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**Human Rights Council: 28th Session
Universal Periodic Review: Angola**

19th March 2015

Oral Intervention

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP)

Delivered by Mr. John Foley

Thank you Mr. President,

My organization makes this statement in partnership with the *Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy*, and the *Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network*.

We welcome the constructive recommendations made to Angola by many member states. We also respect Angola's acceptance of many key recommendations that relate to the operating space for human rights defenders and civil society.

There is however, a considerable disconnect between these commitments, and the situation for human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society in the country. Although the Angolan government shows willingness in this chamber to meet its international human rights obligations, dissenting voices, human rights defenders, and investigative journalists come under routine and serious attack in Angola.

Rafael Marques de Morais, a leading anti-corruption activist and author, has been charged numerous times with criminal defamation. Mr. Marques has a long history of holding the Angolan government to account for human rights abuses and corruption through his insightful investigations and is the recipient of numerous international awards for his work. Mr. Marques has published commendable work alleging serious human rights violations committed by army generals and companies in Angola's diamond fields. Instead of the Angolan authorities investigating those claims, in five days time Mr. Marques will return to court to face further criminal defamation charges. This occurs, in spite of the African Commission on Human & Peoples' Rights recent judgment that such laws violate the right to freedom of expression, and the internationally accepted norm that defamation is a civil, and not criminal law matter.

We are pleased to note Angola's acceptance of Belgium's recommendation to fully respect freedom of expression, opinion, association and peaceful assembly. We note also, the acceptance of Ireland's recommendation to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment, in which human rights defenders, journalists and civil society can operate free from hindrance and insecurity.

Angola has made some laudable commitments, but they seem hollow, and do not match the lived reality for many Angolans. The state concerned must move beyond empty rhetoric, and allow human rights defenders and journalists to conduct their work safely, and without fear of reprisals.

I thank you Mr. President.