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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE FEDERAL
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA
GENEVA

663/2025-A

15 April 2025

The Permanent Mission of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Special Procedures Branch of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and has the honour to refer to the joint communication, dated 13 February 2025, from the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association.

In this regard, the Permanent Mission has the honour to transmit herewith the response of the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia concerning the above-mentioned communication.

The Permanent Mission of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Special Procedures Branch of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.



Enclosure

The Special Procedures Branch
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva



THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

REPLY TO THE COMMUNICATION BY THE SPECIAL
RAPPORTEUR ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS AND FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND
ASSOCIATION ON THE SUSPENSION OF FIVE CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATION



11 April 2025
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Introduction

1. The government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (alternatively Government of Ethiopia, GoE, Ethiopia) hereby submits its reply to the Communication by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, dated 13 February 2025 Ref. AL ETH 2/2025, regarding the suspension of Five Civil Society Organizations namely Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Centre (EHRDC), Centre for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD), Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), and Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE).
2. Committed to minimal interference and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) empowerment, Ethiopia emphasizes collaboration while ensuring accountability through regulatory mechanisms grounded in law and policy. These mechanisms are in place to address violations of policies, national laws, and international standards. The government of Ethiopia's approach reflects a commitment to supporting CSOs vital role in Ethiopia's transformation.
3. This commitment is further demonstrated through ongoing efforts to streamline procedures and create a more favorable atmosphere, including digital platforms and direct engagement between the Prime Minister and CSO representatives. Ethiopia's dedication to upholding the rights to assembly and association, as enshrined in the FDRE Constitution and international agreements, underscores its belief in the critical role of CSOs in the nation's progress.
4. While committed to fostering a collaborative and empowering environment for CSOs, the Ethiopian government also recognizes the importance of ensuring accountability and adherence to legal and ethical standards. Regulatory mechanisms are in place to address any violations of national laws, policies, or international norms. Instances of non-compliance may lead to corrective measures, implemented through established regulatory procedures, to maintain a smooth working environment and uphold the rule of law. This framework ensures that all CSOs, including the five that were temporarily suspended, operate within the established legal boundaries and contribute positively for the good of the people.



I. General Remarks on the Suspensions of the Five CSOs

5. Before detailing the legal and situational grounds for the suspension of five CSOs in Ethiopia, it's important to note the context surrounding these actions. Despite the government's commitment to fostering a collaborative environment, concerns arose regarding these organizations' adherence to their mandates, principles of non-partisanship, and regulatory requirements. Prior to resorting to suspension, the concerned Authority undertook investigations, issued warnings, engaged in direct discussions, and explored alternative solutions. Suspension was ultimately deemed a necessary measure to address identified violations and ensures accountability within the sector.

II. Legal and Situational Context

6. All the CSOs violated the rule that require them to sign project agreements with the concerned organ at Federal or Regional level. Even when using their own funding and budget, it is mandated that CSOs obtain formal agreements with the federal or regional government before beginning projects within their respective jurisdictions.
7. Regarding the transitional justice initiatives, it was also noted that these CSOs spread false or misleading information. This willful distortion of the truth increased public skepticism, and made it more difficult for people to participate in the reconciliation process. It also threatened the initiatives' overall success and reduced public confidence in the transitional justice processes. The credibility and effectiveness were severely harmed by the simultaneous acts of disseminating false information and violating a formal agreement.
8. CSOs are legally obligated to use verified and officially recognized bank accounts for all financial transactions after registering with the ACSO and starting their operations. According to investigations, some CSOs have been discovered to keep and run extra, unreported bank account, which raises serious questions regarding financial accountability and transparency. The presence of these unreported accounts raises serious concerns about the financial integrity of the participating CSOs and constitutes a serious breach of trust. It becomes very difficult to make sure that finance is being spent properly and in line with the organizations' declared missions if there isn't a thorough and transparent record of all financial transactions.



