

JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

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STATES SHOULD END REPRISALS AGAINST ANTI-CORRUPTION HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

As the world celebrates the International Anti-Corruption Day and the 24th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders on this day, 9 December 2022, we, the undersigned organizations and individuals, urge all UN Member States to end reprisals against anti-corruption human rights defenders, and to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the human rights of everyone including those working to promote and defend the rights of other people and to fight and expose corruption.

Anti-corruption human rights defenders – journalists, members of civil society organizations, whistleblowers, and others – play a crucial role in the prevention of and in the fight against corruption and the promotion of human rights. Over the years, they have been instrumental in investigating and exposing corrupt practices and in demanding transparency and accountability and the protection of human rights. We observe, however, that those who work to expose corruption are often not recognized as human rights defenders, and their efforts may be invisible to the wider human rights community or seen as separate from or peripheral to human rights work.

We note that the role and active involvement of anti-corruption human rights defenders in anti-corruption efforts has been widely recognized in many international and regional anti-corruption instruments, including the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) adopted in 2003. Among other things, UNCAC requires states parties to promote the “active participation” of anti-corruption defenders, by “respecting, promoting and protecting the freedom to seek, receive, publish and disseminate information concerning corruption” (Article 13). In addition, the political declaration on corruption adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2021 reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to recognize the important role that civil society, academia, the private sector and the media play in the detection, prevention and fight against corruption.

We are seriously concerned about the escalating reports of violence, threats, harassment, intimidation, attacks and persecution of anti-corruption human rights defenders and the impunity following on from this persecution in several states. Anti-corruption human rights defenders continue to face real risk of physical attack, arbitrary arrest, and prosecution simply for exercising their human rights including to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. And states continue to pass laws to restrict access to information while failing to take effective actions to prevent the harassment, intimidation and attacks against those who dare to expose corruption and its impacts on human rights, and to bring suspected perpetrators of the attacks to justice.

We note that the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders in her recent [report](#) documents several cases of violence, threats, intimidation, harassment, attacks and persecution against anti-corruption human rights defenders. According to the report, hundreds of defenders all over the world face smear campaigns, criminalization, and judicial harassment, and are killed every year for their peaceful work in defence of the rights of others. Very few perpetrators are brought to account for these murders, which only enables the cycle of killings to continue.

We also note that some attacks on defenders are gender-based and that many defenders have been targeted for their work in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic or for fighting against corruption affecting their local communities. Women human rights defenders working against corruption are also often attacked not only for what they do but for who they are.

CONTINUOUS THREATS AND ATTACKS AGAINST ANTI-CORRUPTION HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

We continue to receive reports of increasing threats and attacks against anti-corruption human rights defenders, including whistleblowers. These constitute clear violations of internationally recognized human rights including to life, freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, access to information and media freedom.

The threats, intimidation, harassment and persecution also amount to a breach of the legal obligations of states under the various human rights treaties to which they are states parties, And we believe it is imperative to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of anti-corruption defenders to ensure the effective promotion and protection of the rights of other people, and to improve the implementation of states' legal obligations under the various human rights and anti-corruption treaties to which they are parties.

We therefore call on all UN Member States to:

- Foster a safe and enabling environment, to ensure that anti-corruption defenders are able to freely carry out their activities in full respect of their human rights and in the defence of the human rights of other people and the fight against corruption without fear of reprisals;
- Adopt and implement legislative and other measures for the protection of anti-corruption human defenders, if they do not exist, in line with human rights and anti-corruption standards;
- Effectively respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of everyone to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly including of those working to promote and defend the rights of other people and to fight and expose corruption, in accordance with Article 13 of UNCAC;
- End impunity by thoroughly, impartially, independently, transparently and effectively investigating reports of attacks against defenders in their states, and bringing to justice suspected perpetrators, and ensuring access to justice and effective remedies for victims;
- Publicly recognize the value of the work of anti-corruption human rights defenders and denounce threats and attacks against them, consistent with the provisions of UNCAC, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

