



STATEMENT TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

BY: THE STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FOR WOMEN IN THE HORN OF AFRICA (SIHA) NETWORK at the 50th Ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Banjul, The Gambia, October 2011

Honorable Chairperson, Commissioners, the Secretary of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and distinguished participants, we, XXX, on behalf of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa, wish to draw the attention of the Commission to the existence of pervasive ongoing violations against the rights of women and girls in the Horn of Africa.

Women across the Horn of Africa are still bending their heads and suffering from destitution, famine, the destruction of their livelihoods and the systemic violations of their rights. The women in the Horn are continuously carrying the burden of discriminatory aspects of traditional and customary laws and religious fundamentalism. Women's human identity and even existence is often compromised and threatened in countries around the Horn of Africa. The status of women in the Horn is in direct contrast to the articles, stipulations and principles of the Protocol of the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa and The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Somalia is currently witnessing mass human rights violations and requires the immediate attention of the African Commission to address the Islamic militia's continued oppression of Somali civilians particularly targeting women. This already dire situation has been made worse with the attack of famine on the region forcing a substantial increase in the number of displaced people and lives lost specially those of women and children.

Along the same line, the situation in Sudan has been characterized by the continuous eruption of conflicts especially in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states in addition to the ongoing conflict inside the Darfur region. On top of that, Sudan maintains the exercise of Public Order laws, which are containing a set of concepts, laws and mechanisms which are aimed at imposing particular values about the proper place of women within society and the role of the state in the regulation of personal "morality". This framework impacts all aspects of women's lives in Sudan, from choices relating to choice of dress and hair style; taking public transport or walking on the street; dancing; trading in the market, staying late at the office or attending demonstrations. Especially the most vulnerable women and girls, such as street vendors, women in the market and women living in the IDP camps remain the target of the public order police systematically for over 20 years now. These



women are often arrested, jailed for lengthy periods of time and sexually assaulted. In addition to this, one of the characteristics of the public order law is its vague wording whereby a person can be punished by a variety of criminal punishments including lashing, fine, imprisonment and confiscation of goods.

The operation of the public order regime inherently restricts the exercise of fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the African Charter by women and girls in Sudan.

Furthermore, the Sudanese regime is now using South Sudan's recent independence as a front for removing citizenship for those it sees as being undesirable and these processes are especially affecting poor women from conflict zones.

Then, July 2011, a new African country was called into existence. It carries great opportunities for the South Sudanese people to finally restore human rights inside the long suffering country. Therefore, the new state of South Sudan should be urged by the African Commission to sign and ratify the African Charter and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa.

There is an urgent need to address these violations of women's human rights in the Horn communities and to support the existing efforts to assist the victims of abuse and hold the responsible Governments and perpetrators accountable for these acts. The African Commission is a vital partner in this work.

Therefore we respectfully urge the Commission:

- To take into consideration our submission to the African Commission on the Public Order Regime in Sudan, address the brutality of the public order regime and urge the Sudanese government to ratify and domesticate the African protocol on the rights of women in Africa.
- To address the brutality of Sudan public order police and the recorded cases of violations of women and girls who have been victimized by the Sudan public order courts, by calling on Sudan to abolish the practice of lashing women.
- To hold the governments in the Horn of Africa responsible and accountable for the violations of women rights within their countries and are incompatible with the African Charter and the protocol on the rights of women in Africa.
- Request the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa to call special attention to the impact of the traditional and fundamentalist laws that are impacting on the rights of the women and girls in the Horn of Africa.