

...56th Ordinary Session of African Commission of Human and Peoples' Rights in Gambia also voices concern about xenophobic attacks in South Africa

East African Legislative Assembly, Banjul, Gambia; April 25, 2015: The regional Assembly is keen to further legislate key bills and work closely with various organisations and institutions on matters pertaining to human rights, Speaker of EALA, Rt. Hon Daniel Kidega has said.

In remarks delivered on his behalf by EALA Member, Hon Jeremie Ngendakumana, at the on-going 56th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul, Gambia, the Assembly once again called for the extension of jurisdiction of the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) to deal with issues of human rights.

Hon Ngendakumana ascertained that it was vital for the region to focus on laws that facilitate and encourage social justice and guarantee peace and political stability while preventing conflicts.

"I can assure you that EALA is going to be more vigilant in this important area and shall constantly strive to issue a score-card on how the region is doing in terms of human rights issues," Hon Ngendakumana said.

The legislator cited some of the challenges generally faced in the region and continent as political violence and impunity especially during and after the period of elections, oppression of the media and civil society and the discrimination of women.

He informed delegates that the Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC underscores a strong commitment to the principles of democracy and good governance. "The question of human rights is also thus an important and fundamental concern in our integration process," Hon Ngendakumana said.

"It is also a basic requirement for the membership of the EAC," he added.

"As a region and continent, we must never let our human rights record slide back to the deplorable state since history is not on the side of governments that resist democracy and improvement of human rights," he said.

The EAC Partner States have in their national constitutions and laws fairly elaborate provisions incorporating principles of good governance that include provision for human rights. All Partner States now have National Human Rights Commissions that regularly consult at the regional level. EALA has on its part enacted the EAC Human and Peoples' Rights Bill, 2010, which is currently undergoing assent.

The 56th Ordinary Session which commenced on April 22nd, 2015 runs through to May 7th,

2015. It is focusing on the human rights situation in Africa and is considering state periodic reports from various countries. The Republics of Kenya, Uganda and Burundi are also in attendance.

On the Xenophobic attacks in South Africa, the Government of South Africa issued a strong statement condemning the act in the strongest terms possible. The government statement noted that swift action by security agencies had limited the fatalities to seven persons with President Jacob Zuma assigning security cluster ministers to put to an immediate end, the violence, and to provide assistance to those affected.

“Additional law enforcement officers have been mobilized from around the country and deployed to the affected areas to enforce the law and prevent further attacks,” a section of the statement said. At the opening of the Session earlier this week, the Attorney General and Minister for Justice in the Republic of the Gambia, Fatima Singateh, challenged the continent to address the myriad of challenges it faced.

The Minister cited conflicts and violence, terrorist attacks, socio-economic down-turns and high maternal and infant mortality rates, as areas that need immediate address.

“The Government of the Gambia would therefore like to reiterate its support and commitment to the African Union and the international community in its quest to end conflicts in Africa and beyond, and in particular in the fight against terrorism which has become a major concern adversely affecting the world,” Hon Singateh said.

The Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, Hon Sylvie Zainabo Kayitesi cited the attacks and the kidnap of school girls by the Boko Haram as a tragedy that befell the African continent in 2014. She stated that Ebola disease also continued to threaten the health, life and dignity of African people in many ways never imagined before.

Hon Kayitesi rooted for democratic and constitutional means of change in governments in the continent. The position of the African Union on unconstitutional changes of government is clear; they shall not be tolerated. In addition, the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials in some State parties is not only unjustifiable but also a violation of human rights including the right to life,” Hon Kayitesi stated.

On his part, the President of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Hon Justice Augustino Ramadhan, called on more African States to ratify the Protocol to the Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Establishment of the Arusha-based African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).

Since the adoption of the Protocol in 1998, only 28 out of 54 States have ratified it. Included herein are all the Partner States of the EAC. However only seven countries have deposited the declarations with the Court which allow individuals and Non Governmental Organisations to access the Court directly. The States are Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Rwanda, Malawi and the United Republic of Tanzania

-Ends-

For more information, contact:

Bob Odiko, Senior Public Relations Officer,
East African Legislative Assembly.

Tel: +255-27-2508240 Fax: +255-27-2503103, Cell: +255-787-870945 +254-733-718036.

Email: BOdiko@eachq.org, Web: <http://www.eala.org>