



Mary Maacah

It has been a great journey to be in this fellowship here at UWC. Having the opportunity to be a fellow for the African Universities Hub was quite an exciting feeling. Leaving my country to go and experience and share best practices with other African human rights defenders at UWC was exciting. I felt anxiety coming to Cape Town to meet diverse cultures.

To the African Universities Hub, I would like to take a moment to express my deep gratitude and share a few reflections on my journey. These past months have been a period of renewal both personally and professionally. AUH not only provided a safe and supportive environment but also a space for reflection, learning and healing.

Coming from a context marked by insecurity and displacement, this opportunity allowed me to regain balance, renewed confidence and aligning my advocacy goals with a clearer sense of purpose. Through the various workshops, training and interactions with fellow defenders, I have strengthened my understanding of holistic protection, wellbeing and collective care. The exchange of ideas and experiences remind me that while our struggles may differ, our commitment to justice and dignity unites us. I have also been inspired by solidarity and compassion that despite challenges, the African Universities Hub for Human Rights that continue to advocate for human rights.

The visit to the South African Parliament and Robben Island was remarkable where I witnessed not just something I read in a novel but saw the prison cell of Nelson Mandela.

On a personal level the time spent here allowed me to slow down and reflect deeply on my experiences and reconnect with my inner resilience. The psychosocial support offered through the programme was invaluable in helping me process past experiences and develop strategies for self-care. The Institute of Healing of Memories and the counselling sessions were very supportive and healed me from burnout.

I cannot go without mentioning the summer school programme that brought more defenders together. The networking and knowledge acquired in approaching human rights work as game changers.

As I return to my work, I have with me renewed energy, practical tools for risk management and a stronger network of friends and allies across Africa. Most importantly, I leave with a deeper conviction that transformation in our societies begin with care for ourselves, each other and for the values we defend.

I would like to thank the Africa Hub for their kindness, professionalism and dedication to creating a space for defenders. My gratitude goes to the entire Africa Hub team and partners who made this initiative possible. I also extend my gratitude to PUG, PLAAS, School of Government and the entire space of UWC.

About Mary Maacah Dada Ngia

Mary Maacah Dada Ngia is a human rights officer and activist from Buea, Cameroon, working with Human Rights Cameroon. She focuses on monitoring and documenting human rights violations in Cameroon's Anglophone and Far North regions, conducting prison oversight visits, and advocating for vulnerable populations. Mary leads community education campaigns on human rights, provides voter education ahead of Cameroon's October 2025 presidential election, and offers legal and psychosocial support, particularly for gender-based violence cases. She collaborates with national and international organizations to influence policy and champions the rights of marginalized communities, including women, children, detainees, and internally displaced persons affected by conflict and discrimination.

