

CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE FORUM ON THE PARTICIPATION OF NGOs IN THE 81ST ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

VENUE: International Conference Centre Banjul The Gambia

DATES: 13th – 15th October, 2024.

THEME: THE YEAR OF EDUCATION: *“Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa”*

Background and Justification:

Education in Africa has long been recognized as a critical factor for the continent's development, yet it remains under threat due to various conflicts, political instability, and systemic issues. The impact of these challenges has been severe, particularly in conflict-affected regions where attacks on schools, teachers, and students have escalated in recent years. This backdrop of insecurity undermines efforts to build resilient education systems, which are necessary for promoting peace, stability, and economic development across the continent.

Violence against educational institutions in Africa has surged, with a reported 20% increase in attacks in 2023¹. Nigeria and Sudan were among the hardest-hit countries, experiencing a combined 144 incidents in 2023, where armed groups targeted schools through drone strikes, raids, and other violent acts². In Nigeria, Boko Haram has continued its decade-long assault on education, particularly in the Lake Chad Basin, where abductions, looting, and arson have led to the closure of schools and the displacement of students³. The group's targeting of female students is especially egregious, as it seeks to prevent the education of women and girls in line with extremist ideologies.

Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have also been severely affected. In Burkina Faso, jihadist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and ISIS have conducted attacks that forced the closure of a quarter of the country's schools, affecting one million students as of 2023⁴. Similarly, in the DRC, escalating ethnic violence in the North Kivu and Ituri provinces led to the closure of over 2,100 schools in the 2022-2023 academic year, depriving 750,000 children of their education.

This widespread violence against education is part of a broader destabilizing effect that exacerbates already fragile states. The conflict in these regions is fueled by a complex mix of factors, including political coups, extremist insurgencies, poverty, and the failure of governments to provide security and basic services. These conditions create a vicious cycle where insecurity leads to school closures, which in turn heightens the vulnerability of young people to recruitment by armed groups. The continued displacement of populations,

¹ [Education in Africa: Violent attacks against schools rose 20% in 2023 | Save the Children International](#)

² As above

³ [Education Wars: The Destabilizing Effect of Violent Extremist Attacks on Schools in Africa - New Lines Institute](#)

⁴ As above

particularly in conflict zones, further disrupts education, leaving millions of children without access to learning ⁵⁶.

The NGOs Forum preceding the 81st Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) will serve as a continuation of the critical discussions initiated during the Forum preceding the 79th session held in May 2024. Both Forums are centered around the African Union's (AU) 2024 theme, "*The Year of Education: Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century - Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa.*" This consistent focus reflects the ongoing importance of addressing education in the broader context of human rights and development on the African continent.

Furthermore, the NGOs Forum preceding the 81st Ordinary Session will build upon the key deliberations and strategies discussed earlier in the year. It will assess progress and explore how recent developments, particularly ongoing human rights violations, conflict, and political instability, continue to impact education and human rights across Africa. As new violations and challenges have emerged throughout 2024, this Forum will provide an updated platform for NGOs, human rights defenders, and other stakeholders to revisit strategies, share current data, and propose actionable solutions to address these ongoing issues.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the NGOs Forum is mainly to foster closer collaboration between and among NGOs, the African Commission and other African human rights mechanisms, for the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa.

Additionally, Continuing the discussions from previous sessions allow for a sustained focus on key themes, including the protection of education in conflict zones, the impact of political instability on human rights, and the rights of vulnerable populations such as displaced persons and women. By maintaining this continuity, the Forum will ensure that deliberations remain relevant and responsive to the evolving human rights landscape in Africa, while driving forward the agenda of protecting and promoting education as a fundamental right.

THEMATIC FOCUS: Consequently, the Forum will also deliberate on the following sub-themes;

1. Building Resilient Education Systems in Conflict-Affected Areas

Education systems in conflict-affected areas that need to withstand the disruptions caused by ongoing violence and instability. This theme will explore strategies to protect education in conflict zones, ensuring that children continue to learn despite challenges.

2. Elections and Democratic Processes in Africa

Free and fair elections are critical to the functioning of democracy in Africa. REDHAC actively observed the electoral process in Congo. Additionally, REDHAC closely monitored the security situation involving the M23 and the Congolese government in the eastern regions of Ituri and North Kivu. These areas have been marked by widespread atrocities, human rights violations, and a significant number of internally displaced persons. According to UN

⁵ [Learning on the move: Resetting the agenda for education and learning in conflict-affected settings \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/learning-on-the-move-resetting-the-agenda-for-education-and-learning-in-conflict-affected-settings/)

⁶ [Education Wars: The Destabilizing Effect of Violent Extremist Attacks on Schools in Africa - New Lines Institute](#)

Migration, the number of internally displaced individuals is projected to approach one million, representing a 17% increase compared to 2022. On August 30, 2023, a demonstration was banned and violently suppressed by the Goma police, leading to 50 demonstrators killed, 75 injured, one police officer killed, and 168 people arrested.⁷

This theme will explore the role of elections in promoting political stability, the challenges of conducting elections in conflict-prone regions, and the importance of electoral reforms to strengthen democratic processes across the continent.

