

Haki Na Usalama Forum Press Release

Obama should reinforce what good security means in Tanzania

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As part of his tour of the African continent, United States President Barack Obama will be in Tanzania today and tomorrow. It's very likely that security issues will be on the agenda, in relation to both Tanzania and the wider East African region. In discussing this issue, the Haki na Usalama Forum calls on President Obama to reinforce the recommendations the United States previously made to Tanzania at the United Nations regarding security matters: to ensure that security forces, such as the police, are overseen by civilian bodies and are held accountable for their actions.

The Haki na Usalama Forum is a coalition of non-government organizations working on criminal justice issues in Tanzania. The members include: the Tanganyika Law Society, the Legal and Human Rights Centre, National Organisation for Legal Assistance, the Lawyers Environmental Action Team and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.

In 2011, Tanzania was reviewed under the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a process in which each member nation of the UN has its human rights record examined by other states to assess compliance with human rights obligations and commitments. At the review, the United States made three critical recommendations to Tanzania, stressing the need for oversight and accountability of the police and defense forces. The first recommendation called for Tanzania to “vigorously prosecute security force personnel who violate the law”, the second encouraged human rights training for members of security forces, and the third concerned ensuring that security forces are subject to “strict control of civilian authorities”. These recommendations were accepted by the government of Tanzania.

These recommendations are interrelated. A civilian body to strictly control the police and security forces could investigate complaints against the police and then, if the investigation showed that the police were likely to have committed a criminal offence, refer to an independent state prosecution department for prosecution at a court. The body could also work with the police and Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG) to ensure that the police were trained in human rights matters.

The UK and Danish governments also recommended that an independent mechanism is established to investigate complaints against the police – Tanzania also agreed to this recommendation. The government of Kenya has made a move in this direction recently when it established an independent body to investigate serious police misconduct and recommend subsequent action. This new body - the Independent

Policing Oversight Authority – will check police power and ensure that the police force is held accountable to the public.

Other civil society organisations have called for the ratification of the Convention Against Torture and for the promotion of media freedom in Tanzania – we agree. Underpinning part of both calls is the fact that the police have been implicated in torture of vulnerable groups, and in the death of at least one journalist. The common theme here is the police – and the lack of accountability. Hence if Obama, in addition to these other matters, also stresses the need for ‘strict control’ of the police by a civilian body such as an independent police oversight authority, torture and mistreatment of the vulnerable and media is likely to also decrease.

The Haki na Usalama Forum call on Obama to encourage Tanzania to implement the UPR recommendations it agreed to, recognizing that good security requires strong independent oversight and accountability mechanisms. Good security in turn will lead to greater stability, encouraging economic investment and growth for Tanzania and the region. Good security is good for all.

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