



GOODWILL MESSAGE

**BY THE NETWORK OF AFRICAN NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS
(NANHRI)**

**AT THE OPENING OF THE 2025 JUDICIAL YEAR OF THE AFRICAN COURT ON
HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS**

DELIVERED BY DR. JOSEPH WHITTAL (NANHRI CHAIRPERSON)

February 2025

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1. His. Excellency José Maria Pereira Neves, President of the Republic of Cabo Verde and Guest of Honour together with your delegation
 2. Hon Lady Justice Imani D. Aboud, President of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
 3. Her Excellency Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission in virtual attendance
 4. Hon. Ambassador Shaib Mussa, representing Hon. Mahmoud Thabit Kombo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania
 5. Hon. Jumanne Sagini, Deputy Minister of Constitutional and Legal Affairs representing Hon. Dr. Damas D. Ndumbaro, Minister of Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania
 6. Your Lordships and Your Ladyships Chief Justices of African Union Member States
 7. Hon. Paul Christian Makonda, The Regional Commissioner of Arusha
 8. Mr. Marcel Akpovo, Regional Representative for East Africa and to the African Union, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Representing H.E. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
 9. Excellencies Members of the Permanent Representatives Committee to the African Union
 10. Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners accredited to the United Republic of Tanzania
 11. Hon. Justice Modibo Sacko, Vice President of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
 12. Hon. Judges of the African Court on Human and People's Rights
 13. Hon. Judges of African Union Member States' Jurisdictions
 14. Excellencies Heads of Organs and Institutions of the African Union here present and in virtual attendance
 15. Hon. Presidents of International and Regional Courts and Administrative Tribunals here present or in virtual attendance

16. Distinguished Members of Arusha Administration
17. Distinguished National Focal Points of the African Court from Members States of the African Union here present and those in virtual attendance
18. Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of National Human Rights Institutions of Members States of the African Union here present and those in virtual attendance
19. Hon. Registrars and Deputy Registrars of various jurisdictions here present and those in virtual attendance
20. Presidents and members of Bar Associations here present and those in virtual attendance
21. Distinguished Counsel on the Roster of the African Court and Members of the Legal Profession here present and those in virtual attendance
22. Members of Civil Society
23. Distinguished Members of the Academia
24. Members of the Media & Press Fraternity
25. Ladies and gentlemen

Honourable Justices and Distinguished Guests,

On behalf of the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), I am honoured to address this distinguished gathering at the opening of the 2025 Judicial Year of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Court). This occasion serves as an important moment for reflection on the African Court's critical role in advancing justice, accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights across our continent.

The theme of this year's judicial opening, "Advancing Justice through Reparations," is both timely and significant. It aligns with the African Union's broader commitment to "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations," underscoring the urgent need to redress historical injustices that continue to shape contemporary struggles for justice and equality. The legacies of colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, apartheid, and systemic racial discrimination remain deeply entrenched in African societies. Addressing these legacies requires recognition and concrete legal and institutional measures promoting redress and reconciliation.

Honourable Justices and Distinguished Guests,

The African Court has played an instrumental role in developing progressive jurisprudence on reparations, providing remedies to victims and reinforcing the principle of accountability. The African Court has set important precedents for strengthening human rights protection through its decisions. However, significant challenges remain,

including limited ratification of the African Court's Protocol, restricted access to the Court for individuals and civil society organizations (CSOs), and resource constraints. Addressing these barriers requires the collective commitment of all actors in the African human rights system.

Honourable Justices and Distinguished Guests,

Member States must accelerate the ratification of the Protocol establishing the African Court and deposit the Article 34(6) declaration under the Protocol to extend the right of direct access to individuals and CSOs. The African Court's effectiveness and credibility depend on a fully ratified and operational framework backed by strong political will. A truly independent and impactful Court requires the full engagement of African governments and every human rights stakeholder.

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) have a vital role to play in this regard. As bridges between governments and the people, NHRIs are well-positioned to advocate for ratification, promote awareness of the African Court's mandate, and support the implementation of its decisions at the national level. The partnership between NANHRI and the African Court continues to grow. Signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between our institutions marked a significant milestone in strengthening collaboration on capacity-building, information-sharing, and advocacy. This partnership reflects NANHRI's commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring that justice is accessible to all.

Honourable Justices and Distinguished Guests,

The African Court stands as a pillar of hope, offering redress to victims and reinforcing the values of justice and human dignity. The dedication of the African Court's judges and staff to upholding justice—often under challenging circumstances—deserves recognition and unwavering support. However, justice is not the responsibility of the African Court alone. It is a collective endeavour that requires the engagement of governments, NHRIs, CSOs, developmental partners and African Union institutions.

Honourable Justices and Distinguished Guests,

As we move forward, reparations must rectify past injustices and build a future grounded in equity, dignity, and shared humanity. On behalf of NANHRI, I reaffirm our commitment to supporting the African Court in fulfilling its mandate. We remain steadfast in our efforts to promote a human rights-centered approach to governance, ensuring that justice is not merely an aspiration but a lived reality for all Africans.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations.

I thank you.