



# DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

## UN Human Rights Council – 49<sup>th</sup> regular session

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

#### Oral statement

*Delivered by: Kathia Iskail*

Mr. President, dear Commissioners,

We thank you for your report and ongoing work to shed light on all dimensions of the human rights situation in South Sudan. DefendDefenders and its partners are particularly worried about ongoing violence, impunity, and the intensifying repression civil society is facing.

On 22 February 2022, the National Security Service (NSS) **arrested** eight journalists and one activist within the national Parliament's premises, while they were covering a press conference organised by lawmakers. This incident speaks volumes about the state of civic space in the country.

Mr. President,

This is not the time to relax the Council's scrutiny. Ahead of this session, 81 NGOs **urged** states to extend the Commission's mandate. They stressed that the Commission is the only mechanism tasked with collecting and preserving evidence of violations with a view to ensuring accountability, in the absence of contemporary criminal prosecutions.

Its mandate should continue at least until the Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS) is fully operational and functional, and until such a point as demonstrable progress has been made against human rights benchmarks and accountability, and based on an assessment of risk factors of further violations.

Any technical assistance or capacity building requested by South Sudan can be, and already is, offered as part of annual resolutions extending the Commission's mandate. However, a purely technical assistance focus, as proposed in resolution 46/29 of 2021, would be unsuitable to tackle South Sudan's human rights challenges and would risk further emboldening those who perpetrate the most serious crimes.

Thank you for your attention.