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« TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE »

PRESS RELEASE

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STOP RAPE OF AFAR GIRLS AND WOMEN IN DJIBOUTI

We, FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE LA DIASPORA AFAR (FIDA), the International Federation of Afar Diaspora representing Afar Diaspora Organizations around the world release this statement on behalf of voiceless Djiboutian Afar women and girls who have been and continue to be victims of routine and systematic rape over long period of time in Djibouti.

At least 246 girls and women from the Afar ethnic group have been raped by the Djiboutian military and security forces particularly in the northern districts of Obock Tadjourah and southern district of Dikhil, since the Djiboutian civil war between the government of Djibouti and Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) started in early 1990s. Since these days, the systematic and deliberate policy of using rape and sexual assault for political and military purposes by the government of Djibouti has been practiced with total impunity. No one so far has been tried or punished for the crime. The number of rape victims mentioned here refers to the reported cases and it is widely believed that this is the tip of the iceberg and that the real numbers are much higher.

We are deeply concerned that politically motivated rape and sexual assault is widespread and continue to be perpetuated regularly in the country while perpetrators of the crime enjoy a high degree of impunity. The tragic fact is that the government of Djibouti and its agencies vested with the responsibility of protecting these powerless and defenseless women and young girls are themselves the main actors behind the atrocity, crime against humanity and violations of human rights. This is clearly unacceptable and condemnable. The brutal and shameful practice of systematic rape violates international human rights law as well as the national law of the country. Rape has serious implications on victims' health (both physical and psychological), survival and development. It is against Islam, a religion of overwhelming majority of Djiboutian.

We are deeply worried and extremely concerned over the silence of the international community, human right organisations, and particularly the major powers with military bases in Djibouti that have better access to information and hence are aware of what is happening in the country. We are encouraged, on the other hand, by efforts and actions taken by Stop Rape Now - UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (<http://www.stoprapenow.org/>) and the International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict (<http://www.stoprapeinconflict.org/>). We express our admiration and support to these and other organizations working tirelessly to amplify the voices of rape survivors, especially, ARDHD), Press TV and Radio 1 le *Grand Débat*, ([http://africa1.com/IMG/mp3/le_grand_debat - 29 03 16 - pad.mp3](http://africa1.com/IMG/mp3/le_grand_debat_-_29_03_16_-_pad.mp3)), and put an end to rape in conflict.

Recently, a group of courageous Afar women from Djibouti launched a collective hunger strike in Paris and Brussels to shed light on the plight of women and girls who are victims of a systematic rape, sexual assault and harassment in Djibouti; a crime committed by the country's military and security forces with impunity.

The group of 10 women who started first the hunger strike on 25 March 2016 in Paris remain strong demonstrating their determination to make their voices heard even when their physical conditions became extremely worrying. Two of them were already admitted to hospital after their health conditions worsened, Ouma after 18 days and Fafi 15 days on hunger strike. After a total of 19 days on hunger strike in Paris, the group staged a similar hunger strike in Brussels. The hunger strike in Brussels continues at the time of this press release.

According to Mrs. Aicha Dabale, the group's spokeswoman for the France-based advocacy group Women Solidarity, no one inside the country dares to speak out about this crime for fear of reprisal by the government and the group thus launched the collective hunger strike in Paris and Brussels to draw attention to the issue. Please refer to the following link for more details on the hunger strike. <http://www.loubakdongolo.com/djibouti/hunger-strike-day-10-one-of-the-djiboutian-women-striker-admitted-to-hospital-on-day-10>

We, the International Federation of Afar Diaspora (FIDA), applaud the action taken by these bold women in Paris and Brussels to protest against the Djiboutian regime orchestrated rape targeting Afar women and girls and express our solidarity with them.

We condemn in the strongest terms possible the systematic and wide spread rape and sexual assault with impunity against the innocent Afar girls and women in Djibouti.

We demand the government of Djibouti to stop without delay the policy of using rape and sexual violence as political and military weapon against the Afar ethnic group and demonstrate its seriousness by bringing perpetrators to justice ending the culture of impunity for rape.

We appeal to the international community and humanitarian organizations to take practical steps to support survivors of the systematic rape in Djibouti. The government of Djibouti that carries the primary responsibility for protecting victims of violence including rape has not only failed to meet its constitutional obligation and human rights of its citizens but also happened to be the main actor behind the crime. We urge the international community and the human rights organizations to work actively to bring the case before the International Criminal Court (ICC). There is already abundant evidence of gross violations of human rights amount to crimes against humanity committed by the government of Djibouti against the Afar ethnic group and those raising their voices for democratic change in the country.

FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE
LA DIASPORA AFAR (FIDA ASBL)

