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67th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Agenda Item 4: Human rights situation in Africa

Honourable Chairperson,

Amnesty International welcomes this opportunity to address the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission) on this occasion of its 67th ordinary session.

On 20 November, Amnesty International launched the 2020 edition of *Write for Rights*, our flagship annual letter-writing campaign. During November and December, people around the world write millions of letters, emails, tweets, Facebook posts and postcards for those whose human rights are under attack. This campaign has become the world's biggest human rights event.

This year, the campaign is highlighting the situation of ten individuals across the world, including Germain Rukuki of **Burundi** who is serving a 32-year prison sentence for his work with the anti-torture organization ACAT Burundi. In June 2020, the Supreme Court of Burundi set aside an appeal court decision upholding Germain's conviction and ordered a fresh hearing of the appeal. This is a positive step forward. However, Germain should have never been arrested in the first place and should be released immediately and without condition.

The imprisonment of Germain is emblematic of the broader pattern of judicial harassment, intimidation and arbitrary arrest and detention of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Burundi. It is now more than a year since the arrest of four journalists working for Iwacu Press Group. Agnès Ndirubusa, Christine Kamikazi, Egide Harerimana and Térrence Mpozenzi, were arrested as they arrived in Bubanza province to report on clashes between the security forces and an armed group. The four were sentenced to two and a half years in prison and fined one million Burundian francs (approximately 525 USD). On 4 June of this year, the Ntahangwa Court of Appeal upheld the lower court's verdict.

This year's *Write for Rights* campaign is taking place as a new round of crackdown on human rights NGOs is unfolding in **Egypt**. Since 15 November, three senior staff members of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) have been arbitrarily arrested and detained. This reprisal campaign began after EIPR, one of a handful of independent human rights organizations that bravely operate in Egypt, held a human rights briefing with 13 Western diplomats at their office in Cairo on 3 November.

On 15 November, Egyptian security forces arrested EIPR's Administrative Director Mohamed Bashseer from his home. He was held for about 12 hours at a facility controlled by the National Security Agency, where he was questioned while blindfolded about the diplomats' visit and other EIPR work. On 18 November, EIPR's Criminal Justice Unit Director Karim Ennarah was arrested at a beach resort in Dahab, South Sinai, where he had been on vacation. He was taken to an undisclosed location and



detained incommunicado for 24 hours before been brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecutors (SSSP), where he was questioned about his work. On the evening of 19 November, plainclothes security forces arrested EIPR's Executive Director Gasser Abdelrazek from his home in Maadi, Cairo. He appeared before SSSP at 1:30 am and was questioned over fabricated "terrorism"-related charges.

The three human rights workers are now arbitrarily detained pending investigations into charges of "joining a terrorist group", "spreading false news" and "misusing social media". Mohamed Basheer was also questioned about "committing a crime of funding terrorism". All three have also been added to Case No. 855/2020 which includes several other human rights defenders, many of whom have been detained without trial for over a year.

Amnesty International calls on the African Commission to:

- call on the Burundian government to immediately and unconditionally release Germain Rukuki and all other human rights defenders and journalists imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights; and
- call on the Egyptian government to immediately and unconditionally release Mohamed Basheer, Karim Ennarah, and Gasser Abdel-Razek and drop all investigations against them, and to end the brutal crackdown on human rights NGOs, and allow them to carry-out their vital work without fear of reprisals.

Thank you.