



DEFEND DEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 58th regular session

Item 6: UPR adoptions – Ethiopia

Oral statement

Delivered by: Yared Hailemariam

[Video statement]

Check against delivery

Mr. President,

We welcome Ethiopia's acceptance of a large number of recommendations received during its fourth UPR review. We are concerned, however, about the disconnect between the official discourse and the practice.

On the positive side, we welcome the government's acceptance of recommendations pertaining to:

- **Accountability:** These include recommendations to “address impunity [...]” (no. 58.103 by Sierra Leone), “ensure that all perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses [are] held to account” (no. 58.126 by the UK), or “ensure that women and girls who are survivors of [...] sexual violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, participate in decision-making processes that affect them [...]” (no. 58.286 by Panama).
- **Peace and transitional justice:** These include recommendations on ensuring that all justice processes are victim-centred and human rights-compliant (no. 58.38 to 58.42, by Belgium, Cyprus, Ireland, Austria and Croatia), accelerating the “implementation of transitional justice and reparation mechanisms” (no. 58.49 by Cameroon), or “[fulfilling] commitments under the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in all conflict-affected areas, especially in Tigray” (no. 58.221, by Korea).

It is when we examine details of the government's replies that the picture gets more complex. The government accepted recommendations on **human rights defenders and civic space**, for instance, to “[remove] legal and procedural obstacles to the activities of civil society, the media, and NGOs” (no. 58.118 by Austria) or to “protect journalists and other human rights activists and repeal any legislation that hinders freedom of expression and opinion” (58.138 by Ghana). In practice, Ethiopia is intensifying its crackdown on independent voices, including human rights actors and those reporting on conflicts in several regions of the country.

We note the lifting of suspensions of four human rights NGOs, announced three weeks ago, but highlight the legal and administrative instability that surrounds the operations of human rights defenders and civil society. We urge the government to desist from any form of intimidation, harassment, vilification and threats directed at independent actors.

The government's replies to other civic space-related recommendations exemplify its doublespeak. Indeed, recommendations no. 58.102 (on "[ending] arbitrary detentions of human rights defenders and activists," offered by Chile) and 58.141 (on "[protecting] journalists, human rights defenders, and members of the political opposition against harassment, attacks or undue interference and end the practice of arresting, detaining and prosecuting them," offered by Germany), which are more precise and involve a commitment to act on the state's obligations, were noted (rejected).

Last, Mr. President, we are puzzled by Ethiopia's selective cooperation with human rights mechanisms and selective commitment to international human rights law. The government refused to issue a standing invitation to special procedures (recommendations no. 58.27 to 58.31) or to "fully implement the recommendations made by the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia [ICHREE]" (no. 58.35). It also refused to ratify key instruments such as the Convention on Enforced Disappearances (no. 58.3 to 58.8) or the OP-CAT (no. 58.10 and 58.11).

Ethiopia's membership in the Council should be an opportunity to reconsider its position on rejected recommendations.

Thank you for your attention.