

February, 2008

To: African Heads of State

Re: Presidency of the UN Human Rights Council

As a diverse group of African human rights and civil society organizations, we look forward to a productive upcoming African presidency of the UN Human Rights Council in 2008-2009. In light both of the key position held by the African Group at the Council and of Africa's recent progressive steps on human rights through the adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, we believe it is particularly important that Africa is represented in this role by a recognized human rights leader from our continent.

We are therefore writing to you following the recent African Union meeting to urge you to promote the selection of an African State which can serve as a human rights leader and to encourage you to oppose the selection of any state which does not uphold the highest standards of human rights, in line with the spirit of UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251 creating the Council.

The African Presidency of the Human Rights Council is clearly a unique opportunity to bring to the fore the human rights issues which are of critical concern to Africans by selecting an African state which has served as a proponent of human rights both at a national and international level.

Nevertheless, we are concerned that the direction taken by the leadership within the African Group since the Council was established, a leadership which has come to the fore with very little input or resistance from other African members, has failed to encourage or develop this sort of leadership and has at times taken a position which largely undermines the highest standards of human rights that are required of Council members.

In fact, under the current leadership, several of the draft resolutions presented by the Group of African States as well as the group's voting record have been largely at odds with the founding principles of the Council.

Of particular concern has been the tendency to challenge the independence of the special procedures mechanisms and the very existence of the country mandates, which serve an essential role in the current human rights protection mechanism, despite the fact that they enjoyed the support of African delegations whose opinions have largely been ignored by bloc 'leaders'. The recent Council decision to terminate the mandate of the expert group on Sudan is a powerful example of the position taken by the current African leadership and its potentially detrimental consequences.

The current process of selection within the African group, both for membership and for the Presidency, lacks transparency and appears to thwart the Council's aim of tackling the politicised nature of the UN human rights system. In fact, countries from the region whose human rights records should be applauded and whose membership would be a valuable addition to the Council have been discouraged from seeking a seat in part as a result of power politics.

We therefore urge you in your involvement in the Presidency selection process:

- To reject any possible candidates for the Presidency who have failed to uphold the highest human rights records, to cooperate with the Council, and prevent the passing of positive, pro-human rights measures within the council;
- To urge potential candidates with positive human rights records to present their candidacy for the Presidency, for chair of the Africa Group, and for elections to the Council held in May;
- To support countries who have in the past promoted and supported the work of Special Rapporteurs, notably African countries who had appealed for their country specific mandates to be preserved;
- To ensure that the diplomatic representatives of African states are given the resources and support that they need to participate in the work of the Council;
- To ensure that the selection of the next President is transparent and based on an objective assessment of the state's commitment to and promotion of human rights rather than the result of power politics, reciprocal agreements, and vote trading.

The African presidency of the Human Rights Council is a unique opportunity; not only can it help to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of the Council, but it can also shape the future of human rights in Africa by drawing international attention to Africa's specific concerns and by giving countries within the region who serve as proponents of human rights both the standing and space they deserve.

Many thanks for giving importance to this selection.

Sincerely,

Hassan Shire Sheikh

Executive Director
East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project(EHAHRDP)
Uganda

Bahey Eldin Hassan

Director
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
Egypt

Frank Kamunga Cibangu

Executive Director
Africa Democracy Forum (ADF)
Kenya

Judge Mukete Tahle Itoe

Global Secretary General
Global Network for Good Governance(GNKG)
Rep. of Cameroon

Jamils Richard Achunji Anguaseh

Global Welfare Association (GLOWA)
Rep. of Cameroon

Dieudonné Zognong

President,
Humanus International
Rep. of Cameroon

Maximilienne NGO MBE

Secrétaire Générale de PRODHOP
Solidarité pour la Promotion des droits de l'Homme et des Peuples
Rep. of Cameroon

