

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Amnesty International calls on Burkina Faso to protect human rights defenders and end the practice of early and forced marriage**

### ***Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Burkina Faso***

Amnesty International welcomes Burkina Faso's acceptance of a large number of recommendations, including to investigate allegations of human rights violations by all parties, both government officials<sup>1</sup> and self-defence groups,<sup>2</sup> to hold the perpetrators for such crimes to account, and to end impunity.<sup>3</sup>

The new Penal Code on 31 May 2018 effectively strikes off the death penalty from the list of punishments for ordinary crimes, and in line with this positive move, Amnesty International welcomes Burkina Faso's acceptance of recommendations to commute all death sentences,<sup>4</sup> to abolish death penalty, and to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>5</sup>

Amnesty International welcomes Burkina Faso's acceptance of a recommendation to ensure that human rights defenders can operate freely and securely,<sup>6</sup> and urges the government to refrain from using the fight against terrorism to muzzle defenders. It regrets, however, that despite the commitments expressed in the 2017 Act on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Naim Touré, an online activist, was sentenced to two months in prison on 3 July 2018 after posting a publication on his Facebook page.<sup>7</sup>

Amnesty International also welcomes Burkina Faso's acceptance of 15 recommendations to end early and forced marriage and to provide better protection for the victims of such practices.<sup>8</sup> The rates of early and forced marriage in Burkina Faso remain among the highest in the world. These practices impact on a range of human rights and can lead to early pregnancy and pregnancy-related complications, to the detriment of the health of young girls and women and their access to education.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Burkina Faso, A/HRC/39/4, recommendations 125.30 (France), 125.34 (Ukraine), 125.48 (Austria), 125.51 (Canada).

<sup>2</sup> A/HRC/39/4, recommendations 125.37-125.43 (France, Ghana).

<sup>3</sup> A/HRC/39/4, recommendations 126.18 (Spain), 125.32 (Netherlands).

<sup>4</sup> A/HRC/39/4, recommendation 126.15 (Germany).

<sup>5</sup> A/HRC/39/4, recommendations 126.1 (Chile, Costa Rica, Spain, Togo), 126.4-126.5 (Portugal, Australia); 126.11-126.16 (Iceland, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Ukraine, Germany, Namibia).

<sup>6</sup> A/HRC/39/58 (Ireland).

<sup>7</sup> He was charged for "provocation without any ensuing consequences".

<sup>8</sup> 125.99 (Montenegro), 125.101 (Cabo Verde), 125.104 (Spain), 125.107 (Gabon), 125.109 (Rwanda), 125.113-125.117 (Central African Republic, Ukraine, Germany, Namibia, Argentina), 125.123-125.124 (Sweden, Tunisia), 123.148-123.150 (Netherlands, Namibia, Afghanistan).

The new Penal Code broadens the definition of marriage.<sup>9</sup> Previously early and forced marriage were referred as “unions” and therefore not classified as forced marriages even if the person was coerced. The adoption of the new Code is a welcome first step, but requires effective implementation.

**Background**

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Burkina Faso on 20 September 2018 during its 39<sup>th</sup> session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered this oral statement.

Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis of the review through its submission on country: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr60/7367/2017/en/>

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<sup>9</sup> Article 531-1