



DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 45th regular session

**Item 4: Interactive dialogue with the Commission on Human Rights
in South Sudan**

Oral statement

Delivered by: John Ador Akoy (video message)

Madam President, dear Commissioners,

DefendDefenders and its local partner, the South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (“the Network”), are deeply concerned over the increased pressure faced by independent human rights and peacebuilding actors in the country.

DefendDefenders’ recent [report](#), “Targeted but Not Deterred,” identified clear patterns of repression of South Sudanese human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society actors, including journalists. The report documents how civic space in the country has shrunk, despite continuous efforts from the Network and the South Sudan Human Rights Commission to facilitate dialogue between civil society organisations and government officials and provide understanding on the nature of HRD work. Violations, many of which are committed by the National Security Service (NSS), are facilitated by general insecurity and a pervasive culture of intimidation, abuse of power, and impunity.

In particular:

- On 16 June 2020, a civil society activist was arrested and detained by NSS without access to a lawyer and without charge during nine days, due to his participation in a coalition campaign demanding financial accountability and transparency;
- On 14 September, a journalist was found guilty of defamation and sentenced to one year of imprisonment for an article in which he raised corruption accusations against the Minister of Finance;
- After the filing of a complaint before the East African Court accusing South Sudan and two oil companies of environmental pollution, the involved lawyer and several witnesses were arrested, threatened, and had to flee the country.

We therefore call on the government of South Sudan to: (i) immediately cease the harassment of HRDs, journalists, and other civil society actors; (ii) release activists being detained for engaging in legitimate, peaceful activities relating to human rights; (iii) ensure independent and effective investigations into attacks against HRDs.

Thank you.