

Geneva, 28 March 2011

SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION:

Call for United Nations Human Rights Council *“Special Session on the Human Rights Situation in Yemen”*

Excellency,

As Human Rights non-governmental organizations from all regions of the world, we express our grave concern that the already worrying human rights situation in Yemen has dramatically deteriorated over the last week into a full-fledged human rights crisis to which the Council is yet to respond.

Authorities in Yemen have violently suppressed protests, with members of security forces using live ammunition against protesters in the streets of Sana’a, Aden, Tai’zz, and other localities.

Since 12 February 2011, protests have become a daily occurrence in Sana’a and have spread to other cities in Yemen, including Aden in the south, al-Hudaydah in the west, and al-Mukalla in the region of Hadramawt in the east. As the protests have spread, the response of the security forces has hardened. Reports of grossly excessive use of force have been commonplace. Security forces – some wearing uniform, others plain clothes – have used electric shock batons and live ammunition.

Authorities stood by as snipers and gunmen, suspected to be associated with the government, shot dead over 50 protesters on 18 March, 2011, in Sana’a in the location called Taghyeer Square. So far, at least 80 people have been killed during protests in Yemen since they started in February 2011. Hundreds of protesters have been injured. Scores of them have been arrested and arbitrarily detained in connection with the demonstrations, including civil society activists. Many of them have since been released without charge, but dozens arrested in the south continue to be detained without charge. Journalists have also come under attack. In response to the situation, some senior Yemeni officials, including the Yemeni Ambassador to the UN in New York, and several military generals, have resigned. In response to ongoing protests and calls for him to step down, President Saleh of Yemen has stated that he will use “any means necessary” to maintain power.

A national state of emergency has also been declared, but not yet notified to States Parties of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as required by the Covenant. On 23 March, Yemen’s parliament passed an emergency law giving security forces extensive powers of detention without being bound by the Criminal Procedure Law and imposing heavy restrictions on public assembly, which could be used to ban demonstrations. The emergency law has also given the authorities the power to suspend, seize, and confiscate “all media... and means of expression.”

The grave human rights violations, including to the right to life, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, and the right to health, being carried out by the government of Yemen against pro-democracy protestors violate the ICCPR, the ICESR and other UN human rights instruments. On 22 March, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights deplored the killings in Yemen and stressed that “All such violations of human rights must

indeed be investigated by independent and impartial mechanisms.”

Although the authorities have announced the opening of investigations into some of the killings of protesters, no judicial proceedings appear to have been launched against suspected perpetrators of unlawful actions among the security forces. This reflects a long-standing failure on the part of the Yemeni authorities to hold security forces accountable for serious human rights violations.

The situation in Yemen is representative of a pattern of wide-scale violations of fundamental rights and freedoms, including the rights to peaceful assembly and association, which need to be dealt with urgently by the international community. It is incumbent on the members of the Council to ensure that the Council fulfills its duty to respond promptly to human rights emergencies by urgently examining the allegations of grave human rights violations being carried out in Yemen. In the face of grave and widespread violations such as those being carried out in Yemen, silence is not an option.

We therefore urge the Council to hold, without delay, a “*Special Session on the Human Rights Situation in Yemen.*”

The signatories also recall that the Human Rights Council still needs to respond to the human rights crisis in Bahrain, which is the subject of a call made by many of them on 18 March 2011 for an Urgent Debate of the Council.

Signatories:

African Democracy Forum (ADF)

Amnesty International

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

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

CIVICUS

Democracy Coalition Project (DCP)

East and Horn of African Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP)

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Open Society Foundations (OSF)

Partnership for Justice and Human Rights Agenda, Nigeria

West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN)