



“How to Bring a Dictator to Justice: The Hissen Habré Trial”

June 19, 2014

“After a 24-year-long ‘David vs. Goliath’ struggle, the time has come to bring Chad’s former dictator, Hissen Habré, and his accomplices to justice,” noted Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow **Delphine Djiraibe** in her June 19 presentation. Looking ahead to the trial in early 2015, Djiraibe stated: “Although our enemies have many means to fight back, we are now at the stage where nothing can defeat the truth. The case *will* move forward.”

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“This long and daunting fight to bring Habré to justice has been driven by the struggle against impunity, which has become a cancer across Africa. It is our hope that the Habré case will set a precedent for how to hold perpetrators accountable for violations and demand compensation for victims. It will not only serve to address past injustices and deter future offenders, but it will also pave the path toward national reconciliation. Ultimately, the trial will serve to strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights in Chad.”

—Delphine Djiraibe
Human Rights Lawyer, Chad

Djiraibe, senior human rights lawyer and chief attorney at the Public Interest Law Center, a NED grantee organization based in N’djamena, examined the major milestones in the fight to bring Habré to trial and reflected upon the lessons learned throughout the process. She emphasized how the courage and perseverance of the victims and their allies proved critical in advancing the case. Looking forward, she urged the Chadian government to end the impunity enjoyed by the former dictator’s accomplices and to use the Habré case as a foundation for reconciliation.

Discussant **Dave Peterson**, senior director for Africa at the National Endowment for Democracy, highlighted the unique role civil society has played in bringing Habré to justice, stating that collaboration between grassroots networks in Chad and Senegal has been vital in pushing the legal process forward. He also discussed how human rights defenders have advanced the trial by taking advantage of various opportunities, such as Belgium’s universal jurisdiction. The themes that have emerged from the Habré trial, Peterson stressed, have application for the region and the world alike.

In response to questions, Djiraibe discussed the potential for the case to set a precedent for how to hold heads of state accountable for human rights violations. She recommended that the African Union encourage Chad and Senegal to implement the Extraordinary African Chambers’ statute and judicial cooperation agreement to hand over key accomplices. Djiraibe also urged the United States to expand its support of human rights and the justice process in Chad.

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