

CAL Statement to the 59th Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on (Women) Human Rights Defenders

Madame Chairperson, Honourable Commissioners,

The 2015 Report on the Study on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa acknowledges that WHRDs draw more hostility than their male counterparts because they challenge cultural, religious, economic or discriminatory social norms and work to increase respect for the role of women in society. The Coalition would like to bring to the attention of the Commission the ongoing restrictions, harassment and intimidation of Fees Must Fall human rights defenders and activists engaged in protests in South Africa for affordable and decolonised education. The increased militarisation and deployment of police and private security companies on campuses who are not trained to deal with protest, undermine the rights of all students to learn in safe, enabling environment. This student protest action and the call for governments to ensure free or affordable tertiary education is not isolated. Across the world, students organising to advance their rights to education face increasingly violent responses by their governments. In Nigeria, for instance, various reports cite that at least one student has died following a violent clash between student protestors and police. In particular, the Coalition would like to highlight the targeted physical, emotional and sexual abuse of young women in the frontlines of this student movement by rogue private and state police entities and other militarised organisations.

The Coalition would also like to highlight an incident in Uganda that led to the arbitrary and unlawful arrest of Ugandan lawyer and human rights defender Susan Mirembe, during the unlawful prevention of a legal and peaceful march around parliament. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is also in a critical state, with the violent suppression of peaceful protest and silencing of the freedom of expression of citizens. Women, men and children are violently silenced from speaking out and demanding that President Joseph Kabila make public his intentions for the upcoming elections.

CAL echoes the recommendations of the Report of the Study on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa that name the contextual factors of patriarchy, heteronormativity, militarization, religious and other forms of extremism



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and globalization, and recommends urgent and sustained action by all parties under the strong leadership of States and national human rights institutions.

We urge the commission to publicise the Report on the Situation of WHRDs, to encourage States to adopt the model law for the recognition and protection of HRDs, develop an adoption plan of the report's recommendations, develop guidelines for State Parties to enforce the recommendations, and develop legal and administrative structures around ensuring the safety and wellbeing of WHRDs.

Thank you Madam Chairperson.



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