

## EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

Press Release

1<sup>st</sup> October 2009

### GENEVA: **UN Rights Council should turn commitment into action in Somalia**

The East and Horn of African Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) today called on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to ensure that the recognition shown by Council representatives of the gravity of the human rights crisis in Somalia during this Council session is converted into concrete action aimed at ending impunity and establishing a permanent international human rights presence in Somalia.

In his statement to the Council, EHAHRDP Executive Director, Mr Hassan Shire, commended the consensus reached at the Council of the need to prioritise the human rights situation in Somalia but also stressed that the Council must now step up efforts aimed at monitoring the situation on the ground and renew the mandate of the UN Independent Expert on Somalia.

EHAHRDP called on the Council to pay specific attention to the situation of human rights defenders (HRDs). As one of the sole voices speaking out against the ongoing violations on the ground, defenders, and particularly journalists, have paid a high price: they face harassment, intimidation and the continued risk of being victim of targeted killings.

Mr Shire pointed out how the situation of HRDs is closely linked to two other issues requiring immediate attention by the Council: impunity and the absence of a permanent international human rights presence on the ground.

*“The culture of impunity in Somalia is deeply rooted; it aggravates insecurity, undermines the support of the Somali population for the Transitional Government and weakens any chances of lasting peace. It also undermines the work and protection of human rights defenders: none of the targeted killings of journalists committed in 2009 have of yet been investigated giving more or less free reign to those bent on silencing them”* said Mr Shire.

He also stressed the need for the current absence of international monitoring to be dealt with: *“It has obscured the true extent of the crisis amongst key actors, deepened the culture of impunity and placed Somali defenders in a very isolated and vulnerable position”*.

EHAHRDP’s intervention concluded by calling on the Council to commit to human rights accountability notably by supporting efforts to establish a more permanent international human rights presence on the ground, under the auspices of the Officer of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) or the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), and by backing plans to set-up an international commission of inquiry in order to map out of past, present and future violations.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact Ms Hassan Shire Sheikh, Executive Director of EHAHRDP on + 256 772 753 753., Ms Fartuun Adan , Executive Director of Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre on +4122 716 48 48 or Ms Laetitia Bader, Human Rights Officer at EHAHRDP on + 256 775 141 756 or [advocacy@defenddefenders.org](mailto:advocacy@defenddefenders.org) ( for French speakers).

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