

Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement
Women Leaders Network for Development

MISSION REPORT

Women's voices at the African Commission

RFLD at the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Dakar, Senegal · 1 to 21 October 2026

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This report describes activities that RFLD organised, facilitated or attended. It reflects the views of RFLD and not necessarily those of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, of the States and institutions mentioned, or of RFLD's financial partners. Figures attributed to partner institutions are reported as those institutions published them.

Protection of participants
Some women human rights defenders who took part in the session face real risks. This report names only speakers, officials and staff who appear in public roles. Photographs were published on rflgd.org during the session. No defender at risk is named or shown without her consent.

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Cover photograph: the panel "Defending without being exposed" on the main agenda of the 89th Ordinary Session, Dakar, 12 October 2026.

Contents

Foreword 5
Executive summary 6
Context and objectives 7
The mission at a glance 9

PART I. BEFORE THE SESSION 10
Received at the Embassy of Sweden 10
Protecting women defenders from digital violence 11
National consultation on technology-facilitated violence in Abuja 12

PART II. THE FORUM ON THE PARTICIPATION OF NGOS 13
“The woman who fetches water belongs”: the opening statement 13
Human rights and democracy in Africa, region by region 15
An Afrofeminist reading of shrinking civic space 16

PART III. BUILDING EVIDENCE 18
From stories to evidence: the Gender Mainstreaming Tool 18

PART IV. ON THE MAIN AGENDA OF THE COMMISSION 20
Defending without being exposed 20

PART V. RFLD’S ORAL STATEMENT 22
Three countries out of forty-nine 22

PART VI. SIDE EVENTS 24
Technology-facilitated violence and human rights: the Expertise France dialogue 24
A sentinel for women and girls: the Institut National de la Femme 26

PART VII. ENGAGEMENT WITH STATE ACTORS 28
Audience with Senegal’s Minister of Justice 28
Working meeting at the Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity 29
Learning from the boutiques de droit: visit to the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises 31

PART VIII. PARTNERS IN DAKAR 32
The SEA-T Programme Director visits RFLD’s Dakar office 32
Working with the Special Rapporteurs 34

PART IX. TOWARDS A REGIONAL STANDARD 35
Towards an African regional framework against technology-facilitated gender-based violence 35
Forty years of the African Charter 37

PART X. RESULTS AND THE WAY FORWARD 38
Results 38
Lessons learned 38
Commitments and follow-up 39
Recommendations 39
RFLD in the media 40
Acknowledgements 41
Annex A. People who spoke in RFLD activities 42
Annex B. Oral statement of RFLD, 13 October 2026 (as delivered, abridged) 43
Annex C. Photo gallery 45
About RFLD 45

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACCA	Africa Corporate Accountability Alliance
ACDHRS	African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
AFD	Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)
AJS	Association des Juristes Sénégalaises
ASF	Avocats Sans Frontières (Lawyers Without Borders)
AU	African Union
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CBDH	Commission Béninoise des Droits de l'Homme
CIDH Africa	Centre international pour les droits de l'homme en Afrique
EU	European Union
FESTIC	Association des Femmes Sénégalaises dans les TIC
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
INF	Institut National de la Femme (Benin)
NAFASI	Digital civic space initiative of Magamba Network, DefendDefenders and RFLD, funded by Sida
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RFLD	Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (Women Leaders Network for Development)
SEA-T	Society Equality Africa Transformation programme
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TFGBV	Technology-facilitated gender-based violence
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WACSI	West Africa Civil Society Institute
WHRD	Woman human rights defender
WLICT	Women Leadership in the Public ICT Sector (Team Europe initiative)

Foreword

In October 2026, Dakar hosted the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. For the Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement, it was the most ambitious session we have ever prepared. We came with a delegation of 42 women human rights defenders, grassroots leaders, lawyers and staff from 15 African countries. We came with data from our focal points in all 55 African Union member States. And we came with one conviction: the women who defend rights in their communities must be heard where regional standards are written.

This report gives an account of those three weeks. It shows how a question raised by our members, how can women defend rights without being exposed, reached the main agenda of the Commission. It shows how a national institution from Benin, the Institut National de la Femme, could explain its model to the Minister of Justice of Senegal, to the Ministry of Family and to the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises. It also records our exchanges with three Commissioners whose mandates matter most to the women we serve.

None of this would have been possible without our partners. We thank the African Commission and its Secretariat, the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, the Government and people of Senegal, the SEA-T programme implemented by GIZ on behalf of BMZ, Sweden and Sida through NAFASI, Expertise France and the Team Europe WLICT initiative, the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, and every organisation that sat with us in Dakar.

A session ends. The work does not. The commitments listed in the last chapter of this report are the measure by which our members and partners should judge us in the months ahead.

Dossi Sêkonnou Gloria AGUEH
Founder and Africa Director, RFLD



The RFLD delegation in Dakar, October 2026.

Executive summary

From 1 to 21 October 2026, the Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (RFLD) took part in the Forum on the Participation of NGOs and in the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in Dakar, Senegal. RFLD holds Observer Status N°553 with the Commission and is a member of the Support Group to the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders. Its delegation of 42 people from 15 African countries was led by John GBENAGNON, Director of Strategy and Development, with Bathor SECK, Country Director for Senegal.

Advocacy at the heart of the Commission. RFLD delivered the civil society statement at the opening of the NGO Forum on 8 October, moderated the session on sub-regional human rights reports and convened a panel on an Afrofeminist reading of shrinking civic space with Hon. Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie. On 12 October, the panel "Defending without being exposed", facilitated by RFLD with the support of SEA-T, was held on the Commission's main agenda under Item 5, chaired by Hon. Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu. On 13 October, RFLD delivered its oral statement with four recommendations to the Special Rapporteurs, the Commission and member States.

Side events and evidence. RFLD moderated the Expertise France dialogue on technology-facilitated gender-based violence under the Team Europe WLICT initiative, co-organised with Benin's Institut National de la Femme a side event on the INF model, and co-organised with the Cyrus R. Vance Center a side event on an African regional framework against technology-facilitated gender-based violence. A closed working session under NAFASI produced threat-assessment matrices and a first quarterly GESI dashboard for organisations documenting attacks on women defenders.

Engagement with State actors. Senegal's Minister of Justice, Maître Moussa Sarr, received the RFLD and INF delegation on 14 October. The same day, the delegation held a working meeting with Dr Rokhaya Diakhaté, Director of the Family at the Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity, and visited the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises. The President of Benin's Commission Béninoise des Droits de l'Homme spoke at the INF side event.

Partners. Before the session, H.E. Catharina Cappelin, Ambassador of Sweden, received RFLD's Senegal team on 1 October. During the session, Konstanze Ricken, Programme Director of SEA-T at GIZ, visited RFLD's Dakar office on 14 October. The delegation also met Hon. Commissioner Salma Sassi, Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced Persons and Migrants in Africa, to discuss RFLD's support to her mandate.

Visibility. Eleven press articles in Senegal and Benin covered RFLD's work, including an official statement by Senegal's Ministry of Justice. RFLD published more than twenty articles on rflgd.org during the mission.

