

## Statement at 19<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council

14 March 2012 – Item 5

### **REPRISALS AGAINST THOSE WHO COOPERATE WITH THE UN, ITS REPRESENTATIVES, AND MECHANISMS IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

Thank you Madam Vice President,

The Human Rights Council and its mechanisms depend on the cooperation of human rights defenders for their effective functioning. We have been pleased to see a greater acknowledgement throughout the UN and regional human rights systems of the indispensable contribution that human rights defenders make in this regard. On this note, we draw attention to the joint press release denouncing reprisals issued today by the Rapporteurs on human rights defenders of the Interamerican, African and UN human rights system.

At a side event convened by OHCHR in New York on the issue of reprisals, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that the UN could not do its work without human rights defenders. He added that the UN owes its best efforts to ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their vital work. The SG also said, I quote, that when their voice is stifled the UN's work for human rights is also a victim, end quote. Without a robust, sustained response to reprisals the overall protection of human rights defenders is undermined.

ISHR and others have been highly concerned by the reports of harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders present in Geneva for this session of the Council. It is important that the Council unequivocally denounces such incidents, and we are heartened by the expressions of concern by both individual States and yourself. We commend the President of the Council for the statement she delivered on this issue. As she said, acts of intimidation and aggression against civil society at the Council simply cannot be tolerated. We urge her to continue to assert the right of every human rights defender to participate in the work of the Council and its mechanisms without fear of reprisal. We expect that the Presidency and the Bureau step up the pressure on relevant governments should the practice of intimidating civil society representative persist, including through publicising the incidents. In this regard, we look forward to seeing the most recent cases in the Secretary-General's report later this year, including information on what follow-up they received.

In closing, we are pleased to see other signs that the issue of reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN human rights mechanisms is taken more seriously. We look forward to the dedicated panel discussion scheduled to take place under this agenda item in September of this year, and hope it will allow victims of reprisals, including their families and relatives, to give testimony to the Council. The panel should also give particular attention to the cases contained in the Secretary-General's report, and lead to specific follow-up on those cases. We also hope that members and observer States of the Council will address the issue of cooperation with the UN, its representatives, and mechanisms under Item 5, as encouraged in resolution 18/19.

Thank you.