



DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 43rd regular session

Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the oral update by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea

Oral statement

Delivered by: Joseph Bikanda

Madam President, Madam Special Rapporteur,

DefendDefenders thanks you for your update. In 2019, the Council decided to maintain a high level of scrutiny of the human rights situation in Eritrea and extended your mandate. It made clear that membership in the Council was not a shield from scrutiny.

The lack of tangible domestic steps to address the gross, widespread, systematic, and systemic human rights violations committed in the country calls for continued attention. The fact that HRC resolution 41/1 was adopted under item 2 means that Eritrea is discussed early at this session. More significantly, it means that a hand was extended to the country's authorities.

The Government should seize this hand and fulfil its membership obligations by cooperating with special procedure mandate-holders. The “benchmarks for progress” you identified last year form a basis for such engagement.

In 2018, Eritrea was reviewed by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights after the Government submitted its first-ever report, encompassing eight periodic reports (1999-2016). The Commission formulated 72 recommendations covering a range of serious human rights issues. Meaningful reforms remain elusive, but we welcome the fact that a human rights dialogue took place – and again recently with the CEDAW Committee.

It is never too late to change course. Eritrea should do so without waiting for the Council's 44th session.

Thank you for your attention.