Next steps. RFLD will send written outcomes to the Special Rapporteurs, prepare State-by-State data separating ratification, domestication and budget, gather anonymised cases for the continental study under Resolution 591, follow up the recommendations to funders on protection costs, and deliver with the INF a note of recommendations and a comparative note on national gender institutions in Benin and Senegal.

The session in figures

42
delegates from 15 African countries in the RFLD delegation

13
activities organised, facilitated or attended between 1 and 21 October

3
Commissioners engaged: the Special Rapporteurs on women, on defenders and on refugees, IDPs and migrants

1
panel placed on the main agenda of the Commission (Item 5)

4
recommendations in RFLD's oral statement under Observer Status N°553

2
ministries of Senegal visited, with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Family

11
press articles on RFLD's work in Senegal and Benin

1,143
member organisations in more than 35 countries represented by RFLD

Context and objectives

The African Commission and its 89th Ordinary Session

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is the body of the African Union that monitors how States respect the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and its protocols, including the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, known as the Maputo Protocol. It examines State reports, adopts resolutions and guidelines, and works through Special Rapporteurs who receive information from civil society and act on it.

The 89th Ordinary Session was held in Dakar in October 2026. It was preceded by the Forum on the Participation of NGOs, convened by the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS). The session closed on 21 October, the day the African Charter marked forty years since its entry into force.

Why the session mattered for women

The legal framework for women's rights in Africa is strong on paper. Forty-six of the 55 African Union member States have ratified the Maputo Protocol. RFLD's Maputo Barometer 2026 shows how far practice lags behind. Of the 49 countries it assesses, only three, Cabo Verde, Namibia and Rwanda, are green on all three indicators. Eighteen are red on at least one.

At the same time, women who defend rights face new forms of pressure. Smear campaigns, sexist threats and the publication of personal information now travel through phones and social media. Laws on registration, foreign funding and cybercrime restrict the space in which women's organisations work. Funding for these organisations, especially in francophone Africa, has fallen at the moment it is most needed.

RFLD's objectives for the session

- Bring the experience of women human rights defenders, and the reprisals they face, onto the Commission's main agenda.
- Present evidence from the Maputo Barometer and from RFLD's focal points to the Commission and its Special Rapporteurs.
- Advance the case for an African regional framework against technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
- Create space for a national institution, Benin's Institut National de la Femme, to share its model with the Commission and with Senegalese authorities.
- Strengthen the capacity of member organisations to document attacks in a form the Commission can use.
- Deepen partnerships with States, the African Union system and financial partners.

The RFLD delegation and approach

RFLD brought 42 people from 15 African countries to Dakar: women human rights defenders, leaders of grassroots organisations, lawyers and network staff. The delegation was led by John GBENAGNON, Director of Strategy and Development. Bathor SECK, Country Director for Senegal, coordinated the work of the Dakar office, which RFLD opened in June 2026 and through which it is recognised as an international organisation by the Government of Senegal. Simbiat BAKARE, Country Representative for Nigeria, represented RFLD in Abuja and on the main agenda panel. Dr Sandrine CHIKOU spoke for RFLD at the Vance Center side event.

Every activity followed RFLD's safeguarding rules. Closed sessions were held at undisclosed venues. Journalists were asked to obtain consent before photographing, filming or naming any participant. Data collected from organisations was recorded in aggregated and anonymous form.



The RFLD delegation at the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission, Dakar, October 2026.

The mission at a glance

Date	Activity	RFLD role
1 Oct	Exchange with H.E. Catharina Cappelin, Ambassador of Sweden, Embassy of Sweden, Dakar	Delegation
5–6 Oct	Lawyers Without Borders regional workshop on defenders, with the ACHPR and Canada	Panellist
6–7 Oct	WLICT national consultation on TFGBV, Abuja, Nigeria	Participant
8 Oct	Opening ceremony of the NGO Forum	Opening statement
8 Oct	Sub-regional focal points reports on human rights and democracy	Moderator
8 Oct	NGO Forum Panel 1: an Afrofeminist reading of shrinking civic space	Convener, moderator
10 Oct	Closed working session on the Gender Mainstreaming Tool (NAFASI)	Organiser
12 Oct	Main agenda panel “Defending without being exposed”, Item 5	Facilitator
13 Oct	RFLD oral statement before the Commission	Statement
13 Oct	Expertise France dialogue on TFGBV and human rights (WLICT)	Moderator
13 Oct	Side event: the INF, a sentinel for the rights of women and girls in Benin	Co-organiser
14 Oct	Audience with Senegal’s Minister of Justice	Delegation lead
14 Oct	Working meeting, Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity	Delegation lead
14 Oct	Visit to the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises	Delegation lead
14 Oct	Visit of the SEA-T Programme Director (GIZ) to RFLD’s Dakar office	Host
8–15 Oct	Engagement with Special Rapporteurs Sallah-Njie, Ngoy Lumbu and Sassi	Delegation
15 Oct	Side event with the Vance Center: a regional framework against TFGBV	Co-organiser
21 Oct	Statement on 40 years of the African Charter	Statement

PART I

Before the session

Received at the Embassy of Sweden

1 OCTOBER 2026 · DAKAR

On 1 October 2026, a week before the NGO Forum opened, H.E. Catharina Cappelin, Ambassador of Sweden to Senegal, received RFLD at the Embassy of Sweden in Dakar. The RFLD delegation was led by Bathor SECK, Country Director for Senegal, and John GBENAGNON, Director of Strategy and Development.



The RFLD delegation with H.E. Catharina Cappelin, Ambassador of Sweden to Senegal, at the Embassy of Sweden in Dakar, 1 October 2026.

The meeting was an exchange on women human rights defenders and on the challenges facing women's rights in West Africa. RFLD congratulated the Ambassador on her work in support of human rights and gender equality in Senegal and across the region. Sweden is a long-standing supporter of civic space in Africa, including through Sida's support to NAFASI, the consortium in which RFLD works with Magamba Network and DefendDefenders to protect activists online.

The visit built on an earlier moment. On 16 June 2026, H.E. Catharina Cappelin had joined Hon. Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu and representatives of Germany at RFLD's Dakar office for a convening on the protection of women human rights defenders in West Africa, with about thirty institutional actors. That convening prepared the ground for the work RFLD carried to the 89th Session.



The June 2026 convening on the protection of women human rights defenders at RFLD's Dakar office, with the African Commission, Sweden and Germany.

WHAT IT MEANS

Partners who see the work for themselves become advocates for it. The exchange at the Embassy gave RFLD the chance to present its programme for the session and to hear Sweden's priorities for civic space and gender equality in the region.

Protecting women defenders from digital violence

5 AND 6 OCTOBER 2026 · DAKAR

On 5 and 6 October, Lawyers Without Borders (Avocats Sans Frontières) convened in Dakar a regional workshop for sharing experiences and strengthening alliances between human rights defenders and civil society organisations. The workshop was organised with the African Commission and in partnership with Canada. Bathor SECK spoke on the panel on behalf of RFLD.



Panellists and organisers of the workshop.



Bathor Seck presenting RFLD's approach to the protection of women defenders.

