

Statement at 22nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council

28 February 2013

Item 2: General Debate on the Annual Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MUST TAKE A STAND FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

Thank you Mr President.

On behalf of the International Service for Human Rights I welcome the High Commissioner's Annual Report and commend the High Commissioner and her office on their important role in the promotion, protection and realisation of human rights.

The High Commissioner's report recognises that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity remains persistent and widespread throughout the world. Discrimination exists both in law – whether that be law which criminalises homosexual activity or sanctions so-called “homosexual propaganda” – and also in practice, including the failure to take action to prevent homophobic discrimination or harassment. This is despite the fact that the prohibition against discrimination is a peremptory norm of international law and is enshrined in many of the major international human rights treaties. In accordance with international law, ISHR strongly supports the High Commissioner's call for States to ensure the “repeal of discriminatory laws, the prohibition of discriminatory practices and action to counter violence.” Mr President, the time has come for this Council to take a strong and principled stand in favour of equality and non-discrimination and against homophobia and intolerance.

The High Commissioner's report also discusses the current process of treaty body strengthening. ISHR welcomes the High Commissioner's report of June 2012, referred to in the Annual Report, which contains a series of recommendations to enhance the relevance, efficiency and impact of treaty bodies' work. ISHR supports many of these recommendations and strongly supports proposals to strengthen protections against reprisals for human rights defenders who cooperate with treaty bodies, and to enhance the accessibility of treaty bodies, particularly to NGOs.

Mr President, NGOs are key and legitimate stakeholders in the UN human rights system and must be formally recognised as such, both by mechanisms such as treaty bodies and this Council, and by States themselves. As the voices of rights holders, full and meaningful NGO participation in UN human rights processes is crucial to any “constructive dialogue”, essential to ensuring a proper understanding of the human rights situation concerned, and necessary to ensure effective monitoring of a State's implementation of its human rights obligations on the ground.

Mr President, the High Commissioner's Annual Report also refers to the inadequate resourcing of the UN human rights system and the need for States to commit additional resources to sustain and strengthen the system. ISHR strongly supports this call. Respecting and protecting human rights is never more important than in times of uncertainty and austerity. Research, evidence and recent experience show that reduced investment in human rights in response to economic crises risks inflaming social tensions and impacts

most adversely on the poor and vulnerable. Conversely, increased investment in human rights over the long-term promotes security, peace and prosperity. Mr President, we call on all States to do the right thing legally, economically and morally, and to increase their investment in human rights.

Thank you Mr President.