



WELCOME REMARKS BY MERCY LARBI, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF CHRAJ, AT OPENING OF A 2-DAY WORKSHOP ON FOSTERING COLLABORATION BETWEEN NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTION(NHRI) AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) IN AFRICA ON 5TH DECEMBER 2022 AT MARRIOTT HOTEL ACCRA.

Executive Director of NANHRI - Mr. Gilbert Sebihogo,

The Head of Africa HRDs - Dr Hassan Shire,

MR Joseph Whittal Commissioner for CHRAJ and Vice Chair of NANHRI,

Madam Esther Tawiah of the Gender Advocacy Centre

Distinguished Guest from National Human Rights Institutions,

Distinguished Guest from Civil Society Organizations here present,

Special invited guest.

Friends from the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you on behalf of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) to Accra, Ghana for this august workshop that seeks to foster collaboration between National Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society Organizations in Africa.

NHRIs are state institutions mandated to promote and protect fundamental rights of all persons in their respective countries and are

fundamental part of the human rights system in Africa. NHRIs contribute immensely to the effectiveness, relevance and credibility of the promotion and protection of human rights, through increasing public knowledge and awareness of human rights, monitoring, and investigating human rights abuses and consistently advocating for government to respect ratified international, regional, and national human rights instruments.

NHRIs recognises the key role Civil Society organizations play in the execution of this mandate and considers their role as very vital for effective results. The Paris Summit Declaration and its Plan of Action and the Marrakeck Declaration which was adopted during the 13th Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in October 2018, call for NHRIs to develop relations with organizations dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Through the decades, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) have emerged who champion the rights of others to exercise their rights and speak up where the State violates or fails to protect rights. These are individuals who work alone or with others to promote and protect human rights.

Due to the work that they do, HRDs are often subjected to harassment, intimidation and violence perpetrated by both State and non-State actors with competing interests to the rights defended by the HRDs. They are also often subjected to arbitrary arrests and detentions, politically motivated trials, and other violations of their rights, including the right to privacy. Some have even been subjected to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) face the same challenges, but also experience sexual, religious, cultural, and other attacks based on their gender.

Therefore, there is a need to foster dialogue between NHRIs and CSOs to develop concrete and practical measures for NHRIs to contribute to the protection of human rights defenders (HRD) and enabling environment that allows civil society to thrive. NHRIs are supposed to be bridge-builders between the CSOs and the state, and a such the two ought to collaborate on a mutual beneficial partnership.

NHRIs have set up formal and informal working relationships with CSOs, which serve to provide a more enabling environment for HRDs by providing solidarity and support for their work, platforms for the exchange of information, and facilitating response to attacks against HRDs.

I must say that CHRAJ has a good relationship with CSOs in Ghana. The Commission established the Ghana Human Rights NGOs Forum (GHRNF) since 1998 in the fulfilment of the task of promoting awareness of human rights and also in furtherance of the conclusion reached at the UN conference on human rights held in Vienna in 1993, which stressed the importance of continued dialogue and cooperation between government and non-governmental organizations. The resolution also called on National Human Rights institutions (NHRIs) to facilitate the formation of a coordinating network between them and the human rights NGOs.

Ghana Human Right NGOs Forum (GHRNF), popularly known as the **NGOs Forum**, is a platform for Human Rights NGOs in Ghana. Member NGOs work in thematic areas including health, women, children, prisoners, schools, sanitation, extractive business, environment, and persons with disability, among others. It is a framework for consultation, sharing experiences, good practices and conducting solidarity-based advocacy to uphold the human rights of all persons in Ghana and ensure a society free from human rights abuses.

The CHRAJ has mandate to investigate violation of fundamental rights of all persons including HRDs and take appropriate action to call for remedying, correction, and reversal of instances through such means as are fair, proper, and effective. Nevertheless, this workshop will open avenue for CHRAJ to learn new ways and deepen the existing collaboration between it and CSOs.

As you are aware, the purpose of this workshop is to foster collaboration between NHRIs and CSOs in Africa. This makes this two-day workshop very important and I have no doubt we would take this workshop seriously and learn new ways of dealing with numerous human rights challenges confronting us as Africans including protecting Human Rights Defenders.

The recognition at international and regional levels that HRDs work is attended by reprisals and high-handed attacks by governments and others and so the need to put in place legal frameworks for their protection including the UN Declaration on HRD; the African Commission Rapporteur mandate on HRDs and reprisals; the GANHRI Marrakesh Declaration on HRDs etc are worthy commendable.

This is the normative basis for the collaboration in the protection of HRDs and Civic Space by NHRIs and CSOs

The bridging role of NHRIs between governments and CSOs coupled with their independence and powers of investigation into all manner of issues including reprisals against HRDs make NHRIs natural Allies of CSOs and therefore calls for a road map of collaboration which has indeed been there between NHRIs and CSOs but need to be discussed and effective strategies and programs put in place to achieve desired goals.

I hope when this is done, the collaboration between NHRI CSOs and HRD would significantly contribute to promoting, protecting, and preventing human rights violations in Africa.

Once again you are welcome to Ghana. Thank you very much for choosing Ghana for this all-important workshop and I wish you successful deliberation.

Thank you for your attention.