



## AU Pre-Summit Engagement

# Citizens' Dialogue on Human Rights, Justice, Governance and Peace in Africa

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## 1. Background and Rationale

Africa stands at a critical moment. Armed conflicts, unconstitutional changes of government, shrinking civic space, and persistent human rights violations are testing the effectiveness of national, regional and continental institutions. At the same time, global geopolitical fragmentation and weakening multilateral norms are reshaping the environment in which African states operate.

While the African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens," recent trends raise urgent concerns. In several contexts, human rights violations are no longer isolated incidents; they risk becoming normalised features of governance. Emergency measures become prolonged. Civic restrictions become routine. Accountability gaps widen.

The normalisation of violations poses a systemic threat. When repression becomes politically tolerated, governance loses legitimacy, justice is weakened, and peace becomes fragile.

Human rights, justice, governance, and peace are not separate agendas. They are mutually reinforcing pillars:

- **Human Rights** protect dignity, civic space, and participation.
- **Justice** ensures accountability, reparations, and structural redress.
- **Governance** guarantees constitutional order and democratic legitimacy.
- **Peace** provides the foundation for stability and development.

Strengthening one requires reinforcing the others.

This Citizens' Dialogue, convened on the margins of the AU Summit, will provide a platform for critical reflection and forward-looking recommendations to strengthen Africa's institutional and normative frameworks across these four pillars.

## 2. Objectives

The Dialogue aims to:

1. Examine emerging risks to human rights, democratic governance, justice, and peace.
2. Assess the effectiveness of existing AU and regional mechanisms.

3. Identify practical reforms and accountability measures.
4. Amplify citizen and civil society voices in shaping continental policy debates.
5. Develop actionable recommendations for AU policymakers.

### **3. Thematic Focus Areas**

#### **I. The Future of Human Rights in Africa: Preventing Normalisation**

Across parts of the continent, shrinking civic space, arbitrary detention of journalists and activists, internet shutdowns, excessive use of force, and prolonged states of emergency are increasingly justified in the name of security and sovereignty.

The danger is not only the violations themselves, but their gradual normalisation.

This session will interrogate:

- Is Africa's human rights architecture fit for purpose in the current political climate?
- Where are the enforcement and compliance gaps?
- How can peer accountability within the AU be strengthened?
- How can human rights defenders be better protected in both digital and physical spaces?
- How do we ensure rights remain central to governance and peace efforts?

The discussion will move beyond diagnosis toward practical institutional reforms and strategic responses.

#### **II. Governance, Democratic Legitimacy and Constitutional Order**

Unconstitutional changes of government, manipulated electoral processes, and growing militarisation of politics undermine public trust and weaken state legitimacy.

Key questions include:

- How can constitutional order be safeguarded more effectively?
- What mechanisms can prevent democratic backsliding?
- How can AU governance frameworks be better implemented and enforced?
- How can citizen participation be restored and protected?

The session will explore reforms to strengthen democratic accountability and people-centred governance.

#### **III. Peace, Security and Conflict Prevention**

Ongoing crises in regions such as the Sahel, Sudan, eastern DRC, and the Horn of Africa highlight the need to move from reactive crisis management to proactive conflict prevention.

This segment will assess:

- The effectiveness of early warning and preventive diplomacy mechanisms.

- Accountability gaps in addressing mass atrocities.
- The relationship between governance failures, rights violations, and conflict.
- How African-led peace and security frameworks can be strengthened.

Sustainable peace requires legitimate governance and rights protection.

#### **IV. Justice, Accountability and Reparations**

Building on the AU's Decade of Reparations for Africans and People of African Descent (2026–2036), this session will examine how accountability and structural redress can contribute to long-term stability and reconciliation.

Key issues include:

- Moving reparations beyond symbolism toward structural transformation.
- Linking accountability for past and ongoing violations to governance reform.
- Strengthening African-led institutions in driving the reparative justice agenda.
- Connecting transitional justice processes to durable peacebuilding.

#### **4. Expected Outcomes**

The Dialogue will generate:

- Clear, actionable recommendations for AU institutions and Member States.
- Policy inputs aligned with Summit deliberations.
- Strengthening collaboration between civil society and continental bodies.
- A strategic roadmap linking human rights, justice, governance, and peace.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Africa's institutional future will be shaped by how it responds to this moment. If violations become normalised, democratic governance and peace will erode. If accountability is strengthened, institutions can regain legitimacy.

This Dialogue seeks to ensure that human rights remain non-negotiable, justice transformative, governance accountable, and peace sustainable.

**In collaboration with the Open Society Foundations**