



DEFEND DEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 55th regular session

Item 2: General debate on the oral update by the High Commissioner

Oral statement

Delivered by: Nicolas Agostini

Mr. President, Mr. High Commissioner,

We thank you for your update and for your opening statement during last week's High-Level Segment. We share your concerns about the multilateral order and attacks against human rights and those who defend a principled approach, addressing all situations of human rights violations based on their merits and objective criteria.

We also share your approach to **civic space**. Without an open space for democratic debate and dissent, without an environment in which human rights defenders and other independent voices are enabled, rather than hindered, the promise of democracy, the rule of law, and equality cannot be realised.

Mr. President,

Six African Union members are currently suspended due to unconstitutional changes of government. We are particularly concerned over human rights violations committed in relation to **elections** on the continent. In 2024, almost half of the world's population has been, or will go, through elections. 15 African states will. Elections are much more than voting operations on the day of the polls. They are processes. They are about freedom of expression, access to information, peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, and non-discrimination. An open civic space is a sine qua non for free, fair, and credible elections.

Mr. President,

As in the Greater Sahel, in **Burkina Faso**, concerns are mounting over the security situation. We are deeply concerned over reports of forced conscription, including of human rights defenders and junta critics, and over abductions of activists and opposition members. We call for greater international attention to the country's human rights situation.

Thank you for your attention.