

To: Representatives of African States to the United Nations in New York
Ministries of Foreign Affairs of African States

17th November 2013

Excellencies,

RE: DRAFT RESOLUTION ON PROTECTING WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

We write to you as a group of African human rights defenders and civil society organizations located across the continent working at national, regional and international levels. We are following negotiations on the draft resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders currently being advanced in the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, with great interest. This is the first time a draft resolution has been put forward focusing exclusively on the protection of women human rights defenders. It is a hugely significant and important initiative for African societies.

Women who engage in the defence of all human rights and all those who defend the rights of women and work on issues related to gender equality make a vital contribution to democratic processes, securing and maintaining peace, and ensuring security, development and respect for human rights in our communities. However, in doing this work, women human rights defenders can face a range of violations and abuses – including gender-based violence – at the hands of State and non-State actors. States need to pay attention to the risks faced by women human rights defenders, acknowledge the value of their role, and commit to ensuring their protection. This is the time for all States to show leadership by supporting a resolution that seeks to do this globally.

We are extremely concerned to hear that the African Group has developed a group position objecting to several core elements of the draft resolution. Fifteen years ago, all States agreed to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, including State obligations to protect all human rights defenders working on all human rights. This commitment has been reiterated and built upon in subsequent General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions.

In addition, African human rights instruments include important references that relate to the protection of women defenders. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Article 18:3 speaks of States' obligations to ensure the elimination of discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of women's rights as stipulated in international declarations and conventions. Ten years ago, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa – the Maputo Protocol – was adopted. Acknowledged as a key text on the protection of women's rights, the Protocol speaks of States parties' commitment to increasing women's participation "in structures and process for

conflict prevention, management and resolution” and at all levels of decision-making. African States should be working to implement such commitments, and to ensuring it is reiterated and strengthened at international levels.

African UN Member States are putting forward important resolutions related to women’s rights, such as on ending female genital mutilations, addressing the situation of obstetric fistula and improving the situation of the girl child. At the Commission on the Status of Women in 2013, African States played a key role in securing agreed conclusions on ending violence against women, which also recognized the need to “support and protect those who are committed to eliminating violence against women, including women human rights defenders in this regard, who face particular risks of violence.” The General Assembly resolution on women human rights defenders would complement and reinforce these important efforts by African Member States, as it would support and give recognition to the efforts by women human rights defenders in African countries seeking to implement these initiatives at national and local levels.

We call on every African State to live up to their human rights commitments by supporting this UN resolution, and by taking concrete steps to protect women defenders in their work. We call upon African States at the General Assembly to stand alongside all women human rights defenders in their work for the respect of human rights across the continent.

Sincerely,

1. Actionaid, Zambia
2. African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies
3. African Gender and Media Initiative Trust
4. Africa Programme of the International Commission of Jurists
5. Alliances for Africa
6. Amnesty International Algeria
7. Amnesty International Benin
8. Amnesty International Burkina Faso
9. Amnesty International Cote D'Ivoire
10. Amnesty International Ghana
11. Amnesty International Kenya
12. Amnesty International Morocco
13. Amnesty International Senegal
14. Amnesty International Sierra Leone
15. Amnesty International South Africa
16. Amnesty International Togo
17. Amnesty International Tunisia
18. Arry Organisation for Human Rights
19. Association des Femmes Juristes du Burundi
20. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
21. CAMFAIDS, Cameroon
22. Centre for IHSAN Protection, Kenya
23. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
24. Coalition For justice Accountability (COJA), Sierra Leone

25. CODR UBUNTU, Burundi
26. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization, South Sudan
27. Darfur Bar Association
28. East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project
29. Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre, Somalia
30. Foundation for Human Rights Initiative, Uganda
31. Freedom and Roam, Uganda
32. Friends of RAINKA, Zambia
33. Front Lines Defenders
34. Human Rights Concern - Eritrea
35. Human Rights Institute of South Africa
36. Iniskoy for Peace and Development Organization, Somalia
37. Ivorian Coalition for the ICC
38. Kenya Human Rights Commission
39. League for Human Rights in the Great Lakes region (LDGL)
40. Maternal Mercy Development, Somalia
41. National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Kenya
42. ONG SOS Exclusion: Défense et promotion des droits humains et de la démocratie
43. Pacesetters Youth Network, Zimbabwe
44. Peace Democracy and Research, Somalia
45. Protection International
46. Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale
47. Somali Disability Aid and Protection Association
48. Somali Human Rights Organization
49. Somali Women Development Centre
50. Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa
51. Soroti Development Association & NGOs Network, Uganda
52. Southern Africa Litigation Centre
53. South African Women In Dialogue
54. South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network
55. South Sudan Human Rights Society For Advocacy
56. Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network
57. Southern Africa Human Rights NGO Network - Tanzania Chapter
58. Stop AIDS in Liberia
59. Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa
60. Tanzanian Human Rights Defenders Coalition
61. Tanzania Pastoralist Community Forum
62. TGNP Mtandao (Tanzania Gender Networking Programme)
63. Treatment Advocacy & Literacy Campaign
64. Union Burundaise des Journalistes
65. Union de Jeunes pour la Paix et le Développement, Burundi
66. Wanlaweyn Human Rights Organization, Somalia
67. West African Human Rights Defenders Network
68. Women and Law in Southern Africa
69. Women of Zimbabwe Arise
70. Women's Solidarity Namibia
71. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights