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**STATEMENT AT THE OPENING OF THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE OCTOBER 2022 NGOs FORUM BY NANHRI ED MR. GILBERT SEBIHOGO**

**Allow me to stand on protocols as set and say, All protocols dully observed**

**Honourable Delegates**,

It is a remarkable honour to address this convening of the NGOs forum on this momentous occasion as we mark the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (The African Commission). I congratulate the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies for the successful convention of this forum and express immense gratitude for the invitation extended to the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI). The theme on adopting a multi-dimensional approach in addressing conflict, crisis, injustice and inequality is very timely for the turbulent times we are facing as African peoples.

**Honourable Delegates**,

NANHRI is a regional umbrella body that brings together 46 African National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs).

Article 3 (g) of the Paris Principles recognizes the fundamental role played by non-governmental organizations in expanding the work of NHRIs. It mandates NHRIs to develop relations with NGOs devoted to promoting and protecting human rights, to economic and social development, to combating racism, and to protection of particularly vulnerable groups. Cooperation with NGOs is one of the key metrics against which compliance with the Paris Principles is assessed when NHRIs are undergoing review. NHRIs are indeed regarded as the bridge between NGOs and the state. It is why it is very important that we are together today to strategize how we can leverage cooperation between NHRIs and CSOs to alleviate the human rights situation in the continent. In the context of the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the African Commission we need to contextualize the areas of convergence between the affiliate status that NHRIs hold and the observer status that NGOs hold. The convergence could be attained, for instance, through convening a joint NHRIs and NGOs forum during one public ordinary session every year.

**Honourable Delegates,**

The thematic focus of the NGOs forum speaks to the strategic priorities of the work plans of NANHRI and NHRIs. We are appalled that as a continent we resolved to silence the guns in 2020 but barely two years later the guns are louder than ever before. The reverberating devastating effects of the coup d’états in Burkina Faso, Sudan, Mali, Guinea, and Chad are contrary to the aspirations of our illustrious Agenda 2063. Loss of life, displacement, and dispossession are exposing younger generations to sorrowful wounds we thought we had left in the past. The resurgence of coups points to a fundamental failure in the framing of our core instruments particularly the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and instruments governing democratisation in the Regional Economic Communities. We need to go back to the drawing board and make bold decisions to reverse the current tide of coups. As NHRIs we are prioritizing the design and roll out of Conflict Early Warning and Response mechanisms at the national and regional levels in collaboration with the African Union. We look forward to a continent where guns are not only silent but extinct. An ambitious aspiration, but an achievable one if we all join hands.

**Honourable Delegates**

One of the shining stars of the Continent during this bleak year has been the progress States have made in relation to the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). We can confidently say that it is one of the most successful flagship projects of Agenda 2063 as it is currently signed by 54 Member states and ratified by 43 member states. It is projected that it has the potential to lift millions of Africans out of extreme poverty. As NHRIs, we are keen to ensure that the vulnerable are not left behind in the implementation of the CFTA. We have, therefore, Commissioned a Baseline Assessment and Stakeholder Mapping of National Human Rights Institutions’ and Other Actors’ Involvement in African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) Processes; and a Guiding Framework on Mainstreaming Human Rights in CFTA processes. One of the findings of our Baseline Assessment is that NHRIs and CSOs have been largely excluded from CFTA negotiations and spaces. We intend to ensure that a human rights based approach is on the table in every room where the CFTA is a topic of discussion. We invite you to partner with us in this journey.

**Honourable Delegates**

We have taken a keen note and we look forward to your discussions on digital rights and security; climate change, Covid-19 and Gender. We will on-board the recommendations you will make at this forum into our work plans and hopefully reach out to you for collaboration on implementation. We will be paying keen attention to the panel discussion on democracy, rule of law, and issue of human rights defenders. The focus on the plight of rights defenders is of keen interest to us as we are working on the implementation of the Marrakech Declaration on “Expanding the civic space and promoting and protecting human rights defenders, with a specific focus on women”. Our doors are open to synergize our efforts in this area.

**Lastly Honourable Delegates,**

I am positive that deliberations at this forum will come up with concrete solutions on redressing the negatives while amplifying and replicating the positives as we fortify the progress made in promoting and protecting human rights in Africa during the 35th anniversary of establishment of our premier human rights body.

I thank you and I wish you impactful exchanges during this October 2022 NGOs Forum. I extend my invitation to you to attend the 5th NHRIs forum being convened on 19th-20th October 2022 in this same venue.