

ISLA At The 89th Ordinary Session

COMMUNIQUE

DAKAR, SENEGAL | OCTOBER 2026

AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

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Introduction



The Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa (ISLA), together with its partners, convened and participated in a series of strategic engagements around the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in Dakar, Senegal from 7 – 13 October, 2026.



Our engagements focused on strengthening Africa's human rights architecture, protecting hard-won legal standards and responding to the growing influence of anti-rights actors seeking to use law, institutions and narratives around family, sovereignty and African values to restrict fundamental rights. Through consultations, dialogues and collective strategy discussions, ISLA worked with civil society organisations, feminist movements, litigants and regional partners to identify practical ways to strengthen accountability, defend existing protections and coordinate advocacy beyond Dakar.

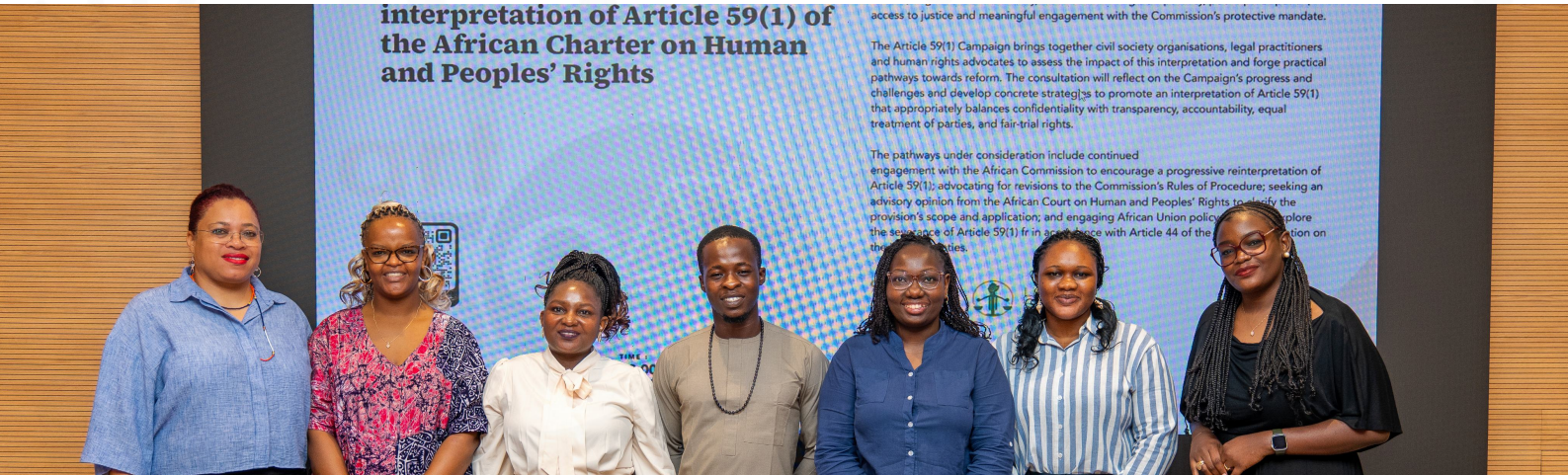


08 OCTOBER

Interrogating And Forging Pathways For A Progressive Interpretation Of Article 59(1) Of The African Charter On Human And Peoples' Rights

On 8 October, ISLA, together with the Article 59(1) Campaign and the Litigants Group, convened a Strategic Consultation on the interpretation of Article 59(1) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Participants examined the restrictive application of confidentiality within the ACHPR's communications procedure and its implications for transparency, procedural fairness and access to justice. While recognising the need to protect victims, witnesses andsensitive information, the consultation emphasised that confidentiality should not operate as a blanket restriction on access to information. Discussions identified several possible pathways for reform and their limitations, such ascontinuing the engagement with the ACHPR for progressive reinterpretation and revision of its Rules of Procedure. An advisory opinion from the African Court was also considered as a possible longer-term option. The consultation concluded with an agreement to consolidate the proposed pathways into legal briefs and an action-oriented strategy identifying priorities, responsibilities and timelines.

For More On The Article 59(1) Campaign, Visit
https://www.the-isla.org/article-591-campaign/



10 OCTOBER Member State Dialogue On The African Union Convention On Ending Violence Against Women And Girls

On 10 October, ISLA, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Fos Feminista and their partners under the Pause for Purpose Campaign convened a Member State Dialogue on the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG).

The dialogue examined whether the Convention, adopted in February 2025, strengthens the protections already established under the Maputo Protocol or risks weakening existing standards. Discussions drew on the Pause for Purpose legal analysis of CEVAWG, which identified procedural, structural, substantive and operational concerns. The dialogue also considered comparisons with national laws, policies and protection frameworks, the relationship between AU-CEVAWG and the Maputo Protocol, and whether Article 15's safeguard clause and Article 18's revision procedure can adequately address identified weaknesses. These questions informed discussion of what further national assessments and consultations Member States need before ratification.







For The Comparative Analysis, See
Maputo Protocol and AU-CEVAWG comparison

Read The Full Legal Analysis:
Pause for Purpose legal analysis.

Participants raised concerns about limited opportunities for meaningful civil society participation during the drafting process, as well as the Convention's reliance on broad and sometimes ambiguous language. Although AU-CEVAWG recognises emerging concerns such as femicide and violence in digital spaces, its provisions do not always establish sufficiently clear and enforceable state obligations. Particular attention was given to the absence of explicit substantive provisions addressing female genital mutilation, child marriage and conflict-related sexual violence, as well as weaknesses relating to non-discrimination, women human rights defenders, state responsibility and access to effective remedies.

