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News

## JOHANNESBURG DECLARATION

We, Human rights defenders, that is, women and men on the front line of the struggle to protect and promote human rights and who include, lawyers, journalists, NGO workers, trade unionists, members of rural organisations, health workers, religious workers, development workers, students and relatives of victims, etc

Gathered at the All-Africa Human Rights Defenders Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, from 2 to 4 November 1998

Recalling the regional and international standards already in existence for the protection and promotion of human rights in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which on 10 December 1998 celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the draft Declaration for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders<sup>1</sup> that guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms.

Observing the failure of most states and governments in Africa either to live up to the domestic and international obligations to which they have committed themselves in the protection and promotion of human rights, or to ratify and accede to relevant international human rights standards, and the failure of governments and armed groups involved in conflicts in Africa to adhere to international humanitarian law;

Acknowledging that Human Rights Defenders have as a result assumed a central role in the promotion and protection of each and every one of the human rights;

Observing moreover the particular risks run by human rights defenders in the context of armed conflict;

Deeply concerned that the increasing number and influence of human rights defenders has been accompanied by their own rights being violated;

Denouncing in particular the violations of human rights they face, including: extrajudicial execution, torture, rape and sexual assault, arbitrary arrest and detention, and unfair trials;

Denouncing moreover the extent of measures used by many states to silence human rights defenders, including censorship and seizure of publications, constant surveillance and intimidation, economic and professional harassment, bureaucratic obstacles to legalisation of their activities, denial of freedom of assembly and social ostracisation

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration on the right and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs of society to promote and protect universally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms, due to be voted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1998

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Affirm the right to continue such work in accordance with the international human rights standards  
Considering all threats on human rights defenders as an attack on the work of human rights NGOs  
everywhere, the participants decide to organise themselves into networks to respond immediately, with  
all means at their disposition, to these fundamental violations of human rights

Undertake to train Africans, in particularly human rights defenders, to make best use of national,  
international and regional mechanisms established for the protection of human rights

Call upon all States to respect and ensure the respect of the right to freedom of action for human rights  
defenders

Urge all States to bring national legislation into accordance with international human rights standards  
and to ensure the independence of the judiciary and other mechanisms for the defence of human rights

Urge all States to adopt special measures to ensure the protection of women human rights defenders  
including the implementation of the Beijing Plan of Action

And call upon all States to facilitate the granting of asylum to human rights defenders at imminent risk  
of human rights violations

Moreover call upon the intergovernmental, international and regional organisations to intervene on  
behalf of human rights defenders and campaign to guarantee their safety

Urge that the United Nations and all its agencies give priority to consultations with human rights  
defenders in their work

Urge the United Nations Commission of Human Rights to establish the post of Special Rapporteur for  
Human Rights Defenders and to ensure that the work of human rights defenders is included in the  
mandate of all United Nations mechanisms

Demand moreover that all bi-lateral and multi-lateral organs and authorities of economic cooperation  
ensure in their program the protection of human rights defenders

Demand finally that multinational companies ensure that their strategies and projects are not harmful to  
the freedom of action of human rights defenders

And call upon international public opinion, in particular the media, to join in the protection of human  
rights defenders and promoting their activities in defence of human rights for all.

*Adopted by acclamation  
Johannesburg, 4 November 1998*