

## EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

### Public Statement

#### **EHAHRD-Net Index: Gen 012/011/2008 (Public)**

29<sup>th</sup> March 2008

#### **KAMPALA: EHAHRD-Net welcomes appointment of Ms Margaret Sekaggya as the new Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders but warns against attacks on the mandate.**

EHAHRD-Net welcomes the adoption by the UN Human Rights Council of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and the nomination of Ms Margaret Sekaggya, the current Chairperson of the Ugandan Human Rights Commission, as the new mandate holder.

EHAHRD-Net recognizes and applauds the commitment shown towards the protection of human rights defenders by the Special Representative and key actors in the international community since the establishment of this mandate in 2000.

It would like to highlight the devotion and the standard setting work of Ms Hina Jilani throughout her tenure as Special Representative since 2000 and in particular the analytical framework laid out in her most recent report which will help to further assess the situation of defenders on the ground and ensure greater compliance of states with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

We would also like to congratulate the Norwegian mission in Geneva for its persistent efforts aimed at maintaining the mandate intact.

“We welcome the decision to appoint Ms Sekaggya as the new mandate holder. She has played an important role in establishing and building the credibility of the Uganda Human Rights Commission and in promoting the establishment of such commissions throughout our sub-region” declared Hassan Shire, the Chairperson of EHAHRD- Net. “We hope that the new mandate-holder will use this opportunity to highlight the plight of human rights defenders in the sub-region of the East and Horn of Africa and hope that Ms. Sekaggya will maintain her predecessor’s practise of working hand in hand with regional human rights defenders mechanisms and networks. Such entities and cooperation are fundamental to the protection of defenders working in the global south.”

EHAHRDP would, however, also like to express its concern about the apparent attempts by several states to weaken the mandate as well as an increasingly negative attitude expressed towards human rights defenders in general and certain groups of HRDs in particular during the recent 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

“We hope that the decision to transform the mandate from Special Representative into Special Rapporteur will not set a precedent and will not weaken the mandate in any way. Ms Segakgya will have to counter any such tendencies and we look forward to working closely with Ms Sekaggya in her endeavours aimed at re-enforcing the protection of defenders in the sub-region and throughout the world” concludes Hassan Shire.

**EHAHRDP calls on the new Special Rapporteur:**

To use her expertise and in-depth knowledge of East and also the Horn of Africa to increase the attention accorded to the situation of human rights defenders and the visibility granted to HRDs in this sub-region;

To use her new position as a means of encouraging other experts from Sub-Saharan Africa in general, and from the East and Horn of Africa in particular, to play a greater role in the UN human rights system;

To encourage states and other relevant stakeholders to include the situation facing human rights defenders in all Universal Peer Review (UPR) reports;

To continue to contribute to the creation of regional mechanisms, instruments and networks for the protection of human rights defenders and to collaborate and help to re-enforce those in existence.

**EHAHRDP calls on the international community and Human Rights Council members:**

To ensure continued collaboration with the mandate and to ensure that the mandate holder receives the financial, logistical and political support needed to pursue her work;

To ensure that the new mandate holder is given the same access to relevant actors, notably within the UN system, as that which was accorded to her predecessor;

To ensure that the mandate-holder receives the support and co-operation, both logistical and political, that she will need from governmental authorities in the lead up to and during her country visits.

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