



DEFEND DEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 45th regular session

Item 2: General Debate

Oral statement

Delivered by: Nicolas Agostini

Madam President, Madam High Commissioner,

We thank you for your update. *We will raise a number of country situations during dedicated interactive dialogues and general debates.*

We thank your Office for continuing to provide vital analysis and recommendations on promoting and protecting human rights and civic space while combatting the **Covid-19** pandemic. “We are all in this together” and we need a human rights-based approach to the crisis and its impact, including on the most vulnerable.

Unfortunately, in the East and Horn of Africa, a number of governments are targeting those debating issues related to the pandemic, its impact, or broader state-citizen relationships. The need to combat disinformation and misinformation does not allow authorities to stifle independent and critical voices and unduly restrict freedom of opinion and expression.

As **elections** approach in several countries, governments must know that they are being watched. Internet shutdowns and other human rights-incompatible measures must be put to an end.

We urge **Ethiopian** authorities to live up to the promises of the reform process launched in 2018 and allow journalists and civil society actors to conduct their activities free from hindrance. The fact that the election held in Tigray on 9 September 2020 was deemed unconstitutional should not have led to the blocking of journalists seeking to report on it.

In **Tanzania**, the deliberate stifling of civil society voices continues ahead of the 28 October presidential election. We urge authorities to unfreeze the bank accounts of the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), release arbitrarily detained human rights defenders, and cease interfering with independent actors’ legitimate activities. We urge member and observer states of this Council to pay close attention to developments in the country and stand ready to respond in a gradual manner.

Lastly, concerns are also mounting in **Uganda**, as violence has been observed in relation to party primaries to choose candidates for district and parliamentary seats. We urge all political actors in the country to re-commit to a peaceful and inclusive political process at all levels.

Thank you.