9. In addition to exposing the CSOs to charges of financial mismanagement and possible fraud, this lack of transparency damages public trust in the industry overall, which may make it more difficult for other compliant organizations to receive funding in the future. There is also a restriction on administrative costs provided in the 20/80 scheme, and these organizations did not respect and comply with that.
10. The stipulations specified in the proclamation establishing the Authority, as well as the guidelines and working procedures of the CSOs, have been broken by the listed CSOs. The established legal framework governing CSO operations in Ethiopia appears to have been disregarded, as evidenced by these violations, which represent a serious breach of regulatory compliance. These regulatory infractions and departures from standard operating procedures offer a strong legal foundation for the involved Civil Society Organizations' suspension. When the established legal framework and operating rules are broken, the credibility of the CSO sector is weakened and its capacity to effectively advance the public good is jeopardized.
11. Following registration and beginning their operations, CSOs risk having their operating license suspended if they do not responsibly carry out their mandated responsibilities, especially those related to accountability and transparency. This includes the vital responsibilities of precisely stating the project's goals and methods, revealing the funding sources, identifying the intended beneficiaries, and openly announcing any alliances with other organizations. The integrity of the CSO sector is put at risk when these basic duties are neglected because it erodes public confidence, makes it more difficult for regulatory agencies to effectively monitor, and opens the door for resource mismanagement or abuse.
12. Furthermore, as mandated by regulatory frameworks, these CSOs have not fulfilled their mandatory obligation to submit periodic reports outlining their activities, financial status, and progress toward accomplishing their stated objectives. Looking specifically into the CSOs, the EHRDC was found to have violated established regulations by using bank signatories that were not permitted by current legal frameworks. The AHRE and the CARD were first suspended due to recognized violations, and then their suspensions had been lifted with a formal warning. These organizations were later found to be participating in the same activities that had initially resulted in their suspension. A re-suspension for CARD and

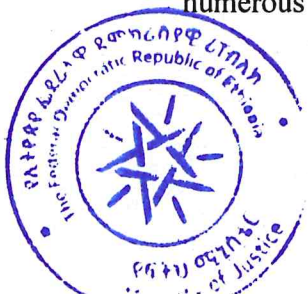


AHRE was required due to their persistent disregard for the established operational guidelines.

13. All these acts by the CSOs constitute of grounds for suspension. After the suspension period, all five Civil Society Organizations have been allowed to return to their operational activities after taking corrective measures and a proven dedication to regulatory compliance.

III. Ethiopia's Compliance with the Right to Freedom of Association

14. Since March 2018, Ethiopia has implemented a comprehensive reform agenda, and the operating environment for CSOs has advanced significantly. Understanding the critical role CSOs play in the development of the country, the government has made a concerted effort to remove earlier barriers and promote a more supportive and cooperative environment.
15. More freedom of movement, higher registration rates, and the capacity to function efficiently at the federal and regional levels are now all benefits of these organizations. Assuring compliance with human rights norms in their operations, this newly acquired freedom also allows them to exercise their internationally acknowledged rights. Legal frameworks are only one aspect of the government's commitment. Now they have the freedom to raise or create their own funds and resources, CSOs can more successfully reach their beneficiaries. Additionally, they are allowed to self-regulate, which fosters accountability and openness in the sector.
16. The government promotes an atmosphere of autonomy and independence by abstaining from excessive interference. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's direct interaction with CSOs, including meetings and frank discussions, demonstrates the government's sincere desire to work together. These conversations offer a forum for CSOs to express their worries, exchange ideas, and cooperatively pinpoint areas in need of development. This shows a thorough awareness of CSOs as strategic partners who are essential to Ethiopia's program of transformation and nation-building. They now see themselves as vital contributors to accomplishing national goals rather than just supporting players. Further streamlining procedures and creating a more favorable atmosphere for CSOs is the Authority's creation of a digital platform. This program is a perfect example of the government's efforts to modernize CSO operations.
17. The Ethiopian government has been acknowledged and praised for its efforts in this field on numerous occasions by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). Ethiopia's



dedication to meeting its international commitments, in particular, is evident from these actions. Additionally, the Authority actively works with CSOs that are having difficulties, offering them support and direction to guarantee their continuous existence and social contribution. This commitment, which is in line with national laws and policies, attempts to motivate CSOs to work with the government in a way that is both practical and moral in order to support economic growth, democratization, and human rights.

18. Article 30 of the FDRE Constitution and the international agreements being integral part of the law of the land; uphold the rights to assembly and association.

