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**Date: Tuesday December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network,**

**The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders in Uganda,**

**The Center for Human Rights Uganda,**

**The Defend Defenders Network Uganda,**

**The Pan – African Human Rights Defenders in Uganda,**

**Re: Call to end all forms of discrimination towards French-Speaking Human Rights Defenders Operating in Uganda as we head towards December 10<sup>th</sup>, the International Day for Human Rights**

### **Background information**

The worsening political situation in the great lakes region especially in Burundi, D R Congo, and Rwanda among other countries has impacted negatively on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) who have paid the high price of their work for the promotion of Human Rights in the region. We all know what is happening to Journalists and Human Rights Defenders in Burundi now, we all know what has happened to journalists and human rights defenders in D R Congo since 1996 up to now and in Rwanda since 1994 up to now.

### **Crimes against Journalists and Human Rights Defenders**

Number of them were assassinated, number of them are in prison, number of them were stopped from their vocation and number of them were forced to exile and Uganda has been one among the few available options for refugee.

### **French speaking Refugee Human Rights Defenders isolated in Uganda**

In Uganda, efforts have been made to ensure the protection and integration of Human Rights Defenders and journalists from the East and Horn of Africa Countries who are in exile here in

Uganda and we greatly thank all those who have deployed energies to have this work done. However we continue seeing imbalances and disparities in response to the needs of all Human Rights Defenders present and active in Uganda.

Human Rights Defenders and Journalist from the French Speaking Countries who continue their work either in the promotion of refugee rights or in the promotion of peace, democracy and good governance in the great lakes region continue to be excluded from enjoying solidarity from their fellow Human Rights Defenders in Uganda.

We are deeply concerned to observe that over the years, the only argument that clothes such kind of discrimination is the mandate and geographic coverage of NGOs in Uganda which offer services to certain human rights defenders in exile here.

Much as we are operating here in Uganda, and doing great work for the promotion of refugee rights which no one else has opted to do, HRDs from French-Speaking countries have suffered isolation, indifference, exclusion and sometimes oppression from their fellow HRDs present in Uganda.

Apart from limiting them from accessing integration opportunities, benefit from HRDs the protection mechanism, be empowered through capacity building, and help them to respond positive to their economic constraints, HRDs from French-speaking countries in Uganda have been forced to endure the generalized violation of refugee rights in Uganda where there are few organizations engaged in the promotion of refugee and forced migrants rights.

Obliged to exist in isolation, their work has been confronted by the challenges faced from the refugee regime which appears more and more intolerant to the nation of “refugee rights”. And HRDs who promote the refugee rights are often the enemies of the refugee regime.

### **Threats against refugee Human Rights Defenders in Uganda**

The consequence of this isolation is too big and has costs a lot to many who were an asset to their fellow refugee communities. Recently in October 2015 the only active refugee human rights defender operating in Nakivale Refugee Camp/ Isingiro was arrested, detained and tortured by Uganda security service, his life was at risk but we greatly thank Frontline Line Human Rights Defender who offered him the much needed assistance at that particular time. As per now we do not have other HRDs active in refugee camps here in Uganda and this gives the refugee regime a green card to abuse refugee rights in total impunity,

Two more HRDs from D R Congo active on refugee issues are currently facing number of security challenges, during the night of Saturday 5<sup>th</sup>, December 2015; one was attacked at his home by unknown people who brock into his house. The other one is confronted by number of allegations by the security services and this has greatly impacted negatively on their work.

Two HRDs who are engaged in the promotion of peace in the great lakes region have been facing death threats since 2013 and are living in hide and this has stopped them from doing their work to ensure that young people who could have been trained in quality leadership for the development of the region are recruited into militia groups in order to kill innocent civilians and loot the national resources. These cases have been shared with some HRDs networks here in

Uganda but the answer has been “*there is nothing we can do for you, because of our mandate, our hands are tight my friend*”.

Putting into our minds that much as we came from French-speaking countries we are HRDs working from Uganda and there is no enough or strong argument why we should be penalized basing on our origin and social status which are condemned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which we are commemorating on December 10<sup>th</sup>. What we need more is *reason and conscience to act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood in line with Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*,

As human rights defenders we strongly condemn all kinds of discrimination and this power is given to us by *Article Two of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, *we are therefore expected to be role-models of this gospel which we preach*,

Much as there are reasons why we should not extend the hand to the others, most of our work is first of human rights issues at the direct benefit of Uganda and the people of Uganda because we do belong to that “*global citizenship of Human Rights Defender*” *as stated by article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*,

As we commemorate the International Day of Human Rights we do appeal to our colleagues HRDs in Uganda for the following:

1. To integrate French-speaking human rights defenders active in Uganda in their strategic plan and expend to them all services accorded to other human rights defenders from the East and Horn of Africa,
2. To put a particular attention to the Most At Risk Key Population mainly refugee Human Rights Defenders active in Uganda through integration programs, livelihood and economic support, capacity building and advocacy programs for them in order to easy their work,
3. To put in place a Uganda Solidarity Funds in support of Human Rights Defenders from French-speaking countries which will be given to them during difficult situations which they face,
4. To publicly recognize, document the work of French-speaking HRDs present in Uganda and come up with strategies to strengthen their work,
5. To offer legal support to French-speaking human rights defenders at different levels and accompany their efforts for refugee status determination, access to humanitarian relief, and resettlement to a third country when they live is at risk here in Uganda,

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