Her presentation, "Women human rights defenders, digital violence and protection mechanisms in Africa", started from a simple observation. Women defenders face the same risks as any person who speaks about rights in public. They also face violence that targets them as women: sexual threats, misogynistic insults, smear campaigns about their private lives and attacks on their reputation. This violence seeks to isolate women from their communities and to push them out of public life.

> **When a threat arrives on a phone, it can seem virtual. For the woman who receives it, its consequences are very real.**
>
> Bathor SECK, RFLD Country Director for Senegal

She set out RFLD's approach in three parts. **Prevent**: build the skills of women and their organisations in digital security, risk management and the documentation of attacks. **Protect**: give defenders fast access to protection, legal and psychosocial support, and safe referral. **Advocate**: bring these cases to national institutions and to the African human rights mechanisms, so that law and policy change.

National consultation on technology-facilitated violence in Abuja

6 AND 7 OCTOBER 2026 · ABUJA, NIGERIA

From 6 to 7 October, RFLD took part in the WLICT National Consultation and Planning Workshop on technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Abuja. Women Leadership in the Public ICT Sector (WLICT) is a 36-month Team Europe initiative, with Expertise France among its implementing partners. RFLD was represented by Simbiat BAKARE, Country Representative for Nigeria.



Participants of the WLICT National Consultation and Planning Workshop, Abuja, 6 and 7 October 2026. Photo: WLICT, Team Europe.

Participants agreed that technology-facilitated violence in Nigeria is growing and changing fast, with new forms of abuse enabled by artificial intelligence. They noted the absence of national baseline data, survivors who do not know where to report, and police and justice institutions that are not always equipped to respond.

RFLD contributed to the working group on the accountability of technology companies and States. The group proposed to use existing Nigerian laws to hold platforms to account, including the Cybercrimes Act, the Nigeria Data Protection Act and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. It recommended mapping the platforms where abuse is most common, reviewing platform policies against national law, opening a dialogue with social media companies, engaging diplomatic missions on cross-border cases and working with the National Assembly on sanctions for platforms that do not comply.



Civil society organisations and national institutions at the workshop.



Simbiat Bakare represented RFLD in Abuja.

PART II

The Forum on the Participation of NGOs

“The woman who fetches water belongs”: the opening statement

8 OCTOBER 2026 · NGO FORUM

On 8 October 2026, the Forum on the Participation of NGOs in the 89th Ordinary Session opened in Dakar. RFLD, a partner of this edition convened by ACDHRS, took the floor at the opening ceremony. John GBENAGNON delivered the statement on behalf of Dossi Sêkonnou Gloria AGUEH, Africa Director of RFLD, and of the network’s 1,143 member organisations in more than 35 African countries.



John GBENAGNON delivers RFLD's statement at the opening ceremony of the NGO Forum, 8 October 2026.

The statement linked the African Union's 2026 theme on water and sanitation to Article 15 of the Maputo Protocol and to the safety of women human rights defenders. It closed with two requests. First, that the African Commission examine women's access to water and sanitation in every State report. Second, that the nine African Union member States that have not yet ratified the Maputo Protocol do so before the Charter's next anniversary.



The opening ceremony of the NGO Forum.



Participants at the opening ceremony.

The statement was reported in the Senegalese and Beninese press, by CIB Plus Web TV, EnQuête+ and Seneweb, under titles on water, sanitation and the responsibilities of States.

Human rights and democracy in Africa, region by region

8 OCTOBER 2026 · NGO FORUM

After the opening, the Forum held its first working session: "Overview and update on the situations of human rights and democracy in Africa: sub-regional focal points reports". At the invitation of ACDHRS, the session was moderated by John GBENAGNON. Over ninety minutes, six focal points presented what civil society had documented since the last session.



The sub-regional focal points report on the situation of human rights and democracy in Africa, with John GBENAGNON moderating.

Sub-region	Focal point
Central Africa	Marcel Mani Epee
Eastern Africa	Walda Keza Shaka
Northern Africa	Naji Moulay Lahsen
Western Africa	Mélanie Sonhaye Kombate
Southern Africa	Cathy Elando Kodiemoka
Lusophone network	Emilio José Manuel

The reports pointed to defenders under pressure, restrictive laws on associations and funding, internet shutdowns and the misuse of security measures. They also covered the weight of conflicts and unconstitutional changes of government on democratic life. Participants stressed that women, young people and Vulnerable Groups carry the heaviest cost of these crises. The findings fed the resolutions the Forum adopted on 10 October and presented to the Commission.

An Afrofeminist reading of shrinking civic space

8 OCTOBER 2026 · NGO FORUM, PANEL 1

In the afternoon, RFLD convened Panel 1 of the Forum. It asked what an Afrofeminist reading of shrinking civic space tells us about protecting freedom of expression, association and assembly in Africa, and what States and the Commission can do about it.

SPEAKERS	Hon. Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa · Omolara Balogun, Head of Policy Influencing and Advocacy, WACSI · Naji Moulay Lahsen, Executive Director, CIDH Africa · Bathor SECK, RFLD Country Director for Senegal
MODERATOR	John GBENAGNON, Director of Strategy and Development, Head of the RFLD delegation



The panel in session: an Afrofeminist reading of shrinking civic space in Africa.

Civic space is usually measured through laws, arrests and registration figures. These indicators miss a large part of what women defenders live. A woman who leads a community association can lose her voice long before any law is passed against her. Smear campaigns, sexist threats, pressure from family and community, and the publication of personal information online can push her out of public life without a single court case.

Omolara Balogun examined NGO registration rules, reporting obligations and laws on foreign funding, which can decide whether a small women's organisation survives. Naji Moulay Lahsen described the mix of digital surveillance, online harassment and prosecution under cybercrime laws faced by women journalists and activists in North Africa, and reprisals against those who engage with the Commission. Bathor SECK brought the discussion to community level, where civic space means the right to call a meeting about a broken water pump or to ask how a local budget was spent.



A full room for the panel, right after the lunch break.



Delegates followed the discussion in English and French.

Commissioner Sallah-Njie connected the testimonies to the instruments of the African system. Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the African Charter protect expression, association and assembly. The Maputo Protocol adds obligations on women's participation in political life and on their security. A State that tolerates the harassment of women defenders falls short of these commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PANEL

States should review registration and foreign funding rules so that they do not block small women-led organisations, recognise online harassment and doxxing of women defenders as attacks on civic space, and apply Resolution 522 in national law. The Commission and its Special Rapporteurs should strengthen their response to reprisals against defenders who co-operate with the Commission.



The moderator and the four panellists after the session, Dakar, 8 October 2026.

PART III

Building evidence

From stories to evidence: the Gender Mainstreaming Tool

10 OCTOBER 2026 · CLOSED WORKING SESSION

On 10 October, RFLD held a closed working session on data protection and safeguarding for the organisations it brought to Dakar and for organisations selected through an open call. The session was held under NAFASI, a programme on digital rights and civic space funded by Sweden through Sida and implemented by Magamba Network, DefendDefenders and RFLD. It was held in French and English, with support in Portuguese.



