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Contact: Lien De Brouckere, liend@globalrights.org, +1 202 741-5043

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African Civil Society Calls for Investment that Protects Human Rights at U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit

WASHINGTON—In the run-up to the first-ever U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, 52 African civil society organizations have sent an open letter to U.S. President Barack Obama and the 50 invited African heads of state asking to participate and have local business and human rights priorities included in a forum that focuses on U.S. trade and foreign investment in Africa.

Far from improving the lives of everyday Africans, foreign investment on the continent for decades has resulted in human rights violations that have led to chronic poverty, corruption, the proliferation of extremist groups, and social instability. Therefore, it is imperative that the priorities of African civil society organizations and their constituencies be included in any dialogue or decision-making process about foreign investment that will significantly impact local communities.

“We express deep concern that the organizers of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit have missed a tremendous opportunity to engage with African civil society organizations who work daily to mitigate the adverse impacts of business activity across Africa,” said Teklemariam Berhane, a researcher and activist with Human Rights Council-Ethiopia. “We believe that dialogue among all stakeholders, including government, civil society and business representatives, is vital to ensuring that foreign investment promotes the welfare and human rights of vulnerable communities.”

In the letter, civil society leaders from across the continent, under the umbrella of the African Coalition for Corporate Accountability (ACCA), ask to participate and have their business and human rights concerns addressed in the Summit and especially in its Business Forum. These concerns are protection of collective and individual rights (particularly the right to free, prior and informed consent), protection of labor rights, strengthening access to remedy, and ensuring states fulfill their duty to protect their citizens’ human rights. The ACCA members also call on their leaders to develop and implement national action plans on protecting human rights in and related to business activity.

As of today, African civil society organizations have not been invited to participate in the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit—to which U.S. President Barack Obama invited 50 African leaders—or the U.S.-Africa Business Forum. While the U.S. Department of State has organized a meeting specifically for African civil society groups, groups working on issues of corporate accountability were largely left out. The meeting also does not offer participating civil society groups the much-needed opportunity to engage directly with African leaders or U.S. business executives.

About the African Coalition on Corporate Accountability and Global Rights

The African Coalition on Corporate Accountability is a coalition of 71 organizations from 27 African countries supporting communities and individuals whose human rights are adversely impacted daily by the activities of corporations, both multi-national and domestic. It was launched in 2013 with the support of Global Rights. Founded in 1978, Global Rights is a human rights organization working in partnership with local activists in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to build grassroots movements that promote and protect the rights of populations marginalized because of gender, ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, gender identity or disability.