



# DEFEND DEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 44<sup>th</sup> regular session

## Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the annual report of the High Commissioner Oral statement

*Delivered by: Nicolas Agostini*

Madam President, Madam High Commissioner,

We welcome your annual report to the Council and the work of your Office in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. As humankind is facing a multi-faceted crisis with human rights, health, socio-economic and environmental dimensions, and as human rights defenders and civic space are under attack, your leadership is more needed than ever. Regarding the human rights implications of the Covid-19 crisis, we stress that restrictions to a number of rights, including to freedoms of peaceful assembly and movement, are legitimate, but that they must be grounded in law, temporary, non-discriminatory, necessary to protect public health, and proportionate.

Unfortunately, in a number of countries, violations have been reported. These include the use of excessive and lethal force to enforce lockdown and curfew measures, as in **Kenya** and **Rwanda**; the targeting of minorities, including LGBTIQ persons, under the guise of combating the virus, as in **Uganda**; Internet shutdowns, as in **Ethiopia**; and attacks against journalists and citizens challenging government responses to the pandemic, as in **Tanzania**. Everywhere, an increase in gender-based violence, in particular domestic violence, has been recorded.

Madam Bachelet,

The post-Covid-19 world must be more equal, just, and resilient. Human rights have a central role to play, and there is also reason for hope. People peacefully express their rejection of injustice (as in **Djibouti**, which witnessed demonstrations in June 2020) or their desire for change, including through the ballots. **Malawi** is the latest example.

We encourage you to continue prioritising the use of civic space indicators and developments as objective criteria to assess country situations, as well as civic space restrictions as early warning signs of deteriorating situations, allowing for preventative engagement. We also encourage you to use public advocacy and speak out when and where necessary.

Expressing concern over the killing of popular Oromo musician **Haacaaluu Hundeessaa** and its aftermath, we ask: what are your plans to address the situation and help Ethiopia overcome challenges ahead of elections?

Thank you.