Participants during the working session on the Gender Mainstreaming Tool, Dakar, 10 October 2026.

Organisations that document attacks on women defenders often record cases as stories. A story protects the detail of what happened, but it cannot be counted or compared across countries. When the Commission asks for evidence, narrative material is hard to add up. Resolution 591, which mandates a continental study on digital violence against women, and Resolution 620 on data collection, both call for evidence collected the same way everywhere and broken down by sex, age and type of violence.

Component	The question it answers
1. Registration instrument	How do we record a case? Every case is recorded the same way and broken down by sex, age and type, online or offline.
2. Threat-assessment matrix	What are we exposed to? Each organisation rates its risks for likelihood and impact, with a mitigation step and a person responsible.
3. Quarterly GESI dashboard	What does our data show? A short set of indicators, published only in aggregated and anonymous form.
4. Protection and referral	What do we do when a defender is at risk? A protection plan and a safe route to the francophone and lusophone helpline desks.



Discussion on how organisations record and protect information about attacks.



Participants follow the presentation of the tool.

RESULTS OF THE DAY

Each organisation built its own threat-assessment matrix from its real working context. The room adopted a first quarterly GESI dashboard, already populated with the participants' own data. A session led by the Cyrus R. Vance Center explored legal pathways for survivors of on-line violence.



The session closed with thanks to every organisation that took part.

PART IV

On the main agenda of the Commission

Defending without being exposed

12 OCTOBER 2026 · 89TH SESSION, ITEM 5

Few civil society proposals reach the main agenda of an ordinary session. On 12 October, the African Commission held the panel "Defending without being exposed: how can women human rights defenders work in Africa without unnecessary risk?" under Item 5 of its agenda. The panel was convened and chaired by Hon. Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals in Africa. RFLD facilitated the session with the support of the SEA-T programme, implemented by GIZ on behalf of BMZ.



The panel on the main agenda of the 89th Ordinary Session, Item 5: Panel Discussions.

The question came from RFLD's members. Women who prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment often work in rural and peri-urban areas, with little legal standing and no institutional backing. The people they report can be close to them. When they speak out, they are exposed. The Chairperson of the African Commission, Hon. Idrissa Sow, attended the panel. Interpretation was provided in English, French, Arabic and Portuguese.

CHAIR	Hon. Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals
PANELLISTS	Konstanze Ricken, Programme Director, SEA-T, GIZ · Omolara Balogun, WACSI · Hannah Forster, Executive Director, ACDHRS · Aua Baldé, UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances · Simbiat BAKARE, RFLD Country Representative for Nigeria



Hannah Forster, Konstanze Ricken, Omolara Balogun and Simbiat Bakare at the panel table.



Hon. Idrissa Sow, Chairperson of the African Commission, at the panel.

Four questions

- When is a community worker or the head of a local association recognised as a defender, in law and in practice?
- Which forms of reprisal dominate today, and how can taking part in a session of the Commission be kept from leading to reprisals at home?
- What share of funding against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment reaches organisations led by African women, and can protection costs become an eligible budget line?
- Which guarantees should be written into the African instruments now under preparation?

Opening the session, Commissioner Ngoy Lumbu placed the discussion within his mandate: defenders must be able to engage with the Commission and with national authorities without paying a price for it. Konstanze Ricken spoke on intersectionality, Afrofeminism and gender equality, and on what they mean for partnerships that aim at gender transformation. Omolara Balogun addressed the wider civic environment in West Africa. Hannah Forster brought the experience of ACDHRS and the NGO Forum. Aua Baldé spoke from the United Nations system. Simbiat BAKARE brought the experience of women defenders in Nigeria.



Hannah Forster (ACDHRS), Konstanze Ricken (SEA-T, GIZ) and Omolara Balogun (WACSI).



The plenary hall during the panel.

FOLLOW-UP AGREED IN THE ROOM

Recommendations to funders on the eligibility of protection costs, so that security, legal support and psychosocial care can appear in standard grant budgets. A contribution to the study under Resolution 571 on the compliance of national legislation with the Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly in Africa. Wider awareness of referral routes, including RFLD's French and Portuguese support desks.



The RFLD delegation with panellists after the session, 12 October 2026.

PART V

RFLD's oral statement

Three countries out of forty-nine

13 OCTOBER 2026 · ORAL STATEMENT UNDER OBSERVER STATUS N°553

On 13 October, RFLD delivered its oral statement before the 89th Ordinary Session. The statement drew on the Maputo Barometer 2026 and on reports from RFLD's focal points in all 55 African Union member States.

> **Three countries out of forty-nine. That is the distance between what this continent has signed and what it has done.**
>
> RFLD oral statement, 13 October 2026

The statement recalled that 46 of the 55 African Union member States have ratified the Maputo Protocol, yet only three of the 49 countries assessed by the Barometer, Cabo Verde, Rwanda and Namibia, score satisfactorily on all three indicators drawn from the Protocol. Eighteen score red on at least one. It described the risk that a protective law, once won, can be unwound, and asked the Commission to treat any attempt to repeal protective legislation as a retrogressive measure. It also described technology-facilitated violence against women journalists, candidates and defenders as attacks that produce the same result as physical threats while leaving far less evidence.

FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa: include in the next report a State-by-State account distinguishing ratification, legislative domestication and identifiable budget allocation. RFLD places its country data at her disposal.
2. To the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders: extend monitoring explicitly to digital reprisals against women defenders, building on Resolutions 522 and 591.
3. To the Commission: keep the situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on its agenda, undertake a fact-finding mission, and address any attempt to repeal protective legislation as a retrogressive measure.
4. To member States: open budget processes to civil society scrutiny.



The panel table during the 89th Ordinary Session, Dakar.

The full text of the statement is reproduced in Annex B.

PART VI

Side events

Technology-facilitated violence and human rights: the Expertise France dialogue

13 OCTOBER 2026 · ALMADIES, DAKAR

On the morning of 13 October, Expertise France brought together institutions, civil society organisations and United Nations partners for a dialogue titled “Technology-facilitated gender-based violence and human rights: strengthening prevention and support for survivors”. The event took place within the Team Europe initiative Women Leadership in the Public ICT Sector (WLICT), funded in particular by the European Union and the French Development Agency, under its component on digital safety in Benin, Nigeria and Senegal. RFLD moderated the panel.



The side event on technology-facilitated gender-based violence, organised by Expertise France in Dakar, 13 October 2026.

SPEAKERS	Astou Diouf, ARTICLE 19 · Moussa Waly Sène, Paradigm Initiative · Hannah Van Der Berghe, UNFPA · Odile Barry, FESTIC · Aymar Prigent, French Representation in Senegal
MODERATOR	John GBENAGNON, RFLD

The discussion followed seven questions, from the nature of the harm to the responses that institutions, platforms and partners can offer, and ended with a round of concrete commitments. Speakers agreed that online abuse is not a separate category of harm. It affects women's security, privacy, dignity and ability to take part in public life. If digital violence is a human rights violation, States have a duty to prevent it and to provide effective remedies. It cannot be left to individual women to manage with privacy settings.



Panellists during the opening exchange.