IV. Investigations, Findings and Measures Taken

19. The implementation of a thorough oversight and investigation system guarantees that CSOs adhere to national policies and established standards. Desk monitoring and follow-up evaluations are included in this system, which is intended to support efficient program execution and compliance with legal and ethical requirements. CSO reports are reviewed as part of the desk monitoring process. In order to evaluate the success of program implementation, conformity to global standards and best practices, and adherence to pertinent national laws as well as the CSOs internal policies, qualified experts examine these reports.
20. The goal of these modes of monitoring and follow up are to ensure compliance with national and international standards, rule of law, and the wellbeing of the society on the one hand and correct any shortcomings, contradictions, or areas that need improvement. To resolve any problems found during desk monitoring, the Authority carries out follow-up regulatory and assessment activities. The Authority has the structure to implement the necessary corrective measures in response to observed violations of established rules and regulations. This can involve anything from offering advice and assistance for progress to enforcing rules or sanctions in situations of severe non-compliance.
21. Submission of comprehensive operational guidelines detailing the CSOs principles and working methods is required as part of the registration process. To guarantee consistency and adherence to moral and legal requirements, these documents undergo a thorough investigation. A careful investigation is conducted into any instances of illegal activity, partiality, or inconsistencies with the CSOs own declared policies and procedures. After such infractions were verified, the Authority responds appropriately by suspending operations in



order to protect the sector’s integrity and guarantee adherence to national regulations as well as international standards.

V. Balancing Independence and Oversight: Safeguarding Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia.

22. Regulations governing Ethiopian CSOs place a great deal of emphasis on their autonomy and self-governance system. CSOs are able to define their operational procedures, create their own internal governance frameworks, and make sure that ethical standards are followed. As a result, they are better equipped to serve their target beneficiaries and meet particular societal needs by developing a sense of ownership and accountability.
23. Government oversight is intentionally limited to ensure CSOs can operate with minimal bureaucratic interference. Annual reports that provide a clear picture of their operations and financial situation are the main means of communication with the government. In order to foster accountability within the industry, these reports are examined to make sure they are in line with national policies and regulations. This enables the government to keep an eye on the general well-being of CSOs activities and guarantee adherence to national regulations. This system strikes a balance between the need for regulatory supervision and the goal of promoting an autonomous civil society.
24. The legal foundation for Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia is established by Proclamation 1113/2019. Articles 5, 6, 63, 73, 77, and 78 outline important aspects of CSOs operational autonomy, accountability, and relationship with the government by outlining the agency's goals, powers, and functions, including the processes of resource mobilization and administration, annual activity reports, the power of inspection, and administrative measures. All of these articles place a strong emphasis on the freedom to organize, the duty to follow the law, and the procedures for guaranteeing openness and conformity to national policy. They give CSOs a platform to work toward their goals free from excessive government intervention, encouraging self-regulation and autonomous action. These articles specifically state the freedom of CSOs to organize and function, as well as the conditions that allow the government to carry out its oversight duties. This covers how annual reports must be submitted, how national policy violations are handled, and when penalties or corrective actions can be implemented.



Conclusion

25. The situation of CSOs in Ethiopia, particularly in light of the recent suspensions of five CSOs, underscores the complex balance between regulatory oversight and the promotion of civic engagement. The Ethiopian government's commitment to strengthening CSOs through legislative reforms, such as Proclamation 1113/2019, is evident in the attempts to create a more favorable environment for their operations. Despite challenges related to compliance and accountability, these organizations play a crucial role in Ethiopia's socio-economic development and democratization efforts. The government's actions, including the temporary suspensions, reflect a necessary step towards ensuring that CSOs adhere to their mandates and regulatory frameworks, thereby upholding public trust and integrity within the sector.
26. These measures also highlight the ongoing dilemma of safeguarding the independence of civil society while ensuring adherence to legal and ethical standards. The government's emphasis on collaboration, direct engagement with CSO representatives, and the establishment of oversight mechanisms demonstrates a proactive approach to fostering an environment conducive to both autonomy and accountability. The reinstatement of the suspended CSOs post-corrective actions illustrates recognition of the importance of a robust civil society to Ethiopia's national development, ultimately supporting a collaborative framework for both government and CSOs to fulfill their respective roles.
27. In conclusion, Ethiopia's journey towards achieving a balanced interaction between the state and civil society is pivotal for the nation's transformation. By prioritizing transparency, accountability, and adherence to legal frameworks, the government not only enhances the reliability of CSOs but also reinforces their essential function as partners in progress. Looking forward, continued dialogue and adaptive regulatory practices will be essential to maintaining this delicate balance, ensuring that Ethiopia's civil society can thrive and contribute effectively to the aspirations of the Ethiopian people.

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,
THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA
11 April 2025
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

