



DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 49th regular session

Item 2: General debate

Oral statement

Delivered by: Estella Kabachwezi

Mr. President, Madam High Commissioner,

We welcome your update. The work your Office conducts to promote and protect human rights and civic space around the globe, and in the East and Horn of Africa in particular, is vital.

In an upcoming report, DefendDefenders will address civic space from the perspective of human rights defenders (HRDs) with disabilities in conflict situations, focusing on Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan. Our findings show that HRDs with disabilities face attitudinal, cultural, physical, and financial challenges. They are often marginalised and subjected to threats, harassment, stigma, and social exclusion. Women HRDs with disabilities are subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence.

Yet HRDs with disabilities demonstrate courage and resilience. They struggle for visibility, recognition, and protection, advocating for the human rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs). We call on governments in the East and Horn of Africa to create and maintain an enabling environment in which PWDs can fully enjoy and exercise their rights. An open civic space is key to improving society's understanding of disability, as well as inclusion and recognition of PWDs. In this regard, HRDs with disabilities are agents of change.

Madam High Commissioner,

Regarding Cameroon, we welcome the release of a summary [report](#) on the technical mission your Office conducted in the North-West and South-West regions in 2019. However, we regret the total absence of communication around this milestone report. In addition to multilateral action to address the crisis in Cameroon, we stress the need for continued OHCHR reporting on the country.

Thank you for your attention.