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human development, and good governance. Under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the EU continued to support domestic electoral observation and citizens' advocacy of EOM recommendations.

The EU continued to support the National Electoral Commission (NEC)'s Strategic plan and Gender and inclusivity policy, and fund two technical assistance experts supporting the NEC and the electoral cycle. The EU supported a National Task Force convened by the NEC to follow up on the EOM recommendations.

An EU Election Follow-up Mission (EFM) visited Sierra Leone from 10 October to 7 November, assessing the state of implementation of the 2018 EU EOM recommendations and discussing with a wide range of key stakeholders ways to achieve further progress in their implementation. The EFM encouraged representatives from government, parliament and political parties to implement EU EOM recommendation 22 and adopt a legislative mechanism to increase the number of women in parliament. At this crucial time before the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023, the Mission encouraged Sierra Leonean political actors to strengthen constructive dialogue, build trust and continue working to ensure a peaceful, inclusive, transparent and credible electoral process, noting there is still time to address electoral challenges and implement electoral reforms, as well as to foster inclusiveness in the democratic and political processes in the country.

In February, the EU and Germany launched the fourth phase of the Employment Promotion Programme which focuses on improving the living conditions of young people in rural communities. The EU contribution of EUR 13 million to this 4-year program aims to improve job and income opportunities in Kailahun, Kono, Koinadugu and Falaba.

5. Multilateral context: Sierra Leone's third UPR cycle review took place in May 2021. Recommendations concerned taking measures to foster cohesion and address political division, reviving the Constitutional Review process, ensuring awareness and respect of international human rights standards by police forces, addressing sexual and gender-based violence, including FGM and child marriage, and abolishing the death penalty (achieved in October 2021).

Somalia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Somalia continues to suffer from widespread insecurity, fuelled primarily by the al-Shabaab insurgent group, controlling vast areas of the country, conducting frequent attacks on government-aligned forces, and ongoing political and clan rivalries, capacity weaknesses and gross misconduct and misappropriation of forces for political ends. The Federal Republic of Somalia remains a more than fragile state, with only a provisional constitution and governing federal authorities, which have not promoted consensus regarding the division of power, resources, rights and duties with the Federal Member States (FMS). The absence of stable and democratic institutions at the regional and national level, disputed legislative frameworks, weak capacity and often lack of political will to implement policies continue to be critical obstacles to ensuring respect for and implementation of human rights.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU support to Somalia is guided by the objective to rebuild the state, improve stability and reduce poverty. EU activities in Somalia (including Somaliland) in the area of human rights in 2021 continued to focus on promoting gender equality and women's rights, ending violence against women and children, supporting the democratisation agenda, including electoral processes, promoting freedom of speech and press freedom, and improving access to justice through institutional capacity building, support to mobile courts and legal aid provision, as well as the promotion of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. EU actions, alongside international partners, also focused on supporting community policing and providing human rights training for security forces (including through CSDP missions), supporting security institutions to enhance political and civilian oversight and the rule of law, strengthening the role of the media and civil society organisations to monitor and report on human rights violations, as well as improving detention conditions and access to justice for prisoners.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The protection and promotion of human rights, including women's rights and the rights of the child, is a vital element addressed by the EU in its regular exchanges with government counterparts at all levels. Throughout 2021, human rights have consistently formed part of the agenda. Topics such as media freedom, arrests of journalists, the yet-to-be-established Human Rights Commission and the passing of relevant legislation, such as the Sexual Offences Bill, have been on the EU's priority list. No Article 8 formal political dialogue meetings took place in 2021 due to the political context and the lingering question of the constitutional legitimacy of the caretaker governing authorities. However, human rights continued to form part of the agenda during informal bilateral dialogues with Somali authorities, wherein the key messages were reiterated on an ad hoc basis.

