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CIVICUS Statement

UPR outcome report of Ethiopia

18 March 2010

CIVICUS welcomes Ethiopia's engagement with the UPR process. However, CIVICUS severely regrets that Ethiopia is not willing to repeal or amend the recently enacted civil society law, or **Proclamation**, as stated in paragraph 50 of the proceedings and in the non acceptance of recommendations 23-27, in spite of the many interventions from various governments and highest UN authorities, including the High Commissioner herself, and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

Moreover, CIVICUS believes that the "consultations" of stakeholders leading up to the acceptance of the Proclamation were in reality only a motive to legitimize the legislative measure, as none of the government officials seriously considered the fundamental issues raised.

What is clear from the various analyses done on the law, including by local civil society and international human rights groups, is the law fundamentally violates Ethiopia's obligations under international human rights law. It violates the right to freedom of expression, assembly and more importantly freedom of association.

It seems that the Governments firm belief that reservation of public affairs to citizens is triggered by the traditional concern of sovereignty. However, former UN SG, Kofi Annan, stated that "national sovereignty cannot be used as a shield to cover up for human rights violations".

An illegal law cannot be tolerated, given the government's poor human rights track record. In light of the fact that the country is heading to a national election in May, the international community should not accept this and await implementation of the law. The impact of the law is already felt and seen. It appears only one or two independent human rights organizations will exist in Ethiopia. The rest have abandoned their human rights work or have ceased to exist.

In relation to the 65 parties adhering to the code of conduct required for political parties, CIVICUS states that one of the leading opposition parties has been completely left out of the negotiations of this code, but has posed several issues with regard to fairness and freeness of the electoral platform. The leading political party leader, Birtukan Mideksa, still remains in jail serving a life sentence.

The Ethiopian delegation notes that it does not consider there is harassment of civil society organizations in Ethiopia. CIVICUS has tracked several attacks.

To conclude: We strongly urge Ethiopia to reconsider adoption of the recommendations 23-27 to allow a vibrant civil society back into its society.

Thank you