

Statement at 19th session of the Human Rights Council

2 March 2012

Item 2 – Interactive Dialogue

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER AND REPORTS OF OHCHR AND THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Thank you Madam President.

Madam High Commissioner, we commend the role that you and your office have played to ensure that the Council and the world does not lose sight of the victims of human rights violations. You have provided a strong and independent voice on behalf of those victims. The mechanisms established under your office to monitor and gather information on situations affecting victims of human rights violations, together with the series of reports produced, ensure that attention is given to a broad range of human rights violations. Much of the information in those reports, or gathered by those mechanisms, is supplied by human rights defenders. Unfortunately defenders who cooperate with the UN system in this way often face threats against themselves and their families as a result.

You have also drawn attention to the critical role played in transition processes by human rights defenders exercising their rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression. All those exercising these legitimate rights, and defending human rights for all, face risks in doing so. In that regard, we commend the Council for the steps it took during the past year to recognise the crucial role that human rights defenders play in supporting its own work, such as through the panel discussion held on peaceful protests.

We hope that the Council will build upon the increased attention that it is starting to give to the issue of reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN human rights mechanisms. We encourage States and the UN mechanisms to take further steps to affirm the important role played by human rights defenders in the work of this Council and to seek ways of ensuring protection. What do you think, Madam High Commissioner, your office could do particularly through its country presences, to address reprisals and enhance the protection of those who cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms?

We particularly welcome the report from your office on discrimination and violence against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. As the report makes clear, under international human rights law, all individuals are protected from violence and discrimination, and an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity can never be a reason to deviate from that principle. While we recognise that this is a sensitive issue for many States, we encourage all to engage in dialogue on this subject. We look forward to a constructive panel discussion on this issue next week.

Finally, Madam High Commissioner, we look forward to the report you will present in June on the recommendations on treaty body strengthening. We share your hope that discussions in New York will complement the work that your office has facilitated from Geneva. In particular, that the intergovernmental process established recently by the General Assembly should not derail work already undertaken, or undermine the underlying need to respect the existing legal parameters and treaty bodies' independent powers to decide on their own working methods and rules of

procedures. It is important that this process should ultimately aim to improve the fulfilment of States' obligations and enhance the capacity of rights holders to enjoy their human rights. To that end the full participation of NGOs is essential.

Thank you