

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROJECT

Press Release

African States Should Commit to Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders

29th November 2013

The adoption of a resolution on protecting women human rights defenders at the UN General Assembly on 27th November 2013 sends a clear message about this issue's global importance. However, with no African State having co-sponsored the resolution, the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project calls today - on International Women Human Rights Defenders Day - for governments across Africa to commit to protecting women human rights defenders.

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) include women advocating respect of all human rights as well as all those of any gender who defend the rights of women and work on issues related to gender equality. In Africa, WHRDs make a vital contribution to promoting democracy, peace, security, development and building societies and communities where the human rights of all are respected. In the course of this work, many WHRDs face a range of violations and abuses – including gender-based violence – at the hands of State and non-State actors.

The risks and violations experienced by WHRDs have been widely recognized. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya, addressed the issue in her 2010 report to the Human Rights Council. In October 2012, concerned by the difficult environment in which WHRDs work, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights passed a resolution on women defenders and commissioned a study on the situation of WHRDs in Africa.

The recent resolution at the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, introduced by Norway, has been the subject of intense negotiations over the past few weeks. While a group of 71 non-governmental organizations from Africa [wrote](#) to African state representatives during the negotiations calling for their support to the resolution, no members of the African Group co-sponsored the resolution and instead sought to weaken the text, for example by emphasizing the duties and responsibilities of WHRDs.

“The African Group's unwillingness to support a strong and progressive text for the protection of women human rights defenders is deeply disappointing,” said Hassan Shire, Executive Director of EHAHRDP. “African governments should take practical and urgent measures to protect WHRDs and combat the impunity that currently prevails when their rights are violated.”

Despite the myriad challenges that they face, WHRDs have been responsible for many human rights achievements in Africa. Throughout this year's 16 days of activism against gender based violence, EHAHRDP is showcasing and honouring their work in an online campaign and calling on States to protect WHRDs.

*To take part in the online campaign to **#protectWHRDs**, please visit EHAHRDP's pages on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/humanrightsdefendersproject>, on Twitter @EHAHRDP, and on our website at*
