

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

Press Release

2nd October 2009

GENEVA: **Ensure regular international reporting on the human rights situation in Burundi**

The East and Horn of African Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) called on UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) representatives and on the Burundian government yesterday to ensure regular international reporting on the human rights situation in Burundi by allowing the Independent Expert on Burundi to report to the Council in 2010.

In its intervention to the Council, EHAHRDP stressed how allowing the Independent Expert to report to the Council would support ongoing progress in the human rights situation and enhance chances of free and fair elections in 2010. EHAHRDP called on the Council and the Independent Expert to pay attention to three issues of particular concern.

The first being the ongoing attacks, threats and harassment of trade unionists in Burundi, symbolised by the lengthy detention and trial of Juvenal Rududura, the Vice President of the judicial trade union, released after seven months in detention in July 2009.

Coupled with this are the increasing restrictions on rights of freedom of expression and association of the media and civil society organizations notably the pre-trial detention and trial of journalist Jean-Claude Kavumbagu and the assassination of anti-corruption activist Ernest Manirumva

“Burundi is often praised for its vibrant civil society.... Given the key role that independent civil society can play in the 2010 elections, these developments are of utmost concern” said Mr Shire Sheikh, Executive Director of EHAHRDP, in his intervention to the Council.

Mr Shire then went to raise the issue of the new Criminal Code describing it as both a victory for justice but also a step back on the road to fulfilling the country's human rights obligations as it abolishes the death penalty whilst also containing a provision that criminalises consensual same sex relationships. EHAHRDP has in fact documented how the provision is already having a negative impact on the ground notably for sexual minority rights groups.

According to EHAHRDP, the Independent Expert's mandate is therefore more vital than ever before: as an independent reporting mechanism it can help to ensure regular monitoring of developments on the ground and can help to ensure that the Burundian authorities receive targeted technical assistance notably to ensure the establishment of an institutional framework necessary for the protection and promotion of human rights.

Mr Hassan Shire therefore concluded his intervention by calling on the Council to allow the Independent Expert to report to the Council in 2010, pointing out how: *‘The positive role of the Mandate will be reduced and the chances of fair and peaceful elections in Burundi somewhat weakened however if the mandate holder is prevented from reporting to the Council on an annual basis’*.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact Ms Hassan Shire Sheikh, Executive Director of EHAHRDP on + 256 772 753 753 or Ms Laetitia Bader, Human Rights Officer at EHAHRDP on + 256 775 141 756 or advocacy@defenddefenders.org (for French speakers).

EHAHRD-Net Index GEN 030/011/2009