

Vitoria Declaration

From May 6 to 7, 2025, human rights defenders from Africa have participated in the *Conference on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders – African Experiences* organised by eLankidetza - Basque Agency for Cooperation and Solidarity.

The discussions provided an opportunity to assess the current situation of African human rights defenders, to review our activities, to share the successes achieved in our mission to promote and protect human rights, as well as the challenges encountered.

The conference also served as a space to generate ideas on how to strengthen cooperation with African human rights defenders and to identify ways to build a solid bridge between all of us.

At the end of this high-level conference—which marks a first in the framework of relations between the Basque Country (a region in northern Spain) and Africa—we note that human rights defenders in Africa operate in very difficult contexts and face numerous challenges, even though some successes have been achieved through the establishment of civil society-led protection mechanisms, such as *Shelters*.

Participants emphasised the need for permanent dialogue between political actors in our states, African regional and sub-regional mechanisms, and human rights defenders. It is important to highlight the role of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the obstacles that hinder the implementation of its recommendations.

Participants also identified key challenges related to the funding of shelters in order to ensure better support for relocated human rights defenders.

The support of partners such as cooperation agencies—especially the Basque Agency for Cooperation and Solidarity—is more necessary than ever for the ongoing work of human rights defenders in Africa.

In light of the above, we, the participants of the conference, make the following recommendations:

- Periodically organise such conferences to facilitate the sharing of experiences among African human rights defenders and the establishment of appropriate measures to support the continuation of our mission.
- Promote partnerships between African human rights defenders and our counterparts in other regions of the world.
- Develop a collective roadmap based on the outcomes of this conference, considering the specific needs of the most at-risk human rights defenders, including women defenders, defenders working in conflict zones, and LGBTQIA+ defenders.

We express our hope that the Basque Agency for Cooperation and Solidarity will continue to provide financial, material, and technical support to human rights defenders.

Europe Congress Palace, Vitoria-Gasteiz, May 7, 2025