

Silence is Not an Option!

Petition for immediate action by the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The undersigned organisations urge the Human Rights Council to act urgently to respond to the violent repression of demonstrations currently underway in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond. The Human Rights Council cannot be a passive bystander of such events, during which the lives of ordinary citizens have been taken or put at risk through violent and unlawful repression. Hundreds of thousands of people in several countries have taken to the streets to peacefully call for their fundamental rights and freedoms to be respected. Several hundred demonstrators have been killed. Protestors, journalists, human rights defenders, former political prisoners and humanitarian workers have been beaten or arbitrarily arrested. In the face of such wide-spread rights violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms the United Nations Human Rights Council can no longer remain silent. The Council should:

- Unequivocally condemn the killing of hundreds of demonstrators over the past few weeks, and call for an immediate cessation of killings like these, including in Libya where they are still taking place.
- Condemn all forms of excessive use of force to repress demonstrations, including the wide spread use of arbitrary arrest, detention and torture of peaceful demonstrators.
- Condemn unprecedented restrictions which undermine access to information and violate freedom of expression, such as the blocking of internet services and telecommunications and attacks against media professionals.
- Remind all governments that are experiencing mass and widespread demonstrations to respect and protect freedom of assembly and association, and allow their citizens to freely express their opinions through peaceful rallies and demonstrations, in accordance with their international obligations.
- Reaffirm that it is the responsibility of governments to provide protection for human rights defenders and guarantee their safety.
- Call for the immediate release of people arbitrarily detained during such protests.
- Assert that there should be no reprisals against people who have taken part in demonstrations.
- Remind states of their obligations under article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections”.
- Call on Governments that are or that have experienced wide-spread protests to ensure that independent investigations into rights violations committed during the demonstrations are conducted promptly and that those responsible for such violations are prosecuted.

- Draw lessons from the experience and, where it exists, good practice of governments regarding the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in situations of large peaceful demonstrations.

Many of those demonstrating are rejecting governments that have deprived citizens of human rights and fundamental freedoms over many decades. The Council should therefore also seek to address the root causes of these peaceful protests, including the denial of fundamental civil, political, social and economic rights.

Finally, in view of the provisions contained in General Assembly resolution 60/251, members of the Council are expected to “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights”. Due to the recent killing of protestors in Libya and Bahrain and the systematic and widespread repression of the demonstrations, the General Assembly should immediately suspend the rights of membership of both these countries in the United Nations Human Rights Council for having committed gross and systematic violations of human rights.

21 February 2011

African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)

African Democracy Forum

Amnesty International

Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC)

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)

CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

Conectas Direitos Humanos

Democracy Coalition Project

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

Human Rights Agenda – Nigeria

Human Rights Watch

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Service for Human Rights

Partnership for Justice – Nigeria

West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network