LIST OF SIGNATORIES

List of Organizations

Accountability Lab, United States/South Africa

Action pour les personnes vulnérables (APV),
Guinea

African Centre for Media & Information
Literacy (AFRICMIL), Nigeria

AfricanDefenders, Uganda

American University Washington College of
Law, United States

Amnesty International, United Kingdom/
Senegal

Appui à la Promotion du Développement
Intégré (APRODI), Guinea

Article 19, United Kingdom

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

Association Songtaaba des femmes unies pour
le développement ASFUD, Burkina Faso

AWTAD Anti-Corruption Organization, Yemen

Be Just, Inc., United States

Bekker Compliance Consulting Partners, LLC,
United States

Blueprint for Free Speech, United Kingdom

Bunge Mashinani Initiative, Kenya

Centre de Recherche sur L'Anti-Corruption,
Democratic Republic of Congo

Centre d'Excellence du Droit de
l'Environnement (CEDE), Guinea

Centre for Free Expression, Canada

Centre for Human Rights, University of
Pretoria, South Africa

CiFAR - Civil Forum for Asset Recovery e.V.,
Germany

CIVICUS, South Africa

Coalition des Défenseurs des Droits de
l'Homme au Bénin (CDDH-Bénin), Benin

Commission nationale des droits humains,
Burkina Faso

Conseil Consultatif des enfants et jeunes de
Guinée, Guinea

Corporate Crime Observatory, United Kingdom

Créativité et développement (C-DEV), Guinea

Defenders Coalition, Kenya

Environmental Investigations Agency, United
States

Federation of Environmental and Ecological
Diversity for Agricultural Revampment and
Human Rights (FEEDAR & HR), Cameroon

FIDH (International Federation for Human
Rights), within the framework of the
Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights
Defenders, France

Front Line Defenders, Ireland
Global Witness, United Kingdom
Government Accountability Project, United States
Gulf Centre for Human Rights, Lebanon
Haki Africa, Kenya
Improve Your Society Organization (IYSO), Yemen
Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Namibia
International Commission of Jurists Kenya (ICJ-Kenya), Kenya
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Switzerland
Les Mêmes Droits pour Tous (MDT), Guinea
Ligue Congolaise de Lutte contre la Corruption (LICOCO), Democratic Republic of Congo
Lutte pour le Changement (LUCHA), Democratic Republic of Congo
Malagen, The Gambia
Mexiro AC, Mexico
Protect, United Kingdom
Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa (PPLAAF), Senegal/South Africa

Publiez Ce Que Vous Payez, Senegal
Réseau de Lutte Contre la Faim (RELUFa), Cameroon
Réseau des Associations Guinéennes des Volontaires pour le Développement (RAGVD-GUINEE), Guinea
Réseau des Organisations de la Société Civile pour l'Observation et le Suivi des Elections en Guinée (ROSE), Guinea
Réseau Guinéen des Maisons et Foyers des Jeunes et de la Culture (REGUIMAJEC), Guinea
Sembrando Sentido, United States
Sherpa, France
Siasa Place, Kenya
Social justice centres Working Group, Kenya
SpeakOut SpeakUp Ltd, United Kingdom
The Daphne Caruaza Galizia Foundation, Malta
The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Switzerland
The Institute for Social Accountability (TISA), Kenya
The Sentry, United States
Tiger Eye Social Foundation, Ghana
Tournons La Page Togo, Togo

Transparency International Bangladesh, Bangladesh
Transparency International Cambodia, Cambodia
Transparency International Italy, Italy
Transparency International Secretariat, Germany
Transparency International Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe
Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, Uzbekistan/Germany
WAFRICA Guinée, Guinea
Whistleblower-Network, Germany
Whistleblower International Network (WIN), United Kingdom
Women Human Rights Defenders Hub, Kenya
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Switzerland
Xnet, Spain
Yemen organization for combatting human trafficking, Yemen
الإنسان - Watch for Human Rights (Watch4HR), Yemen

List of Individuals

Ms. Bangoura Aminata Edith, Women's rights activist, Guinea
Professor David Lewis, Head of the Whistleblowing Research Unit, Middlesex University, United Kingdom

Dr Aled Williams, Principal Adviser, U4 Anti-Corruption Research Centre, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway
Dr Costantino Grasso, Reader in Business and Law, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

Amb. (ret) Francisco Villagran de Leon, Lecturer, Elliott School of International Affairs, United States
Mr Feras Hamdouni, Development professional, Syria