



# DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 59<sup>th</sup> regular session

Item 2: Interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's annual report

Oral statement

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Mr. President, Mr. High Commissioner,

As your annual report shows, human rights are backsliding. Around the world, states are backtracking on their commitments, challenging norms, and undermining multilateralism.

**Civic space** indicators can be used as objective criteria to assess human rights situations, and civic space restrictions are often early warning signs of crises. We once again raise the alarm over attacks against human rights defenders (HRDs), civil society actors and journalists across the East and Horn of Africa, DefendDefenders' core mandate.

In **Ethiopia**, we continue to denounce the severe and undue restrictions human rights actors face. In recent months, against a backdrop of persecution of those calling for peace, or simply for an inclusive transitional justice process, several HRDs have gone into exile. As domestic institutions are failing the victims and survivors, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) was discontinued too early. This Council should now define a clear path towards a new resolution on Ethiopia.

In **Tanzania**, we condemn the **recent** arrests, detentions and deportations of former officials, including a former Chief Justice and a former Justice Minister of Kenya, and civil society members. All travelled to Tanzania to attend the court case of opposition leader Tundu Lissu, who has been charged with "treason." Before being dumped at Tanzania's borders, Ugandan journalist Agather Atuhaire and Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi were held incommunicado, stripped naked, tortured, and sexually abused by security operatives – unjustifiable, criminal acts that must be investigated with a view to holding all those responsible to account.

With elections approaching, risk factors of violations are multiplying. After years of relative opening, including resumption by the government of its dialogue with the country's vibrant civil society, it is time for UN and African human rights mechanisms to enhance their attention to Tanzania.

Tanzania is too big to fail, and East Africa cannot afford another major human rights crisis.

Thank you for your attention.