

Human Rights Council: 27th Session
Universal Periodic Review: Ethiopia

19th September 2014

Oral Intervention

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

Delivered by Mr. John Foley

Thank you Mr. President,

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project welcomes the report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Ethiopia, and the constructive recommendations made by many member states.

Mr. President, Ethiopia's engagement with the UPR process needs to be understood in the context of a deteriorating human rights record, in an increasingly hostile and closed environment for human rights defenders and civil society.

Ethiopia has accepted Australia's recommendation to implement fully its own constitution, including freedoms of association, expression and assembly for NGOs. And yet, Mr. President, the situation in country tells a starkly different story.

Just yesterday, a group of United Nations human rights experts urged Ethiopia to stop misusing anti-terrorism legislation to curb freedoms of expression and association in the country. Since April, nine journalists including six members of the 'Zone 9' blogging collective have been jailed on untenable charges that refer to collaboration with mainstream international human rights groups. Outside of these corridors of power, the governments of many member states and the former president of the OHCHR spoke publicly against this clampdown.

Ethiopia has rejected some startling recommendations that raise legitimate questions on its commitment as a member of the UN's premier human rights body. It has rejected Mexico's recommendation to eliminate all obstacles to the development of NGOs, including financial restrictions. It has rejected Spain's recommendation to issue a permanent invitation to the special procedures.

It is in this context Mr. President, that the Human Rights Council and its member states are under a moral obligation to exert pressure on Ethiopia to change course. It is incumbent upon the Human Rights Council and all member states to plan towards taking urgent action at its forthcoming 28th Session, aimed at opening space in Ethiopia for legitimate human rights voices.

I thank you Mr. President.