A speaker describes how online abuse affects women's security and participation.

ARTICLE 19 addressed the withdrawal of women from public debate, and the need for clear definitions and independent oversight so that the fight against digital violence does not become a pretext to restrict freedom of expression. Paradigm Initiative described the obstacles survivors face in reporting and obtaining a remedy. UNFPA spoke on the continuum between online and offline violence. FESTIC spoke on women's leadership in the digital sector.



Participants follow the exchange from the floor.



The audience at the side event, on the sidelines of the 89th Session.

A sentinel for women and girls: the Institut National de la Femme

13 OCTOBER 2026 · RFLD AND INF SIDE EVENT

On 13 October, RFLD and Benin's Institut National de la Femme (INF) held a joint side event titled "The Institut National de la Femme, a sentinel for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls in Benin". It gave a national institution created five years ago a continental platform to explain how it works, what it has achieved and where it still meets resistance. RFLD facilitated the event from the first planning meeting in Porto-Novo to the panel in Dakar.

MODERATOR	Dr Rokhaya Diakhaté, Director of the Family, Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity, Senegal
SPEAKERS	Flore DJINOU, Executive Secretary, INF · Hon. Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders · Professor Abdou-Bakari Imorou, President, Commission Béninoise des Droits de l'Homme · Bathor SECK, RFLD · John GBENAGNON, RFLD



The panel opened with a presentation of the INF's mandate and its place in Benin's protection system.

The INF was created by Decree No. 2021-391 of 21 July 2021 and reports directly to the Presidency of the Republic of Benin. Its mandate rests on two pillars: promoting women's leadership, and fighting all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. What sets it apart is its legal power. Law No. 2021-11 of 20 December 2021 made it the only institution in Benin specialised in gender-based violence that can bring cases to court and join proceedings as a civil party alongside survivors.

INF figures, from creation to July 2026 (as published by the INF)	Value
Complaints registered	11,971
Cases brought before the courts	5,155
Judicial decisions obtained	1,439
Women and girls whose lives the INF reports it has changed in five years	more than 118,000

Commissioner Ngoy Lumbu brought the perspective of the Commission's mechanism on defenders: women who take up cases of violence, whether lawyers, community workers or staff of a public institution, are themselves exposed to pressure and reprisals. A national institution that protects survivors also needs to protect those who accompany them.



The Senegalese experience gave the discussion a comparative angle.



Civil society organisations, institutions and defenders filled the room.



RFLD thanks every participant and speaker at the joint side event.

PART VII

Engagement with State actors

Audience with Senegal's Minister of Justice

14 OCTOBER 2026 · MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, DAKAR

On 14 October 2026, Senegal's Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals, Maître Moussa Sarr, received a delegation from RFLD and Benin's Institut National de la Femme. The delegation was led by John GBENAGNON for RFLD and by Flore DJINOU, Executive Secretary, for the INF.



Maître Moussa Sarr, Minister of Justice of Senegal, receives the RFLD and INF delegation, 14 October 2026.

The delegation presented the INF model to the Minister. He showed strong interest in an institution that supports victims from the first conversation all the way to court, and that works with civil society, community leaders and traditional authorities. The Minister congratulated RFLD on the initiatives it leads in Senegal and across the region, its advocacy before the African Commission and its ability to bring public institutions and civil society together.



The RFLD and INF delegation at Senegal's Ministry of Justice.



The delegation presented the INF model to the Minister.

For RFLD, access to justice remains one of the main obstacles to applying the laws that protect women. Most countries in the region have the laws, yet victims struggle to file a complaint, to get support and to obtain a ruling. On 15 October, the Ministry of Justice published an official statement on the audience titled "Droits des femmes : le RFLD propose un partenariat au ministère de la Justice".



The audience took place on the sidelines of the 89th Session of the African Commission.

Working meeting at the Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity

14 OCTOBER 2026 · DAKAR

The same day, RFLD and the INF held a working meeting with Dr Rokhaya Diakhaté, Director of the Family at Senegal's Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity. The meeting followed directly from the side event of 13 October, which Dr Diakhaté had moderated. It gave time to go further, in a smaller room and with the teams that work on these issues every day.



The RFLD and INF delegations with the team of Senegal's Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity, 14 October 2026.

The INF explained how it works in practice, from the first call of a woman in distress to the decision of a court, and how it coordinates medical and legal help so that a woman does not have to tell her story again at every door. The Ministry shared Senegal's approach to family protection, including Law No. 2020-05 of 10 January 2020, which made rape a crime and toughened penalties for sexual violence against children, and its social services and family support structures across the country.



The working meeting at the Ministry.



The Ministry team shared Senegal's approach to family protection.

WHAT THE TWO SYSTEMS CAN LEARN

Benin's experience shows the value of a dedicated body with the power to act in court. Senegal's experience shows the strength of social services rooted in families and communities. Both countries face the same challenge: many women who suffer violence never file a complaint, and many complaints never reach a judge.

Learning from the boutiques de droit: visit to the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises

14 OCTOBER 2026 · DAKAR

The delegation also visited the headquarters of the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises (AJS), where it was received by Ms Aminata Fall Niang, President of the AJS. The meeting opened with congratulations: the AJS obtained observer status with the African Commission in October 2026. RFLD offered to share its experience of preparing statements and shadow reports, and to work with the AJS on joint contributions.



The RFLD, INF and AJS teams at the AJS office in Dakar, 14 October 2026.

The core of the exchange was the AJS model of boutiques de droit, community legal clinics where women receive free advice. According to figures published in the Senegalese press in 2025, the network counts ten boutiques in seven regions and has handled close to 69,000 cases, 87 percent of them brought by women, with around 1,000 trained paralegals. Participants discussed how referral between community legal clinics and a public body able to litigate could shorten the distance between a woman and a judge.



The AJS team presented how the boutiques de droit work.



An exchange on the role of paralegals in communities.

NEXT STEPS WITH THE INF

RFLD and the INF committed to produce a note of recommendations from the mission by 31 October 2026 and a comparative note on national gender institutions in Benin and Senegal by 15 November 2026, with a debrief in Cotonou within fifteen days of the delegation's return.

PART VIII

Partners in Dakar

The SEA-T Programme Director visits RFLD's Dakar office

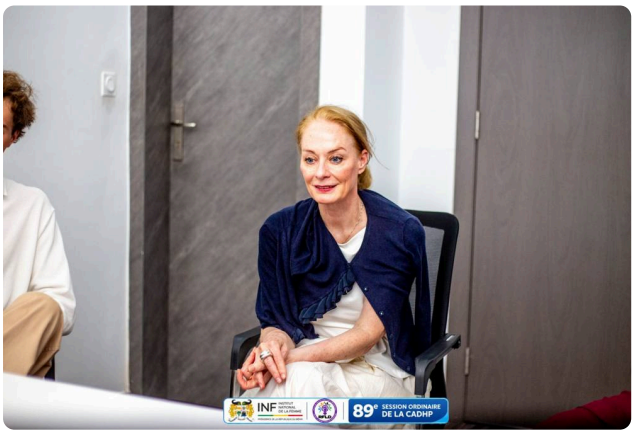
14 OCTOBER 2026 · RFLD DAKAR OFFICE

On the morning of 14 October, Konstanze Ricken, Programme Director of SEA-T (Society Equality Africa Transformation) at GIZ, visited RFLD's office in Dakar. Two days earlier she had spoken on the main agenda panel. She was welcomed by John GBENAGNON and Bathor SECK, together with members of the Dakar team.



