

UN Human Rights Council – 45th regular session
Item 4: General Debate
Oral statement

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Madam President,

Once again, DefendDefenders and AfricanDefenders (the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network) draw the Council's attention to ongoing widespread and systemic human rights violations in **Cameroon**. Since 2016, the Anglophone region's long-standing grievances over political and economic discrimination have been met with a bloody state repression that has resulted in over 3,000 deaths, mass displacement, and numerous violations, including arbitrary detentions. Armed separatists have also committed despicable abuses.

President Biya unilaterally announced the first regional elections to take place in December, in a move towards decentralisation. However, many opposition parties believe that a deep reform of the current electoral law is a prerequisite for free, fair and transparent elections. The Council should make accountability for grave human rights violations and abuses a priority of its strategy, signalling its commitment to justice in Cameroon. It should set benchmarks and stand ready to establish an independent investigation into Cameroon's human rights situation.

In **Egypt**, the 15-year sentence against CIHRS Director Bahey eldin Hassan sets a dangerous precedent, as counter-terrorism provisions might be used against more human rights defenders (HRDs) and other non-violent government critics, to smear and discredit them. The Council should end its shameful collective silence on Egypt's egregious rights record, which includes torture, enforced disappearances, and mass arbitrary detention. It should demand the release of arbitrarily detained citizens, including HRDs, activists, journalists and other non-violent dissenters, including women users of Tiktok detained on spurious "morality" charges.

In **Zimbabwe**, we are concerned about reports of increasing arbitrary arrests, including of opposition party members, journalists, HRDs, and student leaders, and about the arrest, abduction, torture and sexual assault of women. Regional bodies and mechanisms, as well as this Council, must demand an immediate end to these gross human rights violations.

Thank you for your attention.