

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

Press Brief

20th August 2009

KAMPALA: Launch of Electoral Reform Initiative marks an important step on road to fair and free elections in Uganda

A new initiative to spearhead electoral reform in Uganda, the Citizens Coalition on Electoral Democracy in Uganda (CCEDU) was launched yesterday, on 19th August 2009 in Kampala. The initiative organized by civil society intends to mobilize citizens to promote electoral reforms crucial in the run up to the 2011 elections and beyond.

The launch, held at the Grand Imperial hotel in Kampala, was presided over by Speaker of the Uganda parliament, Hon. Edward Kiwanuka Ssekandi and the key note address was given by the Chairperson of the Uganda Electoral Commission, Engineer Dr. Badru Kiggundu.

The Coalition is spearheaded by a working group comprising of Ugandan civil society organizations including, FIDA –U, National NGO Forum, DENIVA and Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), which is the focal point for the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net) in Uganda.

The interest generated by the initiative is clear. The launch was attended by a range of key actors: civil society group leaders and strategic civil society partners including National Democratic and Republican Institute representatives, officials from the European Union, foreign missions in Uganda and development partners.

The presentation on the proposed electoral reforms called for by CCEDU, presented by Mr. Godbar Tumushabe of ACODE, highlighted some of the following:

- Devolution of power from the executive to the strategic institutions of parliament and the Electoral Commission by amending chapter 5 and article 93 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda to allow the Electoral Commission to initiate electoral reform legislation and to allow for Private Members' Bills.
- Abolishment of special interest group representation in parliament and likewise the prohibition of house members occupying both ministerial and representative positions. In this regard, CCEDU recommended amendments to article 113(1), 78(1) (c) and a radical review of the Political Parties and Organizations Act.
- A reinstatement of presidential term limits in order to ensure smooth transfer of power at party and national political levels.
- A review of article 60(i) of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda to enhance accountability and transparency in the appointment of electoral commissioners with clear guide lines on personal qualifications.

Other issues raised during the launch key to CCEDU's work are efforts to end the creation of new districts and other administrative units with the base objective of

pursuing unqualified electoral advantage in total disregard to national scientific policy formulation. CCEDU thus proposed an immediate moratorium on the exercise until a sound national policy is developed by the Electoral Commission through amendment of article 63 of the National Constitution.

Representatives of the Coalition promised to advocate for funding of political parties as national institutions and as a preemptive measure to help curb rampant cases of election related fraud and electoral offences in Uganda. CCEDU further spelt out proposed constitutional penalties for institutional and individual defaulters which it wants entrenched in the national constitution and noted that these penalties would help end the perpetuation of the culture of impunity which has customarily undermined electoral processes in Uganda.

Key to CCEDU's activities will be structured civic education to enhance voter competence and consciousness which will seek to empower citizens to demand and defend their constitutional rights.

Local political party leaders, community based organization leaders; including several former and sitting Members of Parliament alike addressed the forum and reiterated the urgent need for constitutional review in Uganda and specifically the devolution of executive power.

EHAHRDP-Net Chairperson, Mr Hassan Shire Sheikh, remarked after attending the launch on the praiseworthy engagement by both members of civil society and of the Ugandan government and authorities in discussion on electoral reform in Uganda; he went on to comment on how such debate and collaboration should be taken as a model in other countries in the region.

The 2011 elections will evidently be at the heart of all the efforts by the new initiative; to achieve its objectives, with this date in mind, the Coalition rounded-up the event by committing to engaging with a diverse spectrum of players including Government, Parliament but political parties, media houses, youth and women groups as indispensable partners in the pursuit of better governance practice in Uganda.

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