

Human Rights Council must act to stop intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders

Human Rights Council 24th session

ITEM 5 – GENERAL DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES AND MECHANISMS

Joint statement delivered by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) on behalf of

- *Amnesty International*
- *Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)*
- *Association for the Prevention of Torture*
- *Bahá'í International Community*
- *Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies*
- *Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS)*
- *CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation*
- *Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (Colombian Commission of Jurists)*
- *Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative*
- *East and Horn Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP)*
- *Human Rights Watch*
- *International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)*
- *International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH)*

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Thank you Mr President,

Despite a clear right to access and communicate with international human rights bodies, defenders continue to face intimidation, harassment, attacks and reprisals for their work to promote and protect human rights at the UN.

If the Council is serious about ending intimidation and reprisals, it should answer the Secretary-General's call for a coherent, coordinated and systematic institutional response. Under Hungary's leadership, the issue of reprisals and intimidation is once again on the Council's agenda at this session. It is time for the Council and Member States to take concrete steps to protect human rights defenders from all forms of attack, intimidation and reprisal, and, in the words of the UN Secretary-General, "to go beyond reporting". It is also time for Member States to live up to Council membership requirements to "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights" and "fully cooperate with the Council" (GA Resolution 60/251).

The Council should firstly request that the Secretary-General **urgently** appoint a UN-wide focal point to coordinate the response to reprisals and intervene in alleged cases, **along the lines foreseen by the resolution under consideration at this session**

Secondly, the Council must find a way to ensure that States mentioned in the Secretary-General's report inform the Council regularly and in a timely manner of steps taken to investigate cases of reprisals, prosecute perpetrators, and provide appropriate remedies to victims.

Thirdly, efforts should be made to build greater awareness of the Secretary-General's report on reprisals, by providing information about the report on OHCHR and UN human rights system webpages, and to encourage those who have suffered or face reprisals to submit their cases.

Lastly, States too must do their part to address this issue at the national level, by ensuring that national laws and policies provide clearly and explicitly for the right of **all persons to** unhindered access to and communication with international bodies. This would contribute to building an enabling environment for defenders by providing a clear legal basis for their work, underlining the importance and legitimacy of that work, and signalling the State's support for it.

Contact: Michael Ineichen • m.ineichen@ishr.ch