

JOINT STATEMENT

Over 45 African and international organizations call on the AfDB to open spaces for civil society and communities during the Annual Meetings and beyond

From May 22 to the 26, the Board of Directors and other key management staff of the African Development Bank (AfDB) will be gathering for the [58th Annual Meetings](#) in Sharm El Sheikh (Egypt). Once [again](#), though, civil society and communities directly affected by AfDB-funded activities will not have a chance to participate.

The AfDB, despite its mission to spur sustainable development and help the most marginalized across the African continent, remains an institution where decision-making processes tend to happen behind closed doors and with a top-down approach.

During the Annual Meetings, Bank Directors will be speaking among themselves and with some stakeholders from other institutions and the private sector. Those who should be the primary beneficiaries of AfDB projects - and who are most directly affected - will not have a seat at the table. Community members and civil society activists will not have the opportunity to have their say, to express their needs, and to raise their concerns around the negative impacts of some of the Bank's activities.

While the recently updated [AfDB's Integrated Safeguards System \(ISS\)](#) includes a commitment not to tolerate reprisals, the fact that the Bank decided to hold its Annual Meetings in Egypt sends a contradicting and worrisome message. Egypt is currently infamous for its [closed civic space](#). Thousands of people - including [human rights defenders](#) and [journalists](#) - are still arbitrarily detained, simply for peacefully defending human rights or speaking truth to power. Because of the regime crackdown on any critical voice, citizens exercise self-censorship for fear of retaliation. Foreign activists are also a target: just recently, the Egyptian regime [denied entry](#), without providing a reason, for an Italian human rights activist who had a valid visa and accreditation to participate in the [COP27](#).

The Annual Meetings can be a crucial advocacy and lobbying platform for civil society organizations. Similarly to other development banks, the AfDB should reintegrate the Civil Society Forum as part of the programme of the Annual Meetings. It should also reform its design, to make the forum more inclusive, accessible, transparent, and open to a diverse range of civil society groups, without limiting the number and types of topics addressed in the agenda.

Unfortunately, the lack of opportunities for participation during the Annual Meetings is only the tip of the iceberg. Civil society organizations have long been advocating with the AfDB to open up spaces for participation.

Civil society groups have also repeatedly raised concerns about the shortcomings of the [policy review processes](#), which tend to lack transparency and have limited opportunities for civil society participation, and about the actual implementation of the Bank's safeguards.

For instance, the inclusion of language on reprisals in the new ISS - where the bank commits to ensure people can safely speak out in the context of its projects - is a welcome and long-awaited step. But it will remain nothing more than a piece of paper that can easily be ignored, if the AfDB doesn't take concrete actions to change processes, incentives, and culture to adopt a human rights-based approach, to prevent reprisals before it is too late, and to react quickly when cases of reprisals are raised.

As we write this letter, there are dozens of human rights defenders facing threats and attacks simply for speaking out against the negative impacts of AfDB-funded projects and peacefully defending the rights of their communities. Their voices are crucial: the Bank should stand up to ensure they are not silenced.

This week, as the AfDB is holding its Annual Meetings, it must keep African communities at the forefront. Sustainable development is impossible without the voices of those most affected by development. The AfDB should be for the African People and not African Governments.

The signatories are calling on the AfDB to do the following:

1. Ensure meaningful participatory processes in policies, programmes, and projects, including through [reprisal-sensitive consultations and engagement](#);
2. Open spaces for civil society and community engagement, including at the Annual Meetings, and consider the implications of holding AfDB events in contexts where civil society cannot freely operate;
3. Engage with clients to emphasize the importance of independent civil society and open civic space in achieving sustainable and inclusive development;
4. Prioritize community-led development and human rights-based approaches;
5. Raise the bar on access to information, transparency and accountability;
6. Take steps to assess reprisal risks, prevent reprisals, and adequately respond to them when they occur.

Signatories

- 1.** Abibi Nsroma Foundation - Ghana
- 2.** Accountability Lab Liberia - Liberia
- 3.** Action For The Protection Of Endangered Species (ACES) - Cameroon
- 4.** African Law Foundation (AFRILAW) - Nigeria
- 5.** Appui aux Initiatives Communautaires de Conservation de l'Environnement et de Développement Durable (AICED) - Democratic Republic of Congo
- 6.** Association Burkinabè pour la Survie de l'Enfance (ABSE) - Burkina Faso
- 7.** Bank Information Center (BIC) - United States
- 8.** Both ENDS - The Netherlands
- 9.** Buliisa Initiative for Rural Development Organization (BIRUDO) - Uganda
- 10.** Centre de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et Démocratie (CDHD) - Democratic Republic of Congo
- 11.** Coalition des OSC sur la transparence à la BAD - Mali (for Africa secretariat)
- 12.** Committee for Peace and Development Advocacy - Liberia
- 13.** COMPPART Foundation for Justice and Peacebuilding - Nigeria
- 14.** Foundation For Environmental Rights, Advocacy & Development (FENRAD) - Nigeria
- 15.** Gouvernement des Amis de Yadio et Assangbadji (ONG GAYA) - Côte d'Ivoire
- 16.** Green Advocates International - Liberia
- 17.** Green Development Advocates (GDA) - Cameroon
- 18.** Health Promotion and Development Organisation (HePDO) - Gambia
- 19.** Human Rights Movement "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan - Kyrgyzstan
- 20.** IBON Africa - Kenya
- 21.** IFI Sinergy Group - Cameroon
- 22.** International Accountability Project (IAP) - Global
- 23.** Jamaa Resource Initiatives - Kenya
- 24.** Le Monde Des Enfants - Guinea
- 25.** Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD) - Senegal
- 26.** Network Movement for Justice and Development - Sierra Leone
- 27.** Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) - Nigeria
- 28.** Observatoire d'Etudes et d'Appui à la Responsabilité Sociale et Environnementale (OEARSE) - Democratic Republic of the Congo
- 29.** Oil Workers' Rights Protection Organization Public Union - Azerbaijan
- 30.** ONG Coeur d'or d'Afrique - Côte d'Ivoire
- 31.** ONG Environnement et Comportements Sains en Côte d'Ivoire (ECOSCI) - Côte d'Ivoire
- 32.** ONG-OPV (Ordre pour la Paix et la Vie) - Côte d'Ivoire

- 33.** Pain aux Indigents et Appui à l'auto Promotion (PIAP) - Democratic Republic of the Congo
- 34.** Peace Point Development Foundation (PPDF) - Nigeria
- 35.** Public Interest Law Center (PILC) - Chad
- 36.** Réseau Accès aux Médicaments Essentiels (RAME) - Burkina Faso
- 37.** Réseau des Organisations de la Société Civile pour le Développement du Tonkpi (ROSCIDET) pour le Développement - Côte d'Ivoire
- 38.** Sightsavers - Ghana
- 39.** SOS Jeunesse et Défis - Burkina Faso
- 40.** Sustainable Holistic Development Foundation (SUHODE) - Tanzania
- 41.** Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability (UCCA) - Uganda
- 42.** United Youth for Peace Education Transparency and Development in Liberia - Liberia
- 43.** Witness Radio - Uganda
- 44.** Women with Disability Self Reliance Foundation - Nigeria
- 45.** Women's Health Development (FESADE) - Cameroon
- 46.** Youth for Promotion of Development - Cameroon
- 47.** Youth Transforming Africa Narrative (YOTAN) - Liberia