Press Release

Regional Workshop on Enhancing the Role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in Addressing Human Rights Violations in Elections

Nairobi, Kenya – November 12-13, 2024

Introduction

The Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), in partnership with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights East Africa Regional Office (OHCHR EARO), convened a workshop on November 12-13, 2024, at the Trademark Hotel, Gigiri. The Workshop brought together representatives from the NHRIs of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, as well as election experts, to discuss the strategies for strengthening National Human Rights Institutions' (NHRIs) capacity in safeguarding human rights during electoral processes in Africa.

Context of the Workshop

Free, transparent, and rights-respecting elections are central to Africa's democratic growth. NHRIs, with their state-mandated roles and independence, play a vital role in monitoring, reporting, and addressing human rights violations linked to elections. This workshop aimed at enhancing NHRIs capacity to respond to human rights issues in elections and provide practical strategies to safeguard citizens' rights, including those of marginalized communities, throughout the election cycle.

Highlights of the Workshop

The two-day workshop focused on critical areas for NHRIs in electoral contexts:

1. **International Human Rights Standards**: Participants examined international human rights standards applicable to elections, discussing how NHRIs can ensure governmental adherence to these obligations and hold authorities accountable.
2. **NHRI Responsibilities in Elections**: Key responsibilities such as monitoring, reporting on human rights issues, and addressing electoral complaints were discussed, emphasising the significance of NHRI oversight in promoting fair election practices.
3. **Human Rights Challenges in Elections**: The workshop addressed pressing issues including the rights to freedom of assembly and expression, and the importance of upholding participation rights for women, youth, and marginalised groups. Special attention was given to challenges in the digital space, such as misinformation and hate speech, and NHRIs' roles in managing these challenges.

4. **Monitoring and Response Skills**: Training sessions on monitoring techniques provided NHRIs with tools to track and respond to human rights conditions in real-time, enhancing their ability to address violations swiftly.
5. **Action Plan Development**: Participants collaboratively discussed an action plan for continuous monitoring and reporting before, during, and after elections. This plan includes clear procedures, regular reporting mechanisms, and timely response protocols, focusing on maintaining NHRI autonomy and resilience amidst political and resource limitations.
6. **Best Practices and Case Studies**: Participants shared experiences and best practices, identifying strategies to prevent and address election-related challenges, including violence, civil liberties suppression, and attacks on human rights defenders.

Specific Recommendations

Strengthen Collaboration with Digital Platforms and Media: It was recommended that NHRIs establish stronger partnerships with digital platforms, social media companies, and the media to monitor and address issues related to misinformation, hate speech, and online harassment during elections. By working collaboratively, NHRIs can better track harmful online content and advocate for prompt actions to mitigate its impact on the electoral process.

Develop Specialized Training for NHRI Staff on Electoral Human Rights: To further enhance their capacity, it was recommended that NHRIs invest in specialized training programs for their staff focused on electoral human rights. This will ensure that NHRIs personnel are well-equipped to monitor, investigate, and address specific human rights violations related to elections, including the protection of marginalized groups and addressing the challenges of digital election interference.

For more information, contact:

Foluso Adegalu
Programs Officer: Regional Mechanisms & SDGs
Network of African National Human Rights Institutions
fadegalu@nanhri.org; +27728988307; +254 715 479 159