3. Human Rights Violations and Education: Addressing the Impact of Political Instability

Political instability remains a key factor undermining education in Africa. Military coups, weak governance, and ethnic conflicts are destabilizing education systems, and depriving children of their right to education. Tunisian authorities are still violating human rights norms and principles which are documented in credible reports such as torture by government agents; arbitrary arrests or detentions; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including arrests or prosecutions of journalists and censorship.⁸ This theme will focus on how political instability and human rights violations intersect to create barriers to education, and how these challenges can be addressed through reforms and international cooperation.

4. Migration and Vulnerable Groups: Ensuring Inclusion and Access to Rights

Migration driven by conflict, poverty, and climate change continues to affect millions of people across Africa. This theme will be centered on the unique challenges faced by vulnerable groups, including women, children, and people with disabilities, in accessing education, employment, and basic services. Inclusive policies are necessary to ensure that these groups are not left behind in the development process

5. Civic Engagement and Freedom of Assembly in the Educational Context

Civic engagement and the right to freedom of assembly are critical to advancing educational rights in Africa. This theme will explore how civil society, students, and educators can play a role in advocating for reforms, even in repressive political environments. The theme links directly to the larger issue of democratic governance and the need for a strong civil society to protect human rights, including the right to education.

6. Conflicts in Africa: Addressing the Root Causes

Conflicts remain persistent challenges to peace and development across Africa. This theme will emphasize on addressing the underlying causes of conflict, including ethnic tensions, competition for resources, and weak governance. By tackling these root causes, African countries can work towards building more stable and peaceful societies.

7. Protection of Human Rights Defenders in the Education Sector

Human rights defenders working in the education sector often face significant risks, especially in regions where education is under attack by extremist groups or where governments are hostile to civil society activism. This theme will bring attention to the need for stronger protection mechanisms for those defending educational rights and the critical role they play in ensuring that all children have access to education.

⁷ REPORT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK IN CENTRAL AFRICA (REDHAC)

⁸ Human rights Updates in North Africa CIDH Africa

8. Gender-Based Violence and Education: Ensuring Safe Spaces for Girls

Gender-based violence remains a significant barrier to education for girls in many parts of Africa, particularly in conflict zones where schools are targeted by extremist groups. The Gambia has registered 575 cases of Gender-Based Violence in 2023 with one in every four women having experienced sexual or physical violence at some point in her life, aligning unfortunately with the global rate.⁹ In Mali, more than 35% of Malian women experience sexual violence at least once in their lives, but the actual figures are much higher, as many of the victims often do not have the opportunity to seek help.¹⁰ According to Senegal's 2017 Demographic and Health Survey, 27% of women aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical violence from age 15 onwards – in 55% of cases, at the hands of a husband or partner. The survey showed gender-based violence to be the most widespread, yet least visible human rights violation: 68% of violence survivors aged 15 to 49 never spoke of it nor sought help. This theme will concentrate on the importance of creating safe educational spaces for girls and addressing the broader impact of gender-based violence on their educational outcomes.¹¹

9. Unconstitutional Changes of Government: Threats to Democracy and Stability in Africa

Unconstitutional changes of government, such as military coups, have become more frequent in Africa, posing serious threats to democracy and stability. This theme will focus on the implications of these power grabs for governance and development, and explore strategies to promote democratic resilience across the continent.

10. Displacement and Education: Addressing the Needs of Forcibly Displaced Children

Forced displacement due to conflict, violence, and environmental crises has created an education crisis for millions of children across Africa. This theme will explore the challenges of providing education to displaced populations and propose solutions to ensure that these children are not left behind.

11. Countering Violent Extremism through Education

Education is a powerful tool for preventing violent extremism by addressing the root causes, such as poverty, lack of opportunity, and marginalization. This theme will be centered on the role of education in countering extremist narratives and promoting peacebuilding in fragile states.

12. Digital Learning and the Future of Education in Africa

Digital learning offers significant potential for increasing access to education in Africa, particularly in regions where traditional education systems have been disrupted by conflict, displacement, or economic barriers. This theme will bring to light how technology can bridge the gap in education access and equip African students with 21st-century skills, ensuring they are prepared for the future.

PROPOSED TOPICS AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS

- **Education in Crisis: Protecting Learning in Conflict Zones:** This discussion will tackle the complex challenges of delivering education in conflict-affected regions like the Sahel, Central Africa, and the Horn of Africa. Panelists will examine how extremist activities, political instability, and external interventions have caused widespread school closures, disrupting the education of millions of children.

⁹ [UNFPA reports 575 cases of gender-based violence in 2023 - The Point](#)

¹⁰ [FES-PSCC-Brochure-VBG-No42-A4-VA-04.pdf](#)

¹¹ [Fighting gender-based violence at the grassroots in Senegal | WHO | Regional Office for Africa](#)

The conversation will centre on strategies for maintaining educational continuity in these areas and the significance of international commitments to safeguarding education.