Discussions also considered whether interpretation or revisions could adequately address these concerns, or whether substantive revision is necessary. Participants explored opportunities for national consultations, comparative legal assessments, parliamentary engagement and coordinated advocacy with Member States.

The Pause for Purpose Campaign reiterated its call for a pause in further ratifications, pending an independent, inclusive review and necessary revisions. The campaign is not opposed to stronger legal protections against violence. Rather, it seeks to ensure that any new regional instrument strengthens existing obligations and delivers meaningful protection and accountability for women and girls.

For More On The Pause For Purpose Campaign, Visit
https://aucevawg.org



11 OCTOBER Holding The Line: Safeguarding Africa's Human Rights Frameworks

On 11 October 2026, ISLA participated as a panelist in a side event organised by African Civil Society Engagement (ACSE). ISLA addressed the alarming rise of anti-rights lawfare across the continent, focusing specifically on the regressive Draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values.

During the panel, ISLA highlighted how anti-rights actors are increasingly weaponizing the language of culture, sovereignty, and 'African values' to infiltrate regional human rights institutions and dismantle hard-won protections for women. ISLA urged unified civil society action to defend the independence of the ACHPR and ensure the regional human rights framework remains a shield for all marginalised communities.





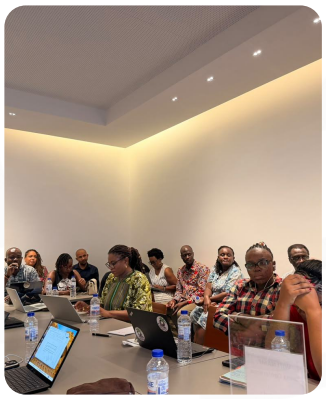


11 OCTOBER Litigants Group General Meeting

ISLA, as part of the Litigants Group participated in the Membership General Meeting, held on 11 October, provided an opportunity for litigants and civil society organisations to reflect on challenges within the ACHPR's communications procedure.
Discussions covered procedural delays, limited access to information and decisions, inconsistent practices and challenges with implementation. Participants explored opportunities for improved knowledge-sharing, greater coordination among litigants and collective engagement with the Commission to strengthen access to justice and institutional accountability.

The meeting also provided space to review ongoing communications, recent decisions and emerging jurisprudence, and to consider the work of the Group's Arusha Initiative, Article 59 Initiative and Implementation Working Group. Members discussed practical application of the Rules of Procedure, communication with the Commission and its Secretariat, and priorities for collective follow-up.







For More On The Litigants Group, Visit
https://www.the-isla.org/litigants-group-membership-form/

13 OCTOBER

40 Years Of The African Charter: Consolidating Civil Society Action To Defend Africa's Human Rights Architecture

On 13 October, ISLA joined CHEVS, MOLI, galck+ and Zamara Foundation in co-convening 40 Years of the African Charter: Consolidating Civil Society Action to Defend Africa's Human Rights Architecture. The convening aimed to consolidate existing movement knowledge, advocacy and legal strategies into coordinated action against efforts to use family, culture, religion and sovereignty to restrict rights.

Its focus encompassed resisting the proposed African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values, challenging AU-CEVAWG in its current form, and influencing the Draft Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

The strategic priorities included defining shared legal and policy objectives, allocating responsibilities through a Dakar action plan, and establishing sustained coordination beyond the session to defend Africa's human rights system.



14 OCTOBER Defending The Maputo Protocol And Advancing Reproductive Justice



On 14 October, ISLA participated in Akina Mama wa Afrika's side event, Defending the Maputo Protocol: Lifting Reservations, Protecting Bodily Autonomy, and Advancing Reproductive Justice in Africa. ISLA's contribution focused on emerging threats to the Protocol, including the institutional, legal and policy pathways and narratives used to weaken its protections, and the implications for gender and reproductive justice. The convening centred on advancing the withdrawal of reservations, particularly to Article 14, strengthening domestic implementation, and drawing lessons from reproductive rights reforms across Africa. It provided a space to strengthen collective advocacy among feminist movements, civil society, governments and regional human rights mechanisms to safeguard the Protocol's integrity and advance bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom.

11 - 15 OCTOBER Strengthening Feminist Litigation Across Francophone Africa

From 11 to 15 October, ISLA's Feminist Litigation Network in Francophone West Africa (FLN-FWA) engaged feminist lawyers, women's rights organisations and regional partners to strengthen collaboration and expand opportunities for strategic litigation.

The network established contacts with RFLD, RADDHO and the Association of Senegalese Women Lawyers, while also engaging Lawyers Without Borders Canada to explore future partnerships.

On 13 and 14 October, the FLN-FWA participated in the launch of the Community of Practice on Strategic Litigation in Francophone Africa, organised by the ODAS Centre and Libera. ISLA presented its approach to feminist strategic litigation and case development. The FLN-FWA committed to contributing to the Community's 12-month roadmap, particularly through its working group on case development.

The network also participated in the launch of PALU's practical guide on advocacy and litigation mechanisms in Africa.





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Beyond Dakar: Sustaining The Work

The engagements in Dakar reinforced the need for sustained, coordinated action to protect Africa's human rights architecture. ISLA and its partners will continue advancing the Article 59(1) Campaign, advocating for a pause and review of AU-CEVAWG, defending the independence of regional human rights mechanisms and strengthening collaboration among litigants, feminist legal networks and civil society movements.

These efforts will also focus on building collective strategies to challenge anti-rights lawfare, engage Member States and ensure that new regional standards strengthen, rather than diminish, existing protections.

Africa's human rights gains have been secured through decades of advocacy, litigation and collective struggle. Defending these gains requires continued vigilance, strong institutions and coordinated action.

ISLA remains committed to working with partners across the continent to advance a human rights system grounded in equality, dignity, accountability and justice for all.

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