

Letter to Member States of the UN Human Rights Council

Re: Support resolution on the protection of human rights defenders addressing economic, social and cultural rights

22 March 2016

Your Excellency,

The undersigned civil society organisations, coming from all regions, urge your delegation to **support the adoption of the resolution on the protection of human rights defenders working to promote economic, social and cultural rights** as tabled. We urge you to **resist efforts to undermine and weaken this resolution**.

The draft resolution entitled ‘Protecting human rights defenders addressing economic, social and cultural rights (A/HRC/31/L.28) is being considered by the 31st session of the Human Rights Council. It will be presented for adoption on 23 or 24 March.

South African jurist and former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, has articulated the importance of such a resolution in the following terms:

As a South African, I have seen and experienced first-hand the role of ESC rights defenders in combating poverty and injustice and in promoting universal human rights for all, even the most powerless and disadvantaged. I have seen how the work of those who defend ESC rights benefits entire communities; just as attacks against those who defend ESC rights harm entire communities. That is why it is so important and timely that the UN Human Rights Council is currently negotiating a resolution on the protection of ESC rights defenders.

The draft resolution has been developed through a number of **open and transparent** informal negotiations.

The text, as tabled, is **balanced and appropriate**, in recognising the vital contribution of human rights defenders to the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. It is currently cosponsored by a broad group of States from all regions of the world.

The text also identifies the threats, attacks and challenges facing this group of defenders and the obligations, duties and interests of State and non-State actors in terms of supporting and safeguarding this work. It provides good practice guidance to both State and non-State actors in this regard.

Despite the importance of the resolution – so tragically illustrated at the commencement of the 31st session with the murder of Honduran woman human rights defender Berta Caceres – a small group of States, led by the Russian Federation, China, Egypt, Cuba and Pakistan are seeking to seriously undermine the text. A large number of adverse amendments being pushed by these States include proposals, which have the purpose or would have the effect of:

- Removing any reference to the term ‘human rights defenders’;
- Denying the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders;
- Weakening protection against, and accountability for, intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders and others who cooperate with the United Nations;
- Failing to acknowledge the specific risks and violations faced by women, indigenous peoples, and land and environment human rights defenders, their families and communities;
- Diluting and regressing from consensus language and terminology from past human rights defenders resolutions; and
- Seeking to justify limitations on human rights that are impermissible under international human rights law.

The amendments being advocated by the Russian Federation, China, Egypt, Cuba and Pakistan should be seen in the context of the systematic efforts currently underway in several of these States to restrict and criminalise the important and legitimate work of human rights defenders and independent civil society organisations in violation of international human rights law. The proposal to weaken language on reprisals should similarly be understood in the context of several of the proposing States being the subject of allegations of intimidation or reprisals in both the Secretary-General's report and the joint communications report of Special Procedures.

We urge you not to associate with such positions. **Instead, we respectfully urge your delegation to co-sponsor resolution L.28 as tabled, vote against the amendments presented, and vote in favor of the resolution as drafted.**

Civil society and human rights defenders around the world look to the HRC and its Member States for support and protection, and we hope your delegation will stand with us.

Yours sincerely,

International Service for Human Rights

Abibiman Foundation

Acción Solidaria on HIV/Aids

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

Akhaya Women Myanmar

Alkarama Foundation

All India Network of Individuals and NGOs working with National and State Human Rights Institutions (AiNNI)

Alliance for Democracy in Laos

Amnesty International

Arc International

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Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)

Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development

Asian Association of Police Studies

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development

Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente (AIDA)

Association for Advancement of Legal Right

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security

Avam NGO

Boys of Bangladesh

Bread for the World, Germany

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

Cambodian Center for Human Rights ("CCHR")

Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)

CELS

Center for Inquiry

Center for Islamic Thought

Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS)

Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)

Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género - Corporación Humanas (Chile)

Chiadzwa Community Development Trust (Zimbabwe)

Child Rights Connect

Child Rights International Network CRIN

CIVICUS

CIVILIS Derechos Humanos

Coalition Against Land Grabbing (CALG) - Philippines

Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CIDDH)

Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)

Colombian Commission of Jurists

Comité Ambiental en Defensa de la Vida, Tolima-Colombia.