Konstanze Ricken (SEA-T, GIZ) with the RFLD team at the Dakar office, 14 October 2026.

SEA-T is implemented by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Through SEA-T, RFLD leads the Afrofeminist Initiative for Human Rights Development in Francophone West Africa. The initiative strengthens women human rights defenders and the organisations they lead, through training, accompaniment and safety support, and channels sub-grants to partner organisations that rarely receive direct funding. Each partner designs its project around priorities it defines itself.



Konstanze Ricken during the meeting at RFLD's Dakar office.



The working session in the meeting room of the Dakar office.

The team explained how SEA-T support helped RFLD move from separate activities to a structured regional approach. Defenders who took part now use what they learned to document cases and accompany survivors. The discussion also covered the challenges ahead: pressure on civic space, the growth of online violence against women defenders and scarce funding for women's organisations in francophone Africa. Both sides discussed the rollout of the 2026 sub-grants and the follow-up of the commitments made during the session.



The RFLD team and the GIZ delegation at the Dakar office.

Working with the Special Rapporteurs

8 TO 15 OCTOBER 2026

During the session, RFLD worked closely with three Commissioners whose mandates cover the women it serves.

Hon. Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa joined RFLD's panel at the NGO Forum on 8 October and opened the Vance Center and RFLD side event on 15 October. Her mandate covers how States apply the Maputo Protocol, and she is one of the two mechanisms leading the continental study on digital violence against women under Resolution 591. RFLD's oral statement asked her to include a State-by-State account of ratification, domestication and budget in her next report, with RFLD's country data at her disposal.

Hon. Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu

The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals chaired the main agenda panel on 12 October, spoke at the INF side event on 13 October and at the Vance Center side event on 15 October. RFLD is a member of the Support Group to his mandate under Resolution 602. The oral statement asked him to extend monitoring explicitly to digital reprisals against women defenders.

Hon. Commissioner Salma Sassi

The RFLD delegation met Hon. Commissioner Salma Sassi, Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced Persons and Migrants in Africa, to discuss RFLD's support to her mandate. The exchange covered the study that RFLD is funding under Resolution 628, toward a specific

legal framework for people forcibly displaced in Africa by climate change, and the gendered dimensions of displacement, particularly for women displaced by conflict and climate stress in the Sahel and coastal West Africa.

WHY THIS ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

For a woman leading a small association in a rural district, the African Commission can seem far away. The Special Rapporteurs are one of the shortest routes between her experience and the decisions that shape regional standards. Evidence they receive can travel into letters to governments, promotion missions, resolutions, studies and the questions put to States during their periodic reports.

PART IX

Towards a regional standard

Towards an African regional framework against technology-facilitated gender-based violence

15 OCTOBER 2026 · VANCE CENTER AND RFLD SIDE EVENT

On 15 October, from 13:00 to 15:00, RFLD and the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice held a joint side event. Commissioners, lawyers, women's rights and digital rights practitioners, defenders and partner organisations examined one question: what would it take for the African human rights system to give women a coherent standard of protection online?



The side event on technology-facilitated gender-based violence, co-organised by RFLD and the Vance Center in Dakar, 15 October 2026.

OPENING	Hon. Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa
PANEL	Hon. Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu · Adaobi Egboka, Director, Africa Initiatives, Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice · Dr Sandrine CHIKOU, RFLD

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence covers acts committed, assisted or amplified through digital technologies against a person because of their gender: online harassment and threats, cyber-stalking, doxxing, surveillance, the non-consensual sharing of intimate images and coordinated smear campaigns. It falls hardest on women who are visible in public life.

The legal response has not kept pace. Most African States still deal with online violence against women through general cybercrime or criminal laws that were not written with its gendered nature in mind, and some laws on false information have been used against the women they should protect. The Commission adopted Resolution 522 in 2022, the African Union adopted its Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls in 2025, and many States are party to the Malabo Convention. None of these instruments yet gives States detailed, gender-responsive guidance on prevention, investigation, accountability and repair.



Members of the panel at the high table during the discussion.



Participants take their seats as the side event opens.

WHAT A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK COULD OFFER

Shared definitions, clear State obligations, minimum standards for remedies, and a basis for the Commission to assess progress through State reporting. RFLD and the Vance Center will explore how this idea can move forward within the African human rights system.

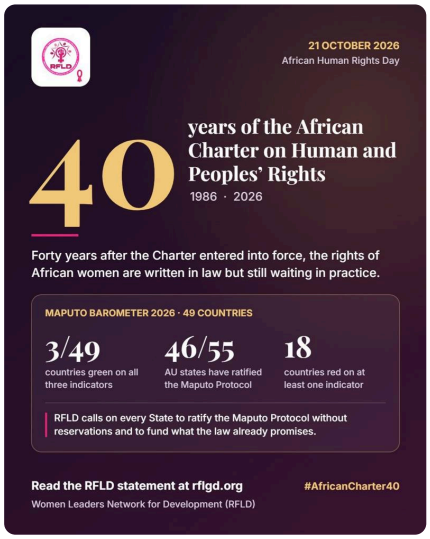


Participants and panellists in the room at the end of the side event.

Forty years of the African Charter

21 OCTOBER 2026 · AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

The session closed on 21 October 2026, forty years after the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights entered into force. RFLD marked the anniversary with a statement that drew on what the delegation had heard in Dakar.



RFLD's visual for the 40th anniversary of the African Charter.

The statement recalled the results of the Maputo Barometer 2026: only three countries are green on all three indicators, and eighteen are red on at least one. In most countries, the laws exist, yet impunity, missing budgets and social barriers keep them from changing the lives of women and girls. RFLD called on the nine African Union member States that have not ratified the Maputo Protocol to do so before July 2028, the 25th anniversary of its adoption, on States Parties to lift their reservations, and on all States to report to the Commission and fund the laws they adopt.

PART X

Results and the way forward

Results

Objective	What was achieved
Bring defenders' experience onto the main agenda	The panel "Defending without being exposed" was held under Item 5, chaired by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, in the presence of the Chairperson of the Commission.
Present evidence to the Commission	Oral statement under Observer Status N°553 with four recommendations; country data offered to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women.
Advance a regional framework on TFGBV	Side event with the Vance Center opened by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women; Expertise France dialogue moderated by RFLD; contribution to the Abuja consultation.
Give a national institution a continental platform	INF side event; audience with Senegal's Minister of Justice; working meeting at the Ministry of Family; visit to the AJS.
Strengthen member organisations	Threat-assessment matrices built by each organisation; first quarterly GESI dashboard adopted.
Deepen partnerships	Exchanges with the Ambassador of Sweden, the SEA-T Programme Director and three Special Rapporteurs; joint work with ACDHRS, WACSI, CIDH Africa, Expertise France and the Vance Center.
Visibility	Eleven press articles in Senegal and Benin, including an official statement by Senegal's Ministry of Justice; more than twenty articles published on rflgd.org.

