

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

Urgent Action

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KAMPALA: Ugandan government speaks out in favour of international human rights and justice mechanisms

The Ugandan government has shown its support for victims of human rights violations by publicly speaking out in favour of international justice and independent human rights monitoring mechanisms at two key events; the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) encourages other governments in the East African region to follow its lead.

Uganda was one amongst several African States that last week defied the position of Egypt, which has up-till-date taken the leadership of the African Group at the UN human rights Council, by speaking out in favour of the creation of a special mechanism to monitor the human rights situation in Sudan.

In a powerful speech evidently directed at Egypt, which has used its leadership of the African group to undermine the country specific mandates of the Council, Mr Justinian Kateera, First Secretary at the Ugandan Mission in Geneva, addressed the Council: *"We look forward to a time when the positions of the [African] group are represented accurately...From the Holocaust to apartheid to the genocide in Rwanda we were always reminded that never again should we allow these events to happen through inaction or political expediency...today we have reassert the credibility of the Human Rights Council."*

Similarly, Uganda was the only country in the East African region, which publicly spoke out in favour of the ICC at a recent meeting of African State Parties to the International Criminal Court (ICC) which took place in Addis Ababa on the 8th/9th June 2009. In fact, Uganda publicly stood up during the meeting to express its continued commitment to the ICC and the Rome Statute.

Uganda has in the past concretely recognized the importance and potential of the ICC in their fight against impunity for the most serious crimes by calling on the prosecutor to intervene in Northern Uganda. This continued support, in spite of the very negative stance taken by many African State since the release of the arrest warrant against the Sudanese President Al-Bashir, can be seen not only by the most recent position by the government at the Addis meeting, but also by its willingness to host the review of the Statute of Rome next year in Kampala.

"Uganda's public support for these mechanisms, at a time when both the ICC and the UN Human Rights Council have received very negative press both by African leaders and, in the case of the former, our media, is vital" says Mr Hassan Shire Sheikh, Executive Director of EHAHRDP. "Time and again we have seen how the failure to end impunity and ensure justice has hampered efforts to bring about lasting peace and to end violations of human rights. We therefore encourage the Ugandan government to continue to build on this position and to take the lead in encouraging other States in East Africa to speak out in favour of international human rights mechanisms and justice."

Background

EHAHRDP and members of the Network have been closely involved with efforts aimed at promoting a pro-human rights African Group membership at the Council and lobbying key states to support the renewal of country mandates, notably the mandates of the Independent Experts on Somalia and Burundi and the Special Rapporteur on Sudan. EHAHRDP has recently also been engaged in ensuring that States in its region of concern Party to the International Criminal Court (ICC) take a more positive stance towards the ICC. EHAHRDP drafted a campaign letter prior to the meeting in Addis Ababa which was presented by its members to the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the respective countries and also produced an opinion piece which was printed in the East African calling on the States to maintain the support which they had given to the Court upon its establishment.

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