



The Chairperson
African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
55th Ordinary Session
Luanda, Angola

28 April 2014

Oral Statement by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Item 4: Human Rights Situation in Africa

Chairperson, Honourable Commissioners,

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, an international movement dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world, expresses its appreciation for this opportunity to address the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights during the 55th Ordinary Session.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play an essential role in the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa. They not only help ensure the representation of diverse voices in policy making but in many instances perform an essential watchdog function in the public sphere. Nevertheless, despite the recognition of the crucial importance of active involvement of civil society at all levels, the conditions in which civil society groups operate in a number of countries on the continent are becoming increasingly contested.

In **Ethiopia**, the government has failed to implement Resolution 218 adopted at the 52nd Ordinary Session in the Gambia in May 2012, which urges the government to repeal or amend the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation to ensure its full compliance with provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' rights governing freedom of association. Due to restrictions found in the Proclamation, including discriminatory restrictions on foreign funding for organisations which work on a broad spectrum of human rights activities, international human rights groups have been forced to suspend their operations and a number of domestic groups have reduced the scope of their work or end their advocacy activities altogether to comply with the law.

Moreover despite firm protections under the African Charter guaranteeing the freedoms of expression, association and assembly, it is a matter of deep concern that civil society activists in Ethiopia engaged in legitimate human rights activity are being subjected to judicial harassment. Since Thursday, 24 April 2014, six members of the independent

blogger and activist group “Zone 9 and three independent journalists have been detained in an apparent attempt to prevent them from undertaking their legitimate work.

In **Zambia**, as we speak, NGOs are being pressured to register under the restrictive 2009 NGO Law. The law contains a number of debilitating restrictions on civil society including, arbitrary registration requirements, provisions that allow undue executive interference into the activities of NGOs; and the imposition of a forced self-regulatory framework on NGOs in breach of international best practices. Despite broad international and national criticism of the law, the Patriotic Front Government has refused to honor its commitments to engage in a substantive consultative process with civil society to ensure the law’s full compliance with national and international human rights law.

In March 2014, the government transferred the management of 22 of Muslim Brotherhood’s NGOs to a government ministry. Non-Brotherhood civil society organizations have also been targeted. On 18 December 2013, security forces raided the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights, arresting six members who later reported they were beaten, and had their laptops, files and documents seized.

CIVICUS calls on the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights to:

- Urge all governments to provide a safe and secure environment for human rights defenders and civil society to enable them to carry out their work without fear of intimidation, harassment or unwarranted restrictions.
- Request protection and promotion missions to Ethiopia and the Zambia to ensure that provisions of the African Charter on freedom of association, assembly and expression are duly implemented.
- Urge the Government of Ethiopia, in line with recommendations made under African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights Resolution 218, to repeal or suitably amended the Charities and Societies Proclamation to ensure that restrictions on the freedom of association are removed.