The EU delegation backs these dialogues with concrete support to civil society organisations working on the promotion of human rights and support to build the capacities of Somali security actors to improve the respect for human rights. For instance, sessions on human rights and international humanitarian law always feature during trainings of the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force by AMISOM, EUTM and UNDP. In its role as co-chair of the Human Rights Working Group (until May 2021) and a regular participant in the Human Rights Pillar Working Group, the EU has also been actively engaging in coordination and advocacy efforts on various human rights-related topics. The December 2020 Somalia Partnership Forum established several agreed priorities and the EU continued to advocate for the implementation of these human rights commitments throughout 2021.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2021, the EU pursued its financial support to strengthen the respect for human rights in Somalia (including Somaliland) through a range of actions. With new projects, amounting to EUR 2 million under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the EU stepped up its support to the fight against female genital mutilation and sexual and gender-based violence. Additional new interventions are dedicated to promoting the opening of civil and democratic space as well as culture and inclusion (EUR 1.9 million). As indicated above, the EU also continued its support to civil society organisations that focus on enhancing the political representation of women, persons belonging to minorities, internally displaced people and persons with disabilities. The EU's ongoing support to the media sector focuses, *inter alia*, on the safety and security of journalists and improving the awareness among Somali security forces on the rights and existing laws protecting journalists in Somalia.

An additional EUR 20.3 million from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa supports projects in the areas of rule of law, corrections and security sector reform, designed to have a positive bearing on the respect for human rights in Somalia

5. Multilateral context: With Somalia being a member of the UN Human Rights Council since 2018 (re-elected in October 2021 for a second three-year term) and the appointment of an Independent Expert on the situation of Human Rights in Somalia under the High Commissioner in 2016, there remains an opportunity to reinforce the work done with key government actors in favour of strengthened enforcement of human rights commitments, even if the mounting political tensions surrounding the conduct of elections has led to an increasingly unfavourable context. Somalia's membership of the Human Rights Council also represents an opportunity for civil society actors to lobby more effectively for the respect of human rights in Somalia. However, Somalia has yet to adopt and/or ratify several other key international commitments, including the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court.

In 2021, the human rights record of Somalia was reviewed in the context of the third UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review. It resulted in 273 recommendations related, *inter alia*, to the accession or ratification of international conventions (including the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Rome Statute of the ICC), the abolition of the death penalty, the establishment of human rights related institutions, the strengthening of civil, political, social and economic rights, as well as another range of human rights of women, children, migrants and other specific groups. Out of these, Somalia accepted 246 recommendations, while recommendations related to the accession to the Rome Statute, the abolition of the death penalty or the decriminalisation of same-sex relations were merely 'noted'. Many of the 228 recommendations that Somalia received during its second review in 2016 remain to be implemented.

South Africa

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: South Africa is a mature and vibrant democracy with a progressive constitutional and legal framework designed to ensure respect for human rights in the society. The government, active and robust media, civil society and an independent judiciary all play their role in monitoring and addressing human rights violations and preserving democracy. Large-scale civil unrest in July, as well as the high prevalence of gender-based violence, despite the government's leadership to address it, directly affected human rights in 2021. Corruption continued to be a major threat for the development of the country. Although the political leadership and the administration undertook several initiatives in 2021 to reduce corruption as part of an overall effort to strengthen governance and boost public trust in political leadership, more efforts are needed to achieve a systemic change. The local government elections held in November were transparent but were also marked by the lowest turnout in the country's democratic history.

Realisation of socio-economic rights and elimination of inequalities remains a major challenge, with the situation deteriorating in 2021 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender-based violence and femicide remain serious human rights challenges. Progress in

implementing the National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide was slow and the National Council to oversee its fulfilment was yet to be established. A number of related legislative initiatives were amended (Domestic Violence Amendment Bill, Criminal Law Amendment Bill) but were yet to be passed by the end of 2021. Other human rights challenges faced by South Africa and closely followed by the EU include the cases of discrimination and exclusion. The updated Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill was opened to public consultation and will be discussed by parliament in 2022. The government has yet to put forward an implementation framework for the National Action Plan to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (2019–2024). The often difficult situation of human rights defenders and whistleblowers remains a matter of concern.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU collective action in 2021 focused on maintaining dialogue, providing support, offering assistance and engaging with a broad range of stakeholders in the areas of i) elimination of discrimination and exclusion, ii) protection of human rights defenders, freedom of expression and digital space, iii) combatting inequalities, iv) closing the accountability gap, and v) strengthening the partnership with South Africa to advance human rights and democracy.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Although the seventh South Africa-EU Human Rights Dialogue was again postponed in 2021, the EU continued to engage government, civil society and the broader public in South Africa on human rights both formally and informally. The Head of EU Delegation participated in a number of public events to promote human rights, with a particularly strong focus on women's rights, the fight against discrimination and exclusion, the role of human rights defenders and the support for democracy. Specifically, this included speaking on behalf of the Gender Development Partners' Group at the launch of the Presidential Private Sector Gender-based violence/ Femicide Response Fund, participation in an event for the International Women's Day, delivering remarks at the EU – South Africa policy dialogue on the Rights of Transgender and Intersex Persons, as well as participating in social media campaigns to mark IDAHOT and the Human Rights Day. The Gender Development Partners' Group, chaired by the EU Delegation, continued to hold regular discussions with the South African government and civil society to track developments in this thematic area, including the implementation of the Women Peace and Security National Action Plan adopted in March. For the 16 days of activism in November, an animated Team Europe video was produced and released simultaneously by the EU delegation, EU Member States' embassies and other like-minded partners. EU delegation also co-hosted a discussion on Guarding Democracy with City Press media.

4. EU financial engagement: Implementation of projects to support action in different priority areas continued in 2021. This included EUR 2 million support to the Department of Basic Education through UNICEF for disadvantaged schools, as well as EUR 2.5 million to three CSOs to address socio-economic rights during the COVID-19 crisis. A further grant of EUR 560,000 was signed in 2021 with the South African National Aids Council with the aim to generate an improved response at national, district and community level to reduce human rights violations in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak. In the area of gender equality, one of the focus areas in 2021 of the EU supported 'Gender Equality and Women Empowerment' programme, was gender-responsive budgeting. 2021 also saw the launch of the 'Enhancing Accountability Programme'. Four grants were signed with civil society organisations for a total of EUR 5,3

million. These projects will implement activities in various sectors, including, gender-based violence, local governance and citizen participation to enhance accountability, as well as the right to adequate health and education. The 2021 allocation of EUR 850,000 under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights will be contracted in 2022 for projects that address gender-based violence, as well as discrimination and exclusion of marginalised groups.

5. Multilateral context: In 2021, South Africa led the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Resolution on the Girl-Child, which was successfully adopted by the UN General Assembly in December. South Africa is also chairing the Commission on the Status of Women in 2022 and 2023. South Africa was an active and important player in the UN Human Rights Council. Although most of the resolutions were tabled by the entire African Group, South Africa is one of the leading voices on some topics. These include the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and the rights of people of African descent, inequality and discrimination, equal pay, the right to social security, discrimination of women and girls in sports, sexual orientation and gender (SOGI), private military and security companies, business and human rights and transnational corporations.

South Sudan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The level of localised violence attributed to community-based militias, the main form of violence in South Sudan, has decreased throughout 2021, but remains worryingly high. It disrupts public life and does not allow the population to exercise basic human rights.

In January 2021, the South Sudan Joint Defence Board launched a three-year action plan for the armed forces on addressing conflict related sexual violence.

The Transitional National Assembly was inaugurated on 30 August 2021, constituting an important step towards the implementation of the Peace Agreement 2018 which overall remains behind schedule. The appointment of Hon. Jemma Nunu Kumba, a female politician, as the Speaker of the Reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly (R-TNLA) and was an important step towards the empowerment of women, but the 35% quota for women in the government still needs to be met and access to resources remains unequal.

In October 2021, the government announced a Technical Committee on the Establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing. Nevertheless, it has not yet signed the 2018 Memorandum of Understanding with the AU on the African Hybrid Court, which would hold warlord commanders responsible for abuses.

In 2021, space for media, civil society, journalists and human rights defenders kept shrinking, with recurrent arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists, human rights abuses of activists and closure of radio stations. The National Security Service enjoys unlimited power to arrest citizens without warrant, and to detain them for an unspecified period. Several human rights violations occur in the context of detention by security actors, including the National Security Service and Military Intelligence.