

## **Declaration on the Establishment of the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Coalition**

**We**, the undersigned human rights defenders (HRDs) and organisations, meeting at the Intercontinental Hotel in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on the initiative of DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project), and in collaboration with Association of Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE), Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organisations (CERO), and Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), from 9 to 13 December 2019;

**Recalling** the commitment of the member states of the African Union in the Grand Bay Declaration to implement the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, commonly known as the "Declaration on Human Rights Defenders," adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998;

**Further recalling** the aspirations outlined in the African Union Agenda 2063, particularly aspirations 3 and 4 aiming for an "Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law"; and "a peaceful and secure Africa";

**Considering** the Grand Bay Declaration and its Plan of Action adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Ministerial Conference on the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa in 1999, the objectives and principles contained in the Constitutive Act 2000 of the African Union; and the Kigali Declaration adopted at the first African Union Ministerial Conference on Human Rights in Africa in 2003;

**Acknowledging** the progressive CSOs Proclamation Act no. 1113/2019 reflecting major provisions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly in Africa;

**Deeply concerned** about the specific challenges HRDs face in Ethiopia, including ongoing attacks from state and non-state actors, and a restrictive legislative and policy environment that impacts the security and the work of HRDs;

**Noting** the waves of repression that affected most civil society organisations (CSOs) and HRDs in Ethiopia over the last three decades, and the urgent necessity to largely rebuild a robust and effective CSO movement, allowing for significant cooperation with regional and international actors through capacity-building, technical advice, joint projects, and collaboration to strengthen the capacity of local HRDs;



**Reaffirming** the principle on the rights and responsibility of individual groups and organs of society to promote and protect universally recognised fundamental human rights and freedoms;

**Bearing in mind** the need for synergy, cooperation, collaboration, and best practice sharing space among HRDs in Ethiopia;

**Noting with high satisfaction** the role played by AHRE, CERO, DefendDefenders, and EHRCO in convening HRDs from all the regions in Ethiopia, supporting and strengthening the work of HRDs in Ethiopia;

**Solemnly decide to:**

- i. Launch a countrywide network of individuals and organisations with the aim of working together to create a safe and enabling working environment for HRDs in Ethiopia; protecting HRDs at risk in Ethiopia, and actively engaging with national, regional, and international mechanisms;
- ii. Increase attention to the most at-risk defenders, including, but not limited to, women human rights defenders (WHRDs), journalists exposing impunity and high-level corruption, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and HRDs working on issues of environment, land, natural resources, and extractive industries;
- iii. Adhere to the values and principles of a firm foundation upon which to build effective partnerships based on equity, mutual benefit, non-discrimination, transparency, information sharing, "do no harm," and respect for each individual organisation to work independently; and
- iv. Have an inclusive membership.

**Resolve** to establish a Steering Committee comprising of the following organisations individuals;

1. **Advocates Ethiopia;**
2. **Ethiopian Human Rights Council;**
3. **Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association;**
4. **Mizan Young Lawyers Center;**
5. **Sara Justice for all Women Association;**
6. **Vision Ethiopian Congress for Democracy.**

**Individual HRDs**



1. **Eden Fissiha**: Lecturer of Law at Bahir Dar University, School of Law and researcher at AHRE;

2. **Enguday Meskele**: Lecturer and researcher at Wolaita Sodo University (human rights and international law);

3. **Lidet Gebrehiwot**: Legal assistant at a law firm in Addis Ababa;

4. **Meskerem Abera**: Lecturer of History in Awassa University and Woman Human Rights Defenders;

5. **Salahadin Towfik**: Lecturer of law in Jijiga university and Dean of school of law;

6. **Zewdu Mengesha**: Assistant Professor of Law at Bahir Dar University School of Law.

**Further decide** to appoint **Yared Hailemariam**, founding member of East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (2005) and its Focal Point for Ethiopia Since 2006 as the Coordinator of the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Coalition;

**Invite** CERO to host the Secretariat of the Coalition with a coordination unit to oversee and manage its operations focusing on protection, capacity-building, and advocacy for the protection of HRDs in Ethiopia;

**Decide** that Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Coalition be fully integrated to the **East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network**; and request DefendDefenders to continue to provide its expertise and mentorship enabling the network to be effective and with a fully functional Secretariat.

**Call on** the Steering Committee, with the support of DefendDefenders, to draft a constitution regulating the Coalition within 12 months;

Done in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13 December 2019

Signed by:

Yared Hailemariam

Biniam Abate

Eden Fissiha

Enguday Meskele

Lidet Gihwot

Salahadin Towfik

Zewdu Mengesha

Meskerem Abera

Yared Beyene

Wubshet Kassaw

Merit Yassahun

Benayin Birma

Yottake Tekalign

Dan Digna

Solomon Eulit



Tadilo Tesfaye

Azulu Oghedo

Habteam Kereke

Daniel Tesfaye

Kassim Berisso

Eyerusalem Belay

Gernet Tebeje

Henok Tesman

Isbre Tekaye

Belay Tefera

Mussa Hiko

Netsanel Muloneh

Tibebu Hairu

Gelawdinos Girum

Henok Kabete

Bayush Minosso

Hebron Yeshoalule

Amanuel Dibabale

Meseret Bereke

Omot Agwa Okway

TESPA BELAYNEH

Frezer Yeheyis

Yafet Tadoss

Athapo BhanalCARD

Center for development of  
Rural and democracy (CARD)

Amal Ahmed

Dr. Shumelis Siran

Mestekem Geza

Yonatan Tesfaye

Biriyam Asmelashon

Gease Ahmednur