

Press release

Closure of the 16th Summit of the African Union

FIDH Deplores the Silence of the Regional Body on the Situation in Egypt

Paris, Cairo, Nairobi, February 2, 2011 – While the 16th Summit of the African Union (AU) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, came to an end on Monday, FIDH deplores the silence of the Heads of State and Government on the democratic aspirations expressed by the Egyptian people and the bloody repression of demonstrations orchestrated by the security forces of the regime of Hosni Mubarak.

This summit was marked by paradox. Although they adopted a declaration on the shared values binding states to respect democratic principles and human rights, no country has expressed support for the claims of the Egyptian population and none of them raised their voice to condemn the summary executions of protesters, the arbitrary arrests and detentions as well as the ill treatment and torture suffered by prisoners. FIDH emphasizes in this regard that the AU has waited more than a month to finally « express its solidarity with the people of Tunisia » and call for a « democratic transition ».

Other paradoxes. FIDH understands the satisfaction expressed by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) for the proper conduct of the referendum on self-determination in South Sudan and the return to constitutional order in Guinea Conakry, but is surprised by the PSC's good report on the electoral process in Burundi in spite of the boycott of the presidential and parliamentary elections by opposition parties which protested against serious irregularities in the electoral process and against the climate of violence created by the ruling party. Furthermore, on one side, the AU expresses serious concerns over the disrespect of democracy in Côte d'Ivoire due to the refusal of the candidate Laurent Gbagbo to step down despite the verdict of the polls and appoints a panel of five Heads of State to try to resolve the political crisis. On the other side, the AU appoints as its new president, Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema, Equatorial Guinea's president, who seized power after a coup and who has ruled the country for 30 years with a total lack of regard for human rights.

Finally, while impunity of those responsible for the most serious crimes violates the right of victims to justice and is the basis of political crises and conflicts on the continent, FIDH deplores the decision of the AU to reiterate its request to suspend legal proceedings initiated by the International Criminal Court against Sudanese President El Bashir, allegedly responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur. Furthermore, FIDH deplores the AU's decision to call for the suspension of the proceedings against 6 Kenyan suspects, accused of having perpetrated serious crimes during the 2007 presidential elections, while the judicial systems of those two countries have so far left the victims of these crimes without recourse. However, FIDH welcomes the AU's decision to confirm the mandate given to Senegal for the prosecution of the former Chadian President Hissène Habré "on behalf of Africa", and to call on Senegal and the AU Commission to engage in a faster process towards the establishment of an ad hoc tribunal to prosecute Habré, pursuant to the decision of the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States.

"In its decisions, the AU reveals that it is floundering in total paradox. The credibility of this regional body in terms of promoting human rights and democracy in Africa is tainted. If the AU wants to regain its dignity, it will have to give stronger voice to the concerns of those who fight for human rights" said Belhassen, FIDH President.

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