- **No One Left Behind: Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Migrants in Africa's Development Agenda:**

Addressing the unique challenges faced by vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and people with disabilities, in the context of migration, this discussion will highlight how to ensure these populations have access to education, healthcare, and other basic rights. The importance of inclusive policies that promote protection and integration will be emphasized.

- **The Rise of Coups: Unconstitutional Changes of Government and Their Impact on Democracy and Development in Africa; commemorating International Democracy Day.**

Examining the recent surge in military coups and unconstitutional government changes across Africa, this session will focus on their impact on democratic governance, human rights, and regional stability. Participants will discuss strategies to strengthen democratic resilience and uphold the rule of law.

- **Human Rights Defenders and the Fight for Educational Rights:**

Advocating for educational rights can come with significant risks, especially for human rights defenders facing threats and violence. This panel will examine the dangers these defenders encounter and propose strategies to ensure their safety, while discussing the legal frameworks available to support their protection in the education sector.

- **Breaking the Cycle: Addressing Ethnic Tensions, Resource Competition, and Governance Failures to Build Sustainable Peace in Africa; Crises in Sudan**

Exploring the root causes of conflict, such as ethnic divisions, resource competition, and governance failures, this panel will analyze recent conflicts in the Sahel, Tigray, and the Horn of Africa. The conversation will focus on strategies for conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and the role of inclusive political processes and international partnerships in supporting these efforts.

- **Education Under Attack: The Gendered Impact of Violence on Girls' Education:**

Focusing on the specific challenges girls face in accessing education in conflict and post-conflict settings, this session will address the intersection of gender-based violence and education. Panelists will explore recent incidents, such as Boko Haram's continued targeting of girls' schools, and discuss strategies for protecting girls' right to education through community-based mechanisms and international advocacy.

- **Leveraging Technology to Build 21st Century Skills:**

This conversation will dwell on how digital learning can bridge educational gaps in Africa, particularly in conflict-affected and rural areas. The panelists will discuss the need for investments in digital infrastructure, teacher training, and equitable access to technology to ensure that digital learning supports the development of 21st-century skills across the continent.

- **Learning on the Move: Providing Education for Displaced Populations:**

Addressing the educational needs of forcibly displaced children in regions like the Sahel, East Africa, and the Horn of Africa, this discussion will cover the challenges of delivering education in displacement settings. The innovative approaches for ensuring displaced children receive quality education, as well as the importance of data collection to track educational progress, will be central to the conversation.

- **Ensuring Free and Fair Elections in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for Strengthening Democratic Processes; Peace and Security on the Sahel**

This discussion will focus on the critical role of elections in promoting democracy

and political stability in Africa. Panelists will examine the challenges of holding elections in conflict-prone areas, the importance of electoral reforms, and the role of monitoring and civic engagement in ensuring that elections are free and fair.

- **The Role of Education in Countering Extremism and Promoting Peace:** Education's role in preventing violent extremism, particularly in areas affected by groups like Boko Haram and al-Qaeda-affiliated militants, will be the focus. This discussion will highlight educational initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying social and economic drivers of extremism and showcase successful programs that foster peacebuilding.
- **Safeguarding Civil Liberties: Addressing the Challenges of Freedom of Assembly, Expression and Movement:** According to CIVICUS, more than 100 countries face severe restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression, with increasing crackdowns on peaceful protests. In 2022 alone, nearly 400 cases of suppression of protests were documented, with Africa witnessing the highest levels of repression. The panel will delve into how these restrictions, whether through government policy or conflict, create conditions that facilitate human rights abuses and violations.
- **Addressing Human Trafficking in Africa: Challenges, Solutions, and Regional Cooperation;** According to the UNODC, an estimated 24.9 million people are trapped in forced labour and human trafficking globally, with women and children being the most vulnerable. Vulnerable populations, as well as migrants and refugees, often facing barriers to movement, making them easier targets for traffickers. The number of identified victims increased by 20% from 2020 to 2022. This panel will explore the specific dynamics of human trafficking within the African context, focusing on regional challenges, effective interventions, and the importance of cooperation among governments, NGOs, and international organizations.

Expected Outcomes:

- Concrete recommendations on protecting and promoting education in conflict-affected and unstable regions.
- Enhanced collaboration between NGOs, human rights defenders, and the ACHPR in advocating for resilient education systems.
- Increased awareness of the intersections between education and human rights in Africa.
- Report on the special interest groups. –
- Adopting Recommendations and resolutions where necessary to highlight them at the opening of the 81st Ordinary Session of the ACHPR
- Report of the NGOs Forum

Date and Venue:

The NGOs Forum preceding the 81st Ordinary Session of the ACHPR. is scheduled to take place from 13th to 15th October 2024 in Banjul, The Gambia.

Languages: TBC

Target Audience:

- African and International NGOs

- Human Rights Defenders
- Policymakers and Government Officials
- Regional and International Organizations
- Academia and Researchers
- Civil Society Organizations
- Media