



# DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

**UN Human Rights Council – 42<sup>nd</sup> regular session**  
**Item 10: Interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on Somalia**  
**Oral statement**

*Delivered by: Nicolas Agostini*

Mr. President, Mr. Independent Expert,

DefendDefenders welcomes your report. Your mandate is still needed to assist the Government and people of Somalia, monitor human rights developments, report to the international community, and contribute to a holistic approach to addressing Somalia's numerous human rights challenges.

We concur with your findings on the progress achieved. We should mention an overall decrease in insecurity and violence in the country, the implementation of a number of UN recommendations, security sector reform, and legal reform, including Somalia's recent accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Ongoing concerns include recurring terrorist attacks by Al-Shabaab, attacks on civilians, the humanitarian situation, high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), violations of children's rights, violations of economic, social and cultural rights, and delays in codifying quotas for women representation in Parliament, adopting authoritative electoral and political parties legislation, and operationalising of the National Human Rights Commission. With regard to the rule of law, the use of military courts should be strictly limited. We encourage the reinforcement of capacity-building efforts, including through the provision of human rights training to paralegals. You rightly mention the Somalia Joint Human Rights Programme as a significant endeavour.

The Sexual Offences Bill should be tabled and adopted by Parliament. In Somaliland, authorities should implement the Rape and Sexual Offences Law as a matter of urgency. A zero-tolerance policy for SGBV and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) must prevail throughout the country to protect the rights of women and girls.

Civic space, including respect for freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders (HRDs), civil society and journalists, is key to building a peaceful, stable, and democratic Somalia. We support all UN recommendations in this regard.

Lastly, we hope that Somalia's election to the UN Human Rights Council will be leveraged for progress. Its voting record has however been disappointing so far.

Mr. Nyanduga,

What role can civil society play ahead the historic "one person, one vote" election, and how can the international community strengthen it and better protect human rights defenders and civic space at large?

Thank you.