



DEFEND DEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 54th regular session

Item 4: General debate

Oral statement

Delivered by: Joseph Bikanda

Mr. President,

In **Eswatini**, 2 September 2023 marked the end of the mourning period for Advocate and human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko. He was killed in cold blood in his house, in front of his wife and children. His only sin was advocating for multi-stakeholder dialogue and a constitutional reform to end the absolute Monarchy and usher in a new Swaziland governance architecture. To date, no independent investigation has been conducted to bring the perpetrators to justice. This gives credence to the allegations of state involvement in the planning of this cowardly murder. His death is not in vain as the Thulani Maseko Foundation will carry on his legacy until the people of Swaziland achieve transition from subjects to citizens.

Mr. President,

In **Egypt**, recent arrests and arbitrary detention of media figures, dissidents and/or their family members show the ongoing crackdown on basic freedoms. The continued silence of the Council and its member states on the enforced disappearance of at least 3,000 citizens, death by mistreatment and medical negligence of at least 1,200 in detention centres, sexual assault against and extrajudicial killings of hundreds will only encourage further violations. In solidarity with other partners, we call on this Council to establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism or, at the very least, adopt a follow-up joint statement at this session.

We regret that the African Union's unequivocal condemnation of unconstitutional changes of government and call for deepening democracy and collective security have been in vain. We draw the attention of this Council to the sham referendum in the **Central African Republic**, recent coups in **Gabon** and **Niger**; and systemic violations committed while countering terrorism in the **Greater Sahel**.

Citizens must have the ability to express frustrations over bad governance, corruption, poverty, and insecurity publicly, in an open civic space. Military coups are never a solution but will rather lead, we fear, to further violations.

Thank you for your attention.