Lessons learned

- Placing a question on the main agenda requires months of preparation with a Special Rapporteur. The panel of 12 October rested on the June convening in Dakar and on RFLD's role in the Support Group.
- National institutions are powerful advocates when they present their own practice. The INF's figures carried more weight with Senegalese authorities than any general argument.
- Evidence must be built in a form the Commission can use. The Gender Mainstreaming Tool shows that organisations can produce comparable data when the tool is in their own language.

- Safeguarding must be designed in from the start: closed venues, consent before images, aggregated data.
- Too many activities on the same day stretch a delegation. The 13 and 14 October schedules required careful planning of people and rooms.

Commitments and follow-up

Commitment	Lead	Timeline
Note of recommendations from the INF mission in Dakar	RFLD and INF	31 October 2026
Comparative note on national gender institutions in Benin and Senegal	RFLD and INF	15 November 2026
Debrief of the INF delegation in Cotonou	RFLD and INF	Within 15 days of return
Written outcomes of each panel sent to the Special Rapporteurs	RFLD	November 2026
State-by-State data separating ratification, domestication and budget	RFLD	Maputo Barometer 2027, 11 July 2027
Anonymised cases of digital violence and digital reprisals for the Resolution 591 study	RFLD and members	Ongoing
Recommendations to funders on protection costs	RFLD and panellists	First quarter 2027
Next steps towards a regional framework on TFGBV	RFLD and Vance Center	2027
Joint contributions with the AJS before the Commission	RFLD and AJS	Next ordinary session
Follow-up of the RFLD proposal to Senegal's Ministry of Justice	RFLD Senegal	From November 2026
Support to the study under Resolution 628 on climate displacement	RFLD	2026 to 2027

Recommendations

To the African Commission and its Special Rapporteurs

- Include a State-by-State account of ratification, domestication and budget for the Maputo Protocol in reports on the rights of women.
- Extend monitoring of reprisals explicitly to digital reprisals against women defenders, building on Resolutions 522 and 591.

- Consider developing an African regional framework against technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

To African Union member States

- Ratify the Maputo Protocol where it is not yet ratified, and lift reservations where they remain.
- Review registration and foreign funding rules so that they do not block small women-led organisations.
- Open budget processes to civil society scrutiny and fund the laws that protect women.

To financial partners

- Make protection costs, including security, legal support and psychosocial care, an eligible line in standard grant budgets.
- Fund women-led organisations in francophone and lusophone Africa directly or through African intermediaries.

To civil society

- Document attacks with common tools so that evidence can be compared across countries.
- Use the Commission's mechanisms, including alternative reports, and request observer status where possible.

RFLD in the media

The following articles covered RFLD's work during the session and the INF mission. Most are in French. The full list of RFLD's 2026 press coverage is available on rflgd.org.

Date	Outlet and link	Subject
15.10.2026	**Ministère de la Justice du Sénégal** justice.sec.gouv.sn/droits-des-femmes-le-rfld-propose-un-partenariat-au-ministere-de-la-justice/	Official statement on the audience: RFLD proposes a partnership to the Ministry of Justice
14.10.2026	**APA News** fr.apanews.net/society/senegal-droits-des-femmes-le-rfld-sollicite-la-justice/	Women's rights: RFLD approaches Senegal's justice system
14.10.2026	**EnQuête+** enqueteplus.com/content/lutte-contre-les-vbg-quand-le-sénégal-sinspire-du-modèle-béninois	Fighting gender-based violence: Senegal looks to the Beninese model
14.10.2026	**Walf Groupe** walf-groupe.com/blog/2026/10/14/lutte-contre-les-violences-faites-aux-femmes-le-senegal-sinspire-du-modele-beninois-pour-renforcer-son-dispositif-national/	Senegal looks to the Beninese model to strengthen its national system against violence against women

Date	Outlet and link	Subject
14.10.2026	**Senegal Direct** senegaldirect.com/promotion-des-droits-et-du-leadership-feminin/	Promotion of women's rights and leadership
13.10.2026	**PointActu** pointactu.sn/violences-faites-aux-femmes-et-aux-filles-le-senegal-sinspire-du-modele-beninois/	Violence against women and girls: Senegal looks to the Beninese model
13.10.2026	**Infos Dakar** infosdakar.com/?p=57866	The RFLD and INF mission in Dakar
09.10.2026	**CIB Plus Web TV** cibpluswebtv.com/2026/10/09/ouverture-au-forum-des-ong-cadhp-john-gbenagnon-porte-la-voix-de-la-societe-civile-africaine/	Opening of the NGO Forum: John GBENAGNON carries the voice of African civil society
09.10.2026	**EnQuête+** enqueteplus.com/content/gestion-de-la-problématique-de-leau-l'état-invité-à-prendre-ses-responsabilités	Water management: States called on to take responsibility
08.10.2026	**Seneweb** seneweb.com/en/news/Politique/eau-et-assainissement-en-afrique-les-etats-face-a-leurs-responsabilites_n_999000118.html	Water and sanitation in Africa: States facing their responsibilities
30.09.2026	**Les 4 Vérités (Benin)** les4verites.bj/le-rfld-et-linf-mutualisent-leurs-energies-pour-la-protection-des-femmes-et-des-filles-au-benin/	RFLD and the INF join forces to protect women and girls in Benin
09.2026	**ACDHRS** acdhrs.org/2026/09/dakar-preparatory-mission-builds-broad-support-for-october-ngos-forum/	Partner publication: the Dakar preparatory mission builds support for the October NGO Forum

Acknowledgements

RFLD thanks the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, its Chairperson Hon. Idrissa Sow, its Commissioners and its Secretariat; Hon. Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, Hon. Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu and Hon. Commissioner Salma Sassi; the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies and its Executive Director, Mrs Hannah Forster; and the Government and people of Senegal for their teranga.

We thank Maître Moussa Sarr, Minister of Justice of Senegal, and his team; Dr Rokhaya Diakhaté and the Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity; Ms Aminata Fall Niang and the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises; H.E. Catharina Cappelin, Ambassador of Sweden; Ms Flore DJINOU and the Institut National de la Femme of Benin; and Professor Abdou-Bakari Imorou of the Commission Béninoise des Droits de l'Homme.

We thank our panellists and partners: Konstanze Ricken and the SEA-T team at GIZ, implemented on behalf of BMZ; Sweden and Sida through NAFASI, with Magamba Network and DefendDefenders; Expertise France and the Team Europe WLICT initiative; the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice and Adaobi Egboka; WACSI and Omolara Balogun; CIDH Africa and Naji Moulay Lahsen; Aua Baldé; ARTICLE 19, Paradigm Initiative, UNFPA and FESTIC; Lawyers Without Borders; the interpreters; and every defender and organisation who travelled to Dakar.

