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**ORAL STATEMENT**

**Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights**  
**Agenda Item 6(xiii): Activity Report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Reprisals in Africa**  
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Honourable Chairperson,

Amnesty International welcomes this opportunity to address the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission) and to draw its attention to the situation of anti-corruption human rights defenders.

Anti-corruption human rights defenders – journalists, members of civil society organizations, whistleblowers, and others – play a vital, legitimate, and necessary role in the prevention of and in the fight against corruption and the promotion of human rights, including the human rights guaranteed in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the 'Banjul Charter'). This role and active involvement of anti-corruption HRDs has been widely recognized in many international and regional anti-corruption instruments, such as the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption that was adopted in July 2003.

However, we are concerned about the escalating reports of violence, threats, harassment, intimidation, attacks, and persecution of anti-corruption HRDs and the impunity following on from this persecution in several states. In a report published on 11 July 2023, Amnesty International documents 31 cases of repression of anti-corruption HRDs identified in West and Central Africa since 2018. These include cases of journalists, bloggers, whistleblowers, civil society activists, civil servants, health professionals, community leaders who are intimidated, assaulted, and hindered through repressive laws on defamation and 'fake news', bans on protests, dismissals, threats, harassment, and even torture and unlawful killings. This, simply for exercising their human rights including to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Among the cases reported is that of Nigerien journalist and blogger **Samira Sabou**, who was convicted in January 2022 of "defamation by electronic communication" under the country's cybercriminal law and sentenced to one month in prison and a US\$100 fine. The prosecution stemmed from her decision to republish a May 2021 article from the Geneva-based Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, which alleged that a drug shipment seized by the Nigerien anti-trafficking agency was reacquired by drug traffickers and leaked back into the market.

In Cameroon, **Martinez Zogo**, a journalist and head of the privately-owned radio station Amplitude FM, was abducted by unidentified men on 17 January 2023. His mutilated body was found in a wasteland in the suburbs of Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital, on 22 January 2023. Zogo had been investigating and reporting on the alleged embezzlement of hundreds of billions of CFA francs by political and business figures close to the government.

Beyond West and Central Africa, Amnesty International has documented several instances of attacks, harassment, intimidation and criminalization of journalists, whistleblowers, and civil society activists who denounce corruption in the **Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Madagascar, South Africa, and Zambia**.

And we continue to receive reports of increasing threats and attacks against anti-corruption human rights defenders, including whistle-blowers.

Threats, intimidation, harassment, and persecution faced by anti-corruption human rights defenders amount to a breach of the legal obligations of states under the various human rights treaties to which they are states parties, including the Banjul Charter. We believe it is imperative to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of anti-corruption defenders to improve the implementation of states' legal obligations under the various human rights and anti-corruption treaties to which they are parties.

Amnesty International therefore call on all African States to:

- Publicly recognize the legitimate and vital role of anti-corruption human rights defenders and respect, protect, promote and fulfill the human rights of all human rights defenders, including by promoting transparency, accountability and the rule of law.
- Foster a safe and enabling legal environment, to ensure that all human rights defenders, including anti-corruption HRDs , are able to freely carry out their important and legitimate activities in full respect of their human rights and without any fear of reprisals. This shall include through the adoption and implementation of legislative and other measures for the protection of anti-corruption human defenders, if they do not exist, in line with human rights and anti-corruption standards.
- Effectively respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of everyone to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly including of those working to promote and defend human rights and to fight and expose corruption.
- End impunity for corruption, attacks, and other forms of human rights violations and violence against human rights defenders, including by thoroughly, impartially, independently, transparently and effectively investigating corruption allegations and reports of attacks in their states, and bringing to justice suspected perpetrators, ensuring access to justice and effective remedies for victims.