



9 November 2020

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Support for Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur: Candidate of Ethiopia for re-election to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to be held in New York on 24 November 2020

Your Excellency,

This letter is concerned with the 18th Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to be held in New York on 24 November 2020. The meeting will elect nine members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) whose terms of office are due to expire on 28 February 2021. The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has put Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur [benyam.mezmur@gmail.com] forward as a candidate for re-election to the CRC Committee. It is also important to emphasise that Prof Mezmur's candidacy has been fully endorsed by the African Union during the 33rd Ordinary Session of the Heads of State and Government held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 09-10 February 2020. His abbreviated CV, which is enclosed, can also be accessed in English, French, Spanish and Arabic at the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Elections2020.aspx>

We at the Centre for Human Rights are proud of our association with Prof Mezmur, and strongly support his candidacy, and highlight why his candidacy is worthy of a serious consideration for support by your State.

The Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria is both an academic and a non-governmental organization and works towards human rights education in Africa, a greater awareness of human rights in Africa, and the improvement of the rights of disadvantaged and marginalized persons or groups including children. For more details go to <http://www.chr.up.ac.za>



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As you probably know, the CRC Committee is composed of 18 independent experts and the members of the Committee shall serve in their personal capacity as independent, impartial, and unpaid experts. Article 43(2) of the Convention states that Committee members shall be of high moral standing and of recognized competence in the field covered by the Convention, including demonstrated expertise in the field of human rights, particularly children's rights; the ability to devote sufficient time to the work of the Committee; experience working with non-governmental organisation; awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences are also other additional criteria worthy of mention.

Prof Mezmur squarely fulfils all these criteria. **In 2016, he was elected with the highest vote of 152 States parties. He is currently serving as a member and was the Chairperson of the CRC Committee (2015-2017).** His professional background and associations clearly indicate that he is independent and impartial. With a PhD in Law focusing on child rights (from the University of the Western Cape), and a master's degree in law (LLM) on human rights and democratisation in Africa (from our Centre- the Centre for Human rights, University of Pretoria), he has one of the most directly relevant qualifications for the work of the CRC Committee. His academic background is further concretised by his work experiences as an academician, as a researcher working with civil society organisations, and advising (on an *ad hoc* basis) intergovernmental organisations as well as governments on child rights issues. If re-elected, the flexibility of his work will continue to allow him the opportunity to allocate sufficient time to the work of the CRC Committee.

In addition, as the Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of the African Union (2012-2014 and 2015-2017), Prof Mezmur has demonstrated direct experience in dealing with State Party Reports and Communications/ Individual Complaints. In addition, his areas of expertise on child rights cut across both civil and political rights (such as on birth registration, discrimination, the right to life, nationality, child soldiers, corporal punishment, the right to privacy, etc) and economic social, and cultural rights (the right to education, the right to health services, children with disabilities, etc), making Prof Mezmur an ideal candidate with relatively comprehensive understanding of children's rights as covered by the 41 substantive provisions of the Convention. Trained in Civil Law and currently based in a country representing the Common Law, and Roman Dutch Law legal systems, he is well placed to represent and understand child rights issues in diverse legal systems. **In February 2018, in recognition of his expertise on, and service to, children's rights, the Holy Father Pope Francis appointed him to the *Pontifical Commission on the Protection of Minors*.**

In the last few years, Prof Mezmur has championed three critical and global child rights issues that he plans to continue on if re-elected - technology and digital media, sustainable development including child poverty and violence against children which has become even more important in the context of COVID19, and of course, climate change. Not only does he live in Cape Town which in 2018 almost became the first major city in the world to run out of water, he also had the opportunity to be in Samoa in March 2020 to witness first-hand the existential threat climate change poses.

If re-elected, we are in no doubt that Prof Mezmur will continue to be a valuable asset in the realization of the mandate of the CRC Committee, and also facilitate collaboration with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Among others, he will bring knowledge, energy, commitment, and understanding of children's rights in diverse cultural and legal systems to the work of the Committee. As a result of the above,

we believe that he is a very strong candidate, whose candidacy is worthy of a serious consideration for support by your State.

We would be very grateful if you could share this letter with relevant authorities in your government, and importantly, with your Permanent Missions to the UN in New York, where the election will take place, and possibly with your Permanent Mission in Geneva, where the CRC Committee Secretariat is based.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frans Viljoen', with a large, stylized initial 'F'.

(PROF) FRANS VILJOEN

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