



DEFEND DEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 58th regular session

Item 4: General Debate

Oral statement

*Delivered by: Estella Kabachwezi
[Video statement]*

Mr. President,

All eyes should be on Ethiopia. But by discontinuing the mandate of its investigative mechanism, ICHREE, this Council made itself blind to the country's human rights situation.

Since this regrettable decision was made, in October 2023, what have we seen?

- Ongoing violence and fighting in several regions of the country, including Amhara and Oromia, and serious tensions in Tigray;
- Attacks on independent actors, including civil society and the media, as well as against the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). This trend is exemplified by the **suspension** or re-suspension of Ethiopia's most prominent human rights organisations – we acknowledge the lifting of suspensions, announced on 3 March 2025, but caution about ongoing grave civic space restrictions, including to freedoms of expression and association;
- A failure to implement key provisions of the 2022 Pretoria Agreement, including regarding disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants;
- A flawed transitional justice process that is failing victims and survivors of the conflict in Northern Ethiopia (at least 600,000 deaths, thousands of women and girls raped, and scores displaced); and
- Bullying and threats domestically, regionally (as shown by tensions with Ethiopia's neighbours) and internationally.

CIVICUS has **downgraded** Ethiopia from "Repressed" to "Closed," its worst Civic Space Monitor rating. Ethiopia's score, the result of a multi-year assault on civic freedoms, puts it among 29 other countries in the worst category.

It is high time for states to consider bringing Ethiopia back to the Council's agenda. We specifically call on: (1) the European Union and supporters to define a credible path towards a new resolution; (2) African states to make clear they will not oppose collective action; and (3) Other states to support action, based on objective criteria, to advance justice and accountability.

Thank you for your attention.