

## Human Rights Council 31<sup>th</sup> session

### ITEM 6 UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR) GENERAL DEBATE

18 March 2016

*Speaker: Ben Leather*

Mr President – this statement will reflect upon the UPR's 23<sup>rd</sup> session; make suggestions regarding UPR strengthening; and make an urgent call on Honduras.

*Regarding the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session:*

ISHR encourages States to use the UPR to demand the highest standards in human rights defender protection, civic space, journalistic freedom and the rights to free assembly and association. Put quite simply, if States make it easier for civil society to defend human rights, then they give themselves a better chance of implementing the range of UPR recommendations they receive.

In this respect, it is pleasing to note a broadening number of States raising these issues through the UPR, with important recommendations made by Cyprus, Estonia, Ghana, Iraq, Latvia, Luxembourg, Namibia and Uruguay at the 23<sup>rd</sup> session.

Myanmar received pertinent recommendations in these areas which - if swiftly and properly implemented - will contribute to a democratic transition that is participative, ensures accountability for past violations, and forges laws and institutions which uphold human rights and the rule of law.

*Regarding UPR strengthening:*

We welcome the upcoming break between cycles as an opportunity for us all to reflect upon how to ensure the UPR is **accessible** to civil society, **protective** to human rights defenders, and **effective** in contributing to real human rights change.

We believe the UPR requires strengthening along four lines:

- Firstly, by establishing an institutionalised mechanism to prevent, investigate and remedy cases of reprisals.
- Secondly, by guaranteeing civil society space throughout the UPR process, including at the Working Group stage.
- Thirdly, by ensuring greater follow-up to, and implementation of, recommendations.
- And fourthly, by raising the standard of UPR proceedings, with a focus on quality recommendations, senior participation and clear responses.

*Finally, regarding Honduras:*

In September, Honduras accepted more than 20 recommendations regarding the protection of human rights defenders. On Tuesday, Nelson Garcia became the third member of the COPINH indigenous organisation to be assassinated; just 12 days after the murder of Berta Caceres provoked indignation in this Council chamber. In the meantime, authorities and armed individuals have harassed COPINH members and their families.

We ask Honduras to update the Council regarding what measures are being taken to protect the COPINH and other defenders, ensure an independent and effective investigation of these murders, (with the oversight of international experts) implement its UPR recommendations, and seek OHCHR assistance in the protection of defenders.