Community Resource Centre Foundation (Thailand)

Conectas Human Rights (Brazil)
 Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights
 Corporacion Reiniciar
 DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
 Dejusticia (Colombia)
 Digital Empowerment Foundation
 ECLT Foundation
 Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
 The Honorable Justice Elizabeth Evatt AC, former member of the Human Rights Committee Equitable Cambodia
 EuroMed Rights - Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network
 European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
 Federatie van Nederlandse Verenigingen tot Integratie van Homoseksualiteit - COC Nederland
 Federation of Women and Family Planning
 FIAN International
 FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
 Fiji Women's Rights Movement
 Fórum Suape Espaço Socioambiental - Brazil
 Foundation HELP
 Franciscans International
 Freedom House
 Freedom Now
 Freemuslim Association Inc
 Front Line Defenders
 Function 8
 Gender Empowerment and Development GeED
 Global Bersih
 Global Human Rights Clinic
 Global Initiative for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights
 Global Justice Clinic, NYU School of Law
 Globe International Center
 Green Advocates (Liberia)
 Groundation Grenada
 Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
 Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor
 Human Dignity
 Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan
 Human Rights Council of Australia
 Human Rights Defenders Alert - India
 Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone
 Human Rights House Foundation
 Human Rights Intitute of South Africa
 Human Rights Law Centre (Australia)
 Human Rights Watch
 Humane, Koraput
 ICCA Consortium
 Inclusive Development International
 Institute for African studies (inštitut za Afriške študije, Cankarjeva 1, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
 Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
 International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute
 International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran
 International Civil Action Network (ICAN)
 International Commission of Jurists
 International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO)
 International Council on Social Welfare - Europe
 International Humanist and Ethical Union
 International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)
 International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
 International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net)
 International Platform against Impunity
 International Women's Development Agency
 International Youth Human Rights Movement (YHRM)
 IPEN
 Ivorian Observatory for Human Rights (OIDH)
 JASS -Just Associates-
 Just Associates (JASS)
 Justice and Peace Action Group (JPAG) Aurora, the Philippines
 Kvinna till Kvinna
 Legal Resources Centre (South Africa)

LGBT Centre (Mongolia)
 Loretto Community
 Martin Ennals Foundation
 Mexico Group, Finnish Peace Union
 MiningWatch Canada
 Minority Rights Group International (MRG)
 Mitchell foundation-NGO (Mongolia)
 Mongolian Women's Employment Supporting Federation
 Mosaiko Instituto para a Cidadania
 Movimento Xingu Vivo para Sempre
 Movimiento Homosexual de Lima - MHOL, Perú
 Narasha Community Development Group
 National Economic and Social Rights Initiative
 Nazra for Feminist Studies (Egypt)
 New Wind Association
 Nuremberg Human Rights Centre
 Ogiek Peoples' Development Program
 OT Watch (Mongolia)
 Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum
 Paul K. Feyerabend Foundation
 Peace Brigades International
 People's Watch - India
 Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc.
 PODER
 Polish Institute for Human Rights and Business
 POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti
 Professor Ben Saul, Sydney Law School, The University of Sydney, Australia
 Project Maisha
 Promo-LEX Association, Moldova
 Protection International
 Proyecto de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales (ProDESC)- México
 Public Interest Advocacy Centre (Australia)
 Public Verdict Foundation
 Rainforest Foundation Norway
 RECOFTC
 Rede Pantanal de ONGs e Movimentos Sociais
 Reporters Without Borders
 Réseau International des Droits Humains (RIDH)
 Rights and Accountability in Development
 Rivers without Boundaries Mongolia
 SAVIA - Asociación para la conservación, investigación de la biodiversidad y el desarrollo sustentable
 Scholars at Risk Network
 Sherpa
 Shia Rights Watch Inc
 Southern Africa Litigation Centre
 Steps Without Borders NGO
 Struggle to Economize Future Environment (SEFE)
 SWRC
 Terra de Direitos (Brazil)
 The Gaia Foundation
 The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People(MOSOP)
 The Tibet Bureau
 The Woodland League, Ireland
 Think Centre
 Transparency International
 True Heroes Films
 UN Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA)
 Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA - International Association of Lawyers)
 Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
 US Human Rights Network
 Uthnau
 Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
 We Women Lanka (Sri Lanka)
 West African Human Rights Defenders' Network
 Workplace Pride Asia
 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

As of 4 April 2016