

To: **All Member States of the United Nations General Assembly**

24 November 2015

## **SUPPORT THE DRAFT RESOLUTION ON RECOGNIZING THE ROLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND THE NEED FOR THEIR PROTECTION**

Excellencies,

We write to you as a group of human rights defenders and civil society organizations located across the world working at national, regional and international levels. We write in regard to the draft resolution entitled "[\*Recognizing the role of human rights defenders and the need for their protection\*](#)" currently being advanced in the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, and due to be adopted on Wednesday 25 November 2015.

We urge your government to support the abovementioned resolution and to reject amendments, tabled by the African Group, China and Iran, designed to weaken the text.<sup>1</sup>

Among other things, the proposed amendments remove references to the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders, delete or weaken language regarding the need for their protection, and delete whole paragraphs related to the need to combat impunity for violations and abuses against defenders and the need to ensure adequate procedural safeguards in judicial proceedings. A call for the release of defenders detained or imprisoned in violation of international human rights law, for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, is also proposed for deletion. In addition, the amendments introduce notions that States should only support and enable their work 'as appropriate', rather than in accordance with the [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#) and other obligations arising under international human rights law

Human rights defenders make a vital contribution to the promotion and respect for human rights, democratic processes, securing and maintaining peace and security, and advancing development in our countries. However, in doing this work, defenders often face a range of violations and abuses at the hands of State and non-State actors. States must acknowledge the role of defenders and the specific risks they face, and commit to ensuring their protection.

Seventeen years ago, all States agreed to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, including State obligations to protect all human rights defenders working on all human rights. This commitment has been reiterated and built upon in subsequent General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions. We are therefore extremely concerned to hear that the abovementioned delegations have objected to several core elements of the draft resolution.

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<sup>1</sup> The amendments are contained in UN documents A/C.3/70/L.69 - L.107, available [here](#).

Based on consultations with over 500 defenders from 111 States, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders found that in the vast majority of States the situation for human rights defenders is deteriorating in law and in practice. He concluded that a lack of awareness regarding their vital and legitimate work, combined with a lack of political commitment and weak institutional arrangements for their protection, is placing them, their organisations and families at elevated risk.<sup>2</sup>

The resolution as drafted reflects a number of these findings and makes a series of recommendations for States and other actors. Importantly, this year's text includes a key focus on the implementation of the resolution itself. This will hopefully prompt States and other actors to move beyond rhetoric in addressing the challenges faced by human rights defenders and take action to ensure the implementation of the calls in the resolution.

**We urge all States to live up to their human rights commitments by supporting this resolution, by rejecting amendments designed to weaken it, and by taking concrete steps to protect human rights defenders.**

Sincerely,

Acción Solidaria on HIV/Aids  
Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights  
Action Trans-Crime Uganda  
ActionAid International  
ADC Memorial  
African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies  
Alkarama Foundation  
Alliance for Democracy in Laos  
Amnesty International  
Analytical Center for Interethnic Cooperation and Consultations  
ARTICLE 19  
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development  
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)  
Asian Legal Resource Centre  
Assistance Mission for Africa (AMA)  
Association des Victimes Parents et Amis du 28 Septembre 2009 (AVIPA)  
Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)  
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)  
Association of World Citizens  
Association UMDPL

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<sup>2</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders to the General Assembly, available [here](#).

Bahrain Centre for human rights  
Balance Mexico  
Belarus Watch  
British Humanist Association  
Brot für die Welt  
Business & Human Rights Resource Centre  
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)  
Cambodian Center for Human Rights  
CELS  
Center for Civil Liberties  
Center for Inquiry  
Centre for Civil and Political Rights  
Centre for Civil Liberties  
Centre for Human Rights and Development  
Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights  
Child Rights Connect (formerly Le Groupe des ONG pour la Convention Relative aux Droits de L'Enfant)  
Child Rights International Network  
CIVICUS  
Civil Rights Defenders  
CIVILIS Human Rights  
Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains  
Comité de ONG de América Latina y el Caribe -CoNGO- sobre la Condición de la Mujer -CSW-  
Consortio para el Diálogo Parlamentario Mx  
Desaparecidos - Philippines  
Diaspora Action Australia  
EarthRights International  
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights  
Egyptian Organization for Human Rights  
Equality Myanmar  
Equidad de Género, Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia  
FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders  
Fortress of Hope Africa  
Foundation HELP  
Freedom House  
Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama - Ecuador  
Front Line Defenders  
Fundacion Arcoiris por el Respeto a la Diversidad Sexual  
Geneva for Human Rights  
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect  
Global Human Rights Group  
Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Global Justice Center  
Green Advocates  
Gulf Center for Human Rights  
Health and Human Rights Info  
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor  
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia  
Helsinki Committee of Armenia  
HRM "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan"  
Human Rights Campaign in China  
Human Rights Concern - Eritrea  
Human Rights Defenders Alert - India  
Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF)  
Human Rights Information Center  
Human Rights Watch (HRW)  
humanrights.ch  
Hustisya – Philippines  
IDSN  
International Center for Justice and Human Rights  
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law  
International Commission of Jurists Victoria  
International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO)  
International Helsinki Association for Human Rights  
International Justice Project  
International Justice Resource Center  
International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)  
International Partnership for Human Rights  
International Platform against Impunity  
International Refugee Rights Initiative  
International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)  
International Service for Human Rights  
International Women's Development Agency  
International Women's Health Coalition  
International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific)  
International Youth Human Rights Movement (YHRM)  
Ipas  
Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights  
Just Associates (JASS)  
Justice and Peace Netherlands  
Justice Connect  
Karapatan Alliance for the Advancement for People's Rights - Philippines  
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM)  
Legal-informational Centre for NGOs - Slovenia  
Legal Resources Centre (LRC)  
LGBT Human Rights NASH MIR Center  
Ligue des Électeurs - DRC  
Loretto Community  
Malaysian Physicians for Social Responsibility  
MOLI - Burundi  
Moscow Helsinki Group  
Moscow regional Public Charity Foundation "Social Partnership"  
National Association of Community Legal Centres - Australia  
Nazra for Feminist Studies  
Netherlands Helsinki Committee  
Norwegian Human Rights Fund (NHRF)  
OutRight Action International  
Peace Brigades International  
People's Watch  
Promo LEX  
Protection International  
Public Foundation Notabene  
Public Information and Need of Knowledge NGO  
Public Interest Advocacy Centre  
Public Union of Democracy and Human Rights Resource Centre  
Public Verdict Foundation  
Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services Inc  
Refugee Council of Australia  
Sayoni  
Sexuality Policy Watch  
Society of Ex-detainees Against Detention and Arrests - Philippines  
Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE)  
Sri Lanka Brief  
Swiss Helsinki Committee  
Tanggol Bayi (Defend Women) - Philippines  
The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House  
The Czech Helsinki Committee  
The International Humanist and Ethical Union  
The Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT)  
The Norwegian Human Rights Fund  
The Tibet Bureau  
TRIAL (Track Impunity Always)  
Unión Latinoamericana de Mujeres ULAM

United Nations Association - UK  
Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation  
Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights  
West African Human Rights Defenders Network  
World Federalist Movement - Institute for Global Policy (WFM-IGP)  
Women Peace Network-Arakan  
Women Won't Wait Campaign  
Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom  
Women's Resource Center  
World Movement for Democracy  
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the  
Protection of Human Rights Defenders  
World Uyghur Congress  
Yemen Organization for Defending Rights & Democratic Freedoms  
Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights