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To the attn. of:

African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) leaders

17 November 2025

Dear African and European leaders,

EU-AU SUMMIT MUST RISE TO CHALLENGES ON HUMAN RIGHTS

As the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) meet for a summit on 24-25 November in Luanda, Angola, both institutions are confronted with burgeoning conflicts and crises, rising authoritarian practices and the concomitant closure of civic space, and mounting attacks on the international human rights system, in their two regions and worldwide. As the EU and AU mark 25 years of partnership, Amnesty International urges you to fully seize the opportunity of the forthcoming summit to deliver on shared human rights commitments in practice.

The AU and EU must rise to ongoing challenges of responding to conflict and crisis, promoting and protecting human rights defenders (HRDs) and activists, civil society and their important work, upholding the rights of refugees and migrants, championing justice and accountability for violations and defending the international human rights system together with its crucial norms and safeguards that protect people on both continents.

In meetings leading up to this summit¹, both sides have publicly affirmed their shared commitment to delivering on human rights; supporting just, comprehensive and lasting peace in conflicts worldwide and addressing root causes of conflict and crisis, including human rights violations; promoting international humanitarian and human rights law; upholding the dignity, safety and human rights of all migrants, regardless of status; and protecting and enabling civic space, including the work of human rights defenders.

Together, at this quarter century of their partnership, the EU and AU and their member states must remain proactive and ambitious in delivering on their shared human rights commitments, championing hard-won international human rights gains and working together toward principled positions and consistent action.

Civil society and human rights defenders

Both AU and EU states remain challenged to effectively protect and support human rights defenders and civil society and advance their important work. Civic space - as an intersection of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly - remains under threat, as governments in both regions continue to restrict or close down civil society space, including with repressive legislation and restrictions on non-governmental organizations, media and peaceful protesters.

In a [concerning trend across Europe](#), human rights violations have increased as EU member states demonstrate their diminishing respect for the rule of law in policy and practice. Human rights defenders and civil society organisations have faced increasing threats from smear campaigns. Depending on the country and varying over time, [LGBTIQ+ rights defenders](#), [those supporting refugees and migrants](#), [anti-racism activists](#) and [defenders acting in support of Palestinians' human rights and climate justice](#) are among those most targeted.

¹ AU and EU officials met for a [Ministerial meeting](#) on 21 May 2025, a [human rights dialogue](#) on 7 October 2025 and a [meeting](#) between the EU Political and Security Committee and the AU Peace and Security Council on 8-9 October 2025.

In Africa, civic space has been significantly eroded in countries led by the military after coups, including in [Burkina Faso](#), [Guinea](#), [Mali](#), [Niger](#) and where political parties and many civil society organizations have been suspended and demonstrations banned, while critical voices face arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances. Civic space has also come under immense pressure in countries where elections have been recently held or are expected in the coming months. In Mozambique, a deadly [protest crackdown](#) following the October 2024 election reportedly resulted in more than 300 deaths and more than 3000 injured. In [Tanzania](#), following the October 29 general elections, security forces used excessive force to suppress and disperse election-related protests, resulting in deaths and injuries of protesters. Similar patterns of violations have been reported before, during and after the recent elections in [Cameroon](#) and [Cote d'Ivoire](#). Meanwhile, repression is on the rise in [Uganda](#) as the country gears up for general elections in January 2026. Across North Africa, authorities have used [unlawful force](#) and mass arbitrary arrests to suppress peaceful protest or have increasingly cracked down on [civil society](#) and [peaceful dissent](#).

Recommendations:

- Adopt an ambitious approach at the highest level, of unequivocal promotion and protection of human rights defenders and civil society on both continents, affirming the importance of their work and striving to address their concerns in AU, EU and joint decision-making that concerns them.
- Release all people arbitrarily detained and/or forcibly disappeared for peacefully exercising their human rights.
- Act to end all attacks on HRDs and repressive laws or tactics designed to silence peaceful dissent, to dismantle independent civil society and/or to curtail the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including threats, arrest and judicial harassment.
- Urgently act to ensure that human rights defenders and civil society can carry out their important work safely and without any fear of reprisals.
- Redouble efforts to improve access for rights defenders and civil society to regional human rights mechanisms, particularly the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- Establish structured, coordinated, holistic and adequately resourced systems to ensure the safety, well-being and operational capacity of civil society actors and rights defenders on both continents, including the [development of a protection mechanism for human rights defenders within the EU](#). Such a holistic protection ecosystem must strengthen institutional protection duties across governance levels and enhance civil society resilience and solidarity mechanisms.
- Use all bilateral, multilateral and regional platforms at the disposal of the AU and EU to urge member states to respect, protect and facilitate the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and stop the unlawful use of force to police peaceful assemblies.

Conflicts and crises

Today, in Europe, Africa and beyond, proliferating armed conflicts are devastating the lives of millions of people and exposing civilians to crimes under international law, including [war crimes and possible crimes against humanity](#) in Sudan, [war crimes and crimes against humanity](#) in Ukraine and the ongoing [genocide](#) against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip.

Crimes under international law and other human rights violations have had far-reaching impact on the civilian populations across Africa, including in [Burkina Faso](#), [Central African Republic](#), the [Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#), [Mali](#) and [Niger](#), and [South Sudan](#).

In responding to conflicts and crises, the AU and EU and their member states must remain proactive and ambitious in their defence of international human rights standards and the broader international human rights system. Rather than retreating or lowering ambitions, they should work together toward principled positions and consistent action.

Recommendations:

- Together, move beyond declarations and denunciations to apply direct, consistent pressure on all parties to armed conflicts responsible for crimes under international law and other violations of international humanitarian or human rights law, as well as states that directly or indirectly support these states or armed groups perpetrating violations.
- Jointly champion human rights in conflicts and crises in Europe, Africa and worldwide, prioritizing the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, accountability for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and the promotion of the work of HRDs and civil society in these contexts.

Rights of refugees and migrants

The AU-EU summit comes at a time when some governments are adopting increasingly restrictive and punitive asylum and migration policies, with devastating consequences for those concerned. Well-managed migration and mobility policies based on human rights and the rule of law have the potential to ensure inclusive growth, sustainable development and advance strategic partnerships within and between countries of origin, transit and destination.

Refugees and migrants face serious human rights abuses as African governments systematically dismantle protections. In [Libya](#), authorities, militias and armed groups have long subjected refugees and migrants - particularly those of sub-Saharan African descent – to unlawful killings, torture, forced labor, rape and sexual violence as well as prolonged arbitrary detention. The EU has been [complicit](#) in these horrific human rights violations through its support to Libyan authorities and militias. In [Tunisia](#), the dismantling of protections and asylum is accompanied by structural racial exclusion, as collective expulsions of Black migrants and refugees to remote desert or border areas—including Libya and Algeria—follow racially targeted arrests or reckless maritime interceptions by EU-backed Tunisian coastguards. In [Egypt](#), security forces, including EU-funded border guards, have arrested Sudanese refugees over irregular entry or stay, detained them in harsh conditions, and forcibly returned them to Sudan without access to asylum procedures. At the same time, [Eswatini](#) and [South Sudan](#) have reportedly entered into secret agreements with the United States, resulting in migrants being unlawfully deported from the U.S. and detained in centers in these countries without due process or access to legal representation.

In Europe, several countries have recently introduced legislation in violation of EU and international law or abused legislative powers to suspend access to asylum, as in the case of [Greece](#) or [Poland](#), process certain asylum applications or detain people facing return decisions extraterritorially, as in the case of [Italy](#), or to authorize unlawful forced returns (so-called pushbacks) at borders, such as [Finland](#), [Lithuania](#), and [Latvia](#). In all these cases, EU institutions have been unwilling to employ the tools at their disposal to ensure respect for EU and international law by member states. In addition, Amnesty International has long denounced the unlawful forced returns of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants at Europe's borders, as well as the use of torture and other ill-treatment against them, in violation of international and EU law. Since 2021, Amnesty International has documented these practices in Greece, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In 2024, [reports](#) of summary forced returns of refugees and migrants were also raised in relation to Cyprus, Serbia, Croatia and Bulgaria.

In Europe, the [prevailing approach to external migration policies](#) centres on the narrow objective of countering irregular border crossings and “externalising” responsibility for border management and refugee protection to states outside the EU. This reductive focus has hampered capacity to cooperate towards legal, safe and regular mobility and a fairer distribution of global responsibility for offering protection. This approach has, moreover, generally been implemented through migration partnerships that lack an adequate focus on human rights and independent monitoring, or evade public, parliamentary and judicial oversight.

