

Human Rights Council 39th session

ITEM 5 – INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL ON SECRETARY-GENERAL’S REPORT ON COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS, ITS REPRESENTATIVES AND MECHANISMS IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr President,

Human rights defenders must be able to access and communicate with the UN freely and safely so it can do its crucial work of monitor countries’ compliance with human rights obligations and protect victims from abuse.

Cases of reprisal are direct barriers to this, and to effective and meaningful civil society participation with the UN. Yet the SG’s reprisals report points to ‘alarming trends’ of reprisals, including killing, torture, arbitrary arrests and detention, travel bans, surveillance, criminalisation, freezing of assets, and stigmatization.

This years’ report including an increased number of cases – 45. Including follow up, 38 countries are implicated. This is to say that, In this year alone, 20% of States who by joining the UN—“reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, and dignity and worth of the human person”—attacked or intimidated persons or organisations knocking on the UN’ doors seeking change and a better world.

The report again documents cases by Council members and candidates, including Bahrain, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Hungary, India, Iraq, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela. We urge GA members to consider this before voting in Council elections.

Missing from this year’s report are Chinese defenders WANG Qiaoling and LI Wenzu, the wives of two detained lawyers who have been intimidated and harassed; CAO Shunli, who was detained in September 2013 prior to boarding a flight for Geneva, where she was going to participate in China-related U.N. training sessions, and who died in detention after authorities denied her adequate medical care; and Dolkun Isa, a Uyghur activist, who was denied entry into the meeting of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in April 2018.

We welcome the Report’s recommendation that the UN do more to ensure the experiences of LGBTI persons facing reprisals for their advocacy are documented, disaggregated, and properly analyzed, seeking to minimize additional risk.

In practice, the Council’s discussion of cases in the Report and follow-up to those cases has not been systematic. What we see now is defenders dissuaded from engaging because the cost is too high. What we need is for States to turn away from repression and attacks, because the cost to them is too high.

We welcome the statement made today by Germany on Egyptian defender Ebrahim Metwally and we urge more States to stand up for the critical voices of human rights

defenders and seize the opportunity to take up cases in the report during future interactive dialogues.

The SG concludes in his report that the UN is seeing evidence of self-censorship with regard to engagement, including people too afraid to speak to the UN, both in the field and at headquarters in New York and Geneva. **What more can be done by the UN and others to effectively and proactively address this situation to minimize risk to those engaging and ensure that the UN can effectively fulfill its mandate?**