

Communiqué:

ISLA at the 85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

*Banjul, The Gambia
14–25 October 2025*

17 October 2025 Closed Strategy Session on Countering Anti- Rights Actors and Engagement in the African Human Rights System

The Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa (ISLA) convened a closed strategy session on countering anti-rights actors and engagement within the African human rights system. The session built on the momentum of the previous year's inaugural meeting, transitioning from diagnosis to coordinated action. Participants drawn from feminist, legal, and human-rights organisations interrogated the growing influence of anti-rights groups that have infiltrated

regional human-rights spaces through the appropriation of language such as 'family values', 'cultural authenticity', and 'religious integrity'. Through in-depth analysis, participants mapped the landscape of anti-rights actors operating across the African Union (AU) and African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) systems. The mapping revealed the activities of transnational networks alongside state-aligned delegations that oppose SRHR and SOGIESC protections. From a feminist lawyering lens, ISLA emphasised that anti-rights influence represents not only political opposition but a structural assault on the equality project, targeting the very legal norms that protect bodily autonomy and gender justice. The discussion underscored

the importance of counter-narratives grounded in decolonial, African feminist jurisprudence. The session concluded with commitments to develop a shared analytical framework for monitoring anti-rights discourse, strengthen coordination among progressive actors, and operationalise a working group to safeguard the normative integrity of Africa's human-rights architecture.

18 October 2025 Women's Platform Convening: Feminist Principles and Legal Analysis of the AU- CEVAWG



The African Civil Society Engagement (ACSE)'s Women's Platform convened under the theme 'Advancing Feminist Legal and Political Advocacy within the African Human Rights System'. The meeting gathered feminist advocates, scholars, and representatives of women's-rights organisations from across Africa to articulate shared feminist principles and sharpen collective engagement with the AU and ACHPR processes. The session opened with reflections on the evolving

role of feminist movements within AU reform processes and the significance of the newly adopted African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG). Participants collectively interrogated the Convention's drafting process, noting that it had largely excluded feminist actors and risked reinforcing the very hierarchies it sought to dismantle.

A feminist legal analysis presented during the convening deconstructed the Convention's silences on intersectionality, marital rape, and enforcement mechanisms. Participants underscored the need for a rights-based interpretation that reclaims CEVAWG as a living feminist instrument rather than a symbolic achievement. Parallel discussions finalised a draft set of Feminist Principles for Ethical Engagement with AU and ACHPR organs, grounded in care, transparency, solidarity, and accountability. These principles are envisioned as a reference framework for collective advocacy and movement coordination. Finally, a participatory mapping of anti-rights actors revealed the ways in which regressive ideologies are reshaping institutional agendas. Participants committed to strengthening solidarity, documenting anti-rights activity, and amplifying feminist voices in continental policymaking. The convening concluded with renewed commitment to

positioning the Women’s Platform as a recognised space for feminist reflection, advocacy, and transformation within the AU system.

19 October 2025 Litigants Group General Meeting



The Litigants group convened their general meeting, an annual gathering of civil-society litigators and advocates working to strengthen the effectiveness of the ACHPR’s communications procedure. The meeting served as a platform for exchanging updates on jurisprudence, procedural reforms, and the ongoing work of the Group’s specialised sub-committees, including the Arusha Initiative, Implementation Working Group, and Article 59 campaign. Discussions focused on the persistent procedural barriers that hinder the timely resolution of communications, the lack of transparency in case management, and the inconsistency of the Commission’s jurisprudence. Participants reflected on the need to build collective expertise on the Rules of Procedure and to promote a culture of openness and accountability

within the ACHPR Secretariat. The session also underscored the importance of cross-fertilisation between regional mechanisms to ensure coherence in African human-rights jurisprudence. The meeting concluded with a list of follow-up actions, including the development of shared advocacy tools, enhanced communication between litigants and the Commission, and the strengthening of the Litigants Group as a collaborative hub for legal practitioners advancing accountability and justice across Africa.

20 October 2025 Litigating Sexual and Gender Minority Rights before the African Human Rights System – From Strategy to Implementation



The SOGIE Working Group under the ACSE platform hosted a side event titled ‘Litigating Sexual and Gender Minority Rights before the African Human Rights System: From Strategy to Implementation’. The event marked a pivotal step in advancing a coordinated approach to regional litigation on

sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) rights Building on ISLA's previous strategy consultations, the side event unveiled a continental mapping of SOGIE-related litigation and introduced the concept of a centralised SOGIE legal research database. This tool will serve as a repository of jurisprudence, a platform for knowledge exchange, and a mechanism for coordinating legal strategies across regions. Panel discussions explored patterns of progressive and regressive jurisprudence before the African Commission, African Court, and ECOWAS Court. Participants highlighted challenges including procedural delays, state non-compliance, and political backlash, while underscoring the transformative potential of regional mechanisms when effectively leveraged. The event reaffirmed that strategic litigation must be anchored in movement-led processes, connecting courtroom victories to advocacy, narrative change, and social mobilisation. The Working Group committed to advancing key thematic priorities such as decriminalisation, gender recognition, access to healthcare, and protection from violence, ensuring that regional litigation remains responsive to the lived realities of sexual and gender minorities.

Conclusion

Across all engagements convened under the ACSE platform and Litigants group, ISLA and its partners reaffirmed their collective commitment to building a feminist, decolonial, and intersectional human-rights system in Africa. From mapping anti-rights actors to strengthening feminist analysis of AU instruments and consolidating SOGIE litigation strategies, these discussions represented a coordinated effort to transform advocacy into action. The 85th Ordinary Session underscored the urgency of solidarity, evidence-based advocacy, and principled engagement to ensure that Africa's regional human-rights institutions remain true to their protective mandates and reflective of the continent's plural realities.

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