Refugee protection and the expansion of legal, safe pathways, by contrast, typically represent a secondary or minimal part of this cooperation, despite global needs remaining high. This approach undermines the international refugee protection system, with governments increasingly shifting rather than sharing responsibility for upholding the right to asylum worldwide.

Recommendations:

- Respect the principle of *non-refoulement*, show leadership in upholding the right to asylum and the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants, and abandon policies and practices that restrict access to protection and advance the externalisation of asylum and migration policies.
- Pro-actively combat racism and xenophobia and guarantee all internationally recognized rights to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, in policy and in practice.
- Protect rights in migration-related cooperation – building in strong human rights protection mechanisms, monitoring and conditions for all financial, technical or practical support.
- Commit to global responsibility-sharing and to investing in legal, safe and regular migration pathways, including refugee resettlement, humanitarian admissions, and employment, study, or family reunification pathways.
- Ensure accountability for human rights violations in the context of migration management, wherever they have taken place.

Justice and accountability

Growing attacks on the international justice system, in particular the International Criminal Court (ICC), have compounded the challenges facing the international human rights system. These attacks are an affront to all victims and survivors who look to the ICC for truth, justice and reparations. In recent years, several states – including EU member states – [have failed to comply with ICC arrest warrants](#), issued [statements](#) and/or taken actions signaling their [intention not to cooperate with the Court and engaged in high level meetings](#) with individuals subject to ICC arrest. Both [African Union](#) and [European Union](#) member states have announced their withdrawal from the Rome Statute, in a serious backwards step in the global fight against impunity. All these actions, along with the stark differences in states' support for international justice from one country situation to another, erode not only the EU's and AU's credibility as key actors in the fight against impunity, but also the integrity of the entire international criminal justice system.

Recommendations:

- Support international justice and the fight against impunity for crimes under international law, regardless of where they occur, by upholding international justice in a consistent manner. This includes supporting the work of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the ICC, as well as United Nations (UN) and other international accountability mechanisms, without fear or favour.
- Take strong and decisive action to defend the ICC's independence and preserve its integrity from political interference, using all opportunities to publicly express full and unconditional support to the ICC as a cornerstone of the international criminal justice architecture and the only permanent international court with a mandate to investigate and prosecute individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. In parallel, the AU and EU should commit to full cooperation with the Court across all situations, including taking decisive action to protect the Court, its staff and UN mandate holders from any sanctions and other threats.
- Take an unequivocal, joint public stance regretting the withdrawals of EU and AU member states from the Rome Statute and calling on the concerned member states to urgently reconsider their stated decisions to withdraw from the Rome Statute.
- Support the fight against impunity for crimes under international law led by African courts and other accountability mechanisms, including supporting the work of the Fact-Finding Mission of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic, the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, as well as AU and other domestic or regional accountability mechanisms, without fear or favour.

Defending the international human rights system

The United Nations human rights system and its mechanisms play a crucial role in both preventing and responding to today's growing threats and challenges to human rights. As human rights crises multiply and deepen across the globe, this system provides essential scrutiny over serious human rights violations and crimes under international law. It serves as a critical safeguard against impunity, injustice and mounting authoritarian practices, while offering the strongest available guarantee for the protection of human rights, global stability and sustainable development.

Yet today, unprecedented pressures are underway to challenge the universality of human rights – aiming to recast the international system or even to dismantle it entirely. Indeed, the UN's 80th anniversary takes place as the proliferation of armed conflicts continues to devastate the lives of millions of people and expose civilians to some of the most egregious crimes under international law. Amid these developments, the United Nations human rights system faces increasing polarization, a financial and liquidity crisis, increasing state pushback against agreed human rights standards and attacks on the international criminal justice architecture.

Recommendations:

- Jointly show leadership in defending international human rights standards and the international human rights system, remaining steadfast in affirming all rights and their universality and indivisibility, including in the joint communiqué at the close of this summit.
- Firmly defend against efforts to roll back established human rights standards, particularly with regard to women's human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexual orientation and gender identity as well as established commitments regarding the support and protection of human rights defenders and civil society.
- Unequivocally defend United Nations mandates and [mandate holders](#) from attacks, including by decisively rejecting all attempts to undermine, delegitimize or impede their crucial work.
- Engage genuinely and constructively on initiatives at the UN related to economic, social and cultural rights; the elimination of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia; climate justice and financing; the digital divide; tax cooperation; and equitable access to vaccines, while ensuring full compliance with international human rights law.

Yours sincerely,



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