Joseph Mawuli Mensah

Executive Secretary
Hopelink International
Ghana

Anyakwee Nsirimovu

Executive Director
Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL)
Nigeria

Babatunde Oluajo

Coordinator
Africa Freedom of Information Centre
Nigeria

G. Jasper Cumme, III

Center for Transparency & Accountability in Liberia
Liberia

Christophe Babu Kalonji

General Director
Droits Humains Sans Frontieres
Democratic Republic of Congo

Guelord Bahati Mbaenda,

Executive Director
Action des jeunes pour le Développement Communautaire et la Paix (ADECOP)
Democratic Republic of Congo

Paul KASONGO NGOY

President du Conseil d'Evaluation
Ongdh MANIEMA LIBERTES (MALI)
Democratic Republic of Congo

Hafez Abu Seada

Secretary General
The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR)
Egypt

Gamal Eid

Executive Director
Arabic Network for Human Rights Information
Egypt

Hossam Bahgat

Director
The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
Egypt

Aamna Aabouayach

President
Moroccan Organization for Human Rights
Morocco

Elhabib Belkouch

Chairman
Centre for Human Rights and Democracy Studies
Morocco

Yosef Mulugeta

Secretary General
Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO)
Ethiopia

Elizabeth Chyrum

Executive Director
Human Rights Concern- Eritrea (HRCE)
Eritrea

Samuel Bizen

Chairperson
Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR)
Eritrea

Jean Noël Abdi

President
Ligue Djiboutienne des Droits Humains(LDDH)
Djibouti

Omar Faruk Osman

Secretary General
National Union of Somali Journalist-Somalia
East Africa Journalist Federation-Djibouti

Ahmed Mohamed Ali “Kiimiko”

Chairman
Somali Human Rights Defenders Network
Somalia
EHAHRDP/Net Focal Point for Somalia

Abdurashid Abdulle Abikar

Chairman
Center for Youth and Democracy –CYD- Mogadishu
Somalia.

Ali Said Omar Ibrahim

President
Center for Peace and Democracy (CPD)
Somalia

Jibril Ibrahim Abdulle

Director
Centre for Research and Dialogue
Somalia

Abdinasir Osman Ahmed

Chairman
Peace and Human Rights Network (PHRN)
Somalia

Ali Abdullahi Egal

Chairman
Fanole Human Rights Organization (FAHRO)
Somalia

Alia Aden Abdi

Chairwoman
Hiran Women Action on Advocacy for Peace & Human Rights (HIWA)
Somalia

Suleiman Ismail Bolaleh

Chairman
Horn of Africa Human Rights Watch Committee (HORNWATCH)
Somaliland

Hashim Ahmed

Acting Director
Sudan Organization Against Torture (SOAT)
Sudan
EHAHRDP/Net Focal Point for Sudan

A. Monim Elgak

Acting Director
Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA)
Sudan

Samuel Muhochi

Chairperson
Kenyan National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders
Kenya
EHAHRDP/Net Focal Point for Kenya

Helen Kijo-Bisimba

Executive Director
Legal and Human Rights Centre
Tanzania
EHAHRDP/Net Focal Point for Tanzania

Livingstone Sewanyana

Executive Director
Foundation for Human Rights Initiative
Uganda
EHAHRDP/Net Focal Point for Uganda

Ndifuna Mohammed

National Coordinator
Human Rights Network (HURINET)
Uganda

Nkunda Dismas

Co-Director
International Refugee Rights Initiative
Uganda

Didace Kanyugu

Acting Director
Action des Chretiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT)
Burundi

Soodhakur Ramlallah

Assistant Editor Mauritius Times
Secretary Forum of Mauritian Journalists (FMJ)
Mauritius (Indian Ocean)

Irene Petras

Executive Director
Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights
Zimbabwe

Thamsanqa Ngwenya

Executive Director
Centre for Public Participation
South Africa

Corlett Letlojane

Director
Human Rights Institute of South Africa
South Africa