in Africa, and not just a mere change of name of the OAU. "African leaders must take full responsibility for promoting and respecting human rights in the continent," Amnesty International said.

Other recommendations made by the organization include:

ensuring that human rights are given due consideration by all the organs of the Union;
addressing human rights as an integral component of finding a solution to conflict;
that all African governments ratify the Protocol Establishing the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights as well as accept individual and NGO access to the Court; and
that all African governments implement the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and ratify and implement other relevant human rights instruments.

"The fundamental principles enumerated in the Act must be translated into concrete action. It will only be through making human rights central to its work that the AU will be able to truly recommit itself to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Amnesty International added.

Background

The Constitutive Act of the African Union was adopted by the OAU on 11 July 2000 in Lome Togo, and entered into force on 26 May 2001 when Nigeria became the thirty-six OAU member state to deposit its instrument of ratification of the Constitutive Act. The Act requires ratifications by two-thirds of the member states of the OAU for the Union to be legally established. At the forthcoming summit of Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Durban South Africa, the African Union will formally replace the OAU, established in 1963.

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