

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, 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
Acción Solidaria on HIV/Aids
Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights
Alkarama Foundation
All India Network of Individuals and NGOs
working with National and State Human
Rights Institutions (AiNNI)
Amnesty International
Arc International
ARTICLE 19
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 (Argentina)
Center for Inquiry
Center for Islamic Thought
Centre for the Development of Democracy and
Human Rights (Russia)
Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y
Justicia de Género - Corporación Humanas
(Chile)
Child Rights Connect
Child Rights International Network CRIN
CIVICUS
CIVILIS Derechos Humanos
Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits
Humains (CIDDH)
Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)
Colombian Commission of Jurists
Community Resource Centre Foundation
(Thailand)
Conectas Human Rights (Brazil)
Consortium on Gender, Security and Human
Rights
Corporacion Reiniciar
Defend Defenders (East and Horn of Africa
Human Rights Defenders Project)
Digital Empowerment Foundation (India)
ECLT Foundation
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
Equitable Cambodia
EuroMed Rights - Euro Mediterranean Human
Rights Network

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 (Tanzania)

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

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 Law Centre (Australia)

Human Rights Watch

Humane, Koraput

ICCA Consortium (www.iccaconsortium.org)

Inclusive Development International

Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

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)

Ivorian Observatory for Human Rights (OIDH)

Just Associates (JASS)

Kvinna till Kvinna

LGBT Centre (Mongolia)

Loretto Community

Martin Ennals Foundation

MiningWatch Canada

Minority Rights Group International (MRG)

Mongolian Women's employment supporting federation

Mosaiko Instituto para a Cidadania

Movimento Xingu Vivo para Sempre

Movimiento Homosexual de Lima - MHOL, Perú

National Economic and Social Rights Initiative

National Fisheries Solidarity Organization (NAFSO), Sri Lanka

Nazra for Feminist Studies (Egypt)

Nuremberg Human Rights Centre

Ogiek Peoples' Development Program

OT Watch (Mongolia)

Peace Brigades International

People's Watch - India

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

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
Salmah Women's Resource Centre (Sudan)
SAVIA - Asociación para la conservación,
investigación de la biodiversidad y el desarrollo
sustentable
Scholars at Risk Network
Shia Rights Watch Inc
Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)
Steps Without Borders NGO
Terra de Direitos (Brazil)
The Honorable Justice Elizabeth Evatt AC,
former member of the Human Rights
Committee
The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni
People(MOSOP)
The Tibet Bureau
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
We Women Lanka (National conviner)
Marian Geetha lakmini
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 24 March 2016