

March 31, 2010

To: African Heads of State

Re: May 2010 UN Human Rights Council elections

Your Excellency,

As a diverse group of African human rights organizations engaged with the UN Human Rights Council (Council) in Geneva we urge you to seize the opportunity of the forthcoming May 2010 Council elections to ensure that the African group encourages the states from our continent with a human rights record of the 'highest standard' to run for election, in line with the spirit of UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251 creating the Council.

We would like to start off by applauding the competitive elections among the African candidates during last year's Council election and would like to encourage the African group to support competition for the elections this year.

We are however writing to express our concern about several recent and established procedures within the selection process that risk to undermine the level of competition and transparency of elections within the African group.

First of all, we are concerned that the nomination of candidates within the African Union (AU) Ministerial Committee on African Candidatures within the International System, a body in which a limited number of states are represented, prevents certain states from having their voices heard and heightens the risk of power politics, reciprocal agreements, and vote trading. In fact, in past years, countries from our continent 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 as a result of considerations unrelated to their commitment to human rights promotion.

We would also like to express our concern by the recent decision of the AU Executive Council to only officially endorse two candidates, notably Libya and Mauritania, for this year's election: four African seats are up for re-election in May and the elections are now just over a month away. One of the key aims of the Council was to improve the membership of the main UN human rights mechanisms, notably by ensuring that Member States are able to elect members based on the "contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights"; ensuring a competitive slate is therefore crucial.

We therefore urge you:

- To call for greater transparency and representation within the selection process of candidates in the AU Ministerial Committee on African Candidatures within the International System;
- To encourage the African group to ensure competitive elections by selecting in a fair and transparent manner at least five candidates for the forthcoming May 2010 elections;

- To closely monitor the human rights records of states nominated to run; and
- To ensure that states are elected 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.

Commitment by the African group to the Council election process can not only 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,

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