Annex A. People who spoke in RFLD activities

Name	Function	Activity
Hon. Idrissa Sow	Chairperson, ACHPR	Main agenda panel (attended)
Hon. Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie	Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, ACHPR	NGO Forum Panel 1; Vance Center side event
Hon. Rémy Ngoy Lumbu	Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals, ACHPR	Main agenda panel (chair); INF side event; Vance Center side event
Hon. Salma Sassi	Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, IDPs and Migrants, ACHPR	Bilateral engagement
Maître Moussa Sarr	Minister of Justice, Keeper of the Seals, Senegal	Audience, 14 October
Dr Rokhaya Diakhaté	Director of the Family, Ministry of Family, Social Action and Solidarity, Senegal	INF side event (moderator); working meeting
Ms Aminata Fall Niang	President, Association des Juristes Sénégalaises	Visit, 14 October
H.E. Catharina Cappelin	Ambassador of Sweden to Senegal	Exchange, 1 October
Ms Flore Djinou	Executive Secretary, Institut National de la Femme, Benin	INF side event; visits
Prof. Abdou-Bakari Imorou	President, Commission Béninoise des Droits de l'Homme	INF side event
Mrs Hannah Forster	Executive Director, ACDHRS	NGO Forum; main agenda panel
Ms Konstanze Ricken	Programme Director, SEA-T, GIZ	Main agenda panel; visit to RFLD Dakar office
Ms Omolara Balogun	Head of Policy Influencing and Advocacy, WACSI	NGO Forum Panel 1; main agenda panel
Mr Naji Moulay Lahsen	Executive Director, CIDH Africa	NGO Forum Panel 1
Ms Aua Baldé	Member, UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances	Main agenda panel

Name	Function	Activity
Ms Adaobi Egboka	Director, Africa Initiatives, Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice	Vance Center side event
Ms Astou Diouf	ARTICLE 19	Expertise France dialogue
Mr Moussa Waly Sène	Paradigm Initiative	Expertise France dialogue
Ms Hannah Van Der Berghe	UNFPA	Expertise France dialogue
Ms Odile Barry	FESTIC	Expertise France dialogue
Mr Aymar Prigent	French Representation in Senegal	Expertise France dialogue
Mr John Gbenagnon	Director of Strategy and Development, Head of delegation, RFLD	All activities
Mrs Bathor Seck	Country Director for Senegal, RFLD	NGO Forum; INF side event; visits
Ms Simbiat Bakare	Country Representative for Nigeria, RFLD	Abuja consultation; main agenda panel
Dr Sandrine Chikou	RFLD	Vance Center side event

Annex B. Oral statement of RFLD, 13 October 2026 (as delivered, abridged)

Mr Chairperson, Honourable Commissioners, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Forty-six of the fifty-five member states of the African Union have ratified the Maputo Protocol, according to the African Union's official status list. Twenty-three years after its adoption, of the forty-nine countries we assessed this year, three score satisfactorily across all three indicators drawn from the Protocol itself. Cabo Verde. Rwanda. Namibia.

Three countries out of forty-nine. That is the distance between what this continent has signed and what it has done.

I speak on behalf of the Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement, a pan-African feminist network of 1,143 member organisations across more than 35 countries. We maintain a focal-point network in all fifty-five African Union member states, reporting quarterly from the districts where violations occur long before they appear in national statistics.

We bring four matters before this Commission, each grounded in data we produce and stand behind.

Our Maputo Barometer scores each country on three indicators taken directly from the Protocol. The legal framework against gender-based violence under Articles 4 and 5. Girls' education and retention under Article 12. Political and public representation under Article 9.

Thirteen of forty-nine countries score red on the legal framework against gender-based violence. Eighteen score red on at least one of the three indicators. Twenty-seven sit in the middle band on anti-violence law, which in practice means a statute exists and is not enforced.

Honourable Commissioners, a treaty that is ratified and unfunded produces no change in the life of a single woman. Ratification is a diplomatic act. Implementation is a legal obligation. This Commission is entitled to insist on the difference.

A protective law, once won, can be unwound. What was treated as settled is not settled. Where a legislature moves to repeal protection that the Protocol requires, it adopts a retrogressive measure under an instrument the state has freely ratified, and it warrants the attention of this Commission as such.

Our focal points across all fifty-five member states report quarterly on technology-facilitated gender-based violence. These attacks are directed at women journalists, women candidates and women human rights defenders, and they are effective. They produce the same outcome as physical threat, which is withdrawal from public life, while leaving far less evidence for the mechanisms designed to respond. Our protection frameworks were built for bodily harm. They do not capture a campaign that destroys a woman's standing without ever touching her.

In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the Central African Republic, in Sudan and in Somalia our indicators stand at red. Sexual violence continues to be used as a method of war, and impunity remains the expectation rather than the exception.

Mr Chairperson, we make four recommendations.

To the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, to include in the next report a state-by-state account distinguishing ratification, legislative domestication and identifiable budgetary allocation. RFLD places its country data at the Rapporteur's disposal for this purpose.

To the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals, to extend monitoring explicitly to digital reprisals against women defenders, building on Resolutions 522 and 591, and to treat the absence of evidence in these cases as a feature of the method rather than an absence of harm.

To this Commission, to keep the situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on its agenda and to undertake a fact-finding mission, and to address any attempt to repeal protective legislation as a retrogressive measure under the Protocol.

To member states, to open budget processes to civil society scrutiny. Access to the budget line is now the practical condition of every other right this Commission defends. Where civil society cannot see what was allocated and what was released, accountability is rhetorical.

Mr Chairperson, this Commission already knows the crisis. We came with the measurement of it, country by country, and with an offer to keep producing that measurement for as long as it is useful.

I thank you.

Annex C. Photo gallery



NGO Forum, 8 October



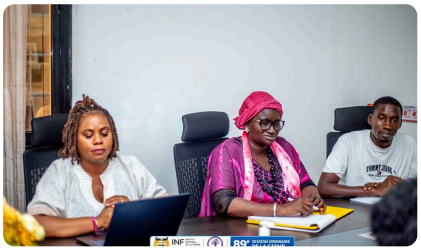
Main agenda panel, 12 October



Expertise France dialogue, 13 October



INF side event, 13 October



Ministry of Family, 14 October



AJS, 14 October



SEA-T visit, 14 October



Vance Center side event, 15 October



The delegation in Dakar

About RFLD

The Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (RFLD), the Women Leaders Network for Development, is a pan-African women-led network founded in 2013. It brings together 1,143 member organisations in more than 35 African countries.

RFLD holds Observer Status N°553 with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and is a member of the Support Group to the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (Resolution 602). It is a member of the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) coalition.

RFLD works from six offices: Accra, Ghana (Africa Office); Dakar, Senegal, and Porto-Novo, Benin (francophone hubs); Banjul, The Gambia (liaison with the African Commission); Lagos, Nigeria; and Igolo, Benin. It is registered as an international organisation by the Government of Senegal.

Its work covers sexual and reproductive health and rights, civic space and women human rights defenders, economic and climate justice, participatory governance, peace and security, and ending female genital mutilation and child marriage. RFLD publishes the Maputo Barometer and manages re-granting through the West African Feminist Fund and the Africa Grant Portfolio.



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