

H. E. Joachim Ruecker
President of the Human Rights Council
Palais des Nations, Geneva

3 July 2015

Dear Ambassador Ruecker,

Venezuela: Intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders

I write regarding a case of intimidation and reprisal which merits your urgent attention as President of the Human Rights Council.

On 1 July, the President of the National Assembly of Venezuela and Vice-President of the Socialist Party of Venezuela, Diosdado Cabello, appeared on State TV (Venezolana de Television) and, during his weekly address, mentioned International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) staff members Ben Leather and Eleanor Openshaw and Board member Gustavo Gallon as among those human rights defenders working to undermine the Venezuelan State. As you will be aware, Mr Gallon is also the Human Rights Council's Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Haiti.

The broadcast is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4y1ARpxGSs>, with the relevant segment being at 2.05.30. A synopsis was also posted online and is attached, together with an unofficial translation.

The broadcast mentioned that ISHR staff facilitated a workshop for human rights defenders in Venezuela on engaging with UN human rights mechanisms, attendees of which have subsequently used those mechanisms to issue 'lies' about Venezuela.

The incident is part of an ongoing campaign in Venezuela to intimidate, defame, stigmatise and undermine the work of defenders and their engagement with the international human rights system. Attached please find our previous statement on this issue.

The actions of the President of the National Assembly are in clear breach of international law and flagrantly incompatible with Venezuela's membership of the UN Human Rights Council, pursuant to which it is required to uphold the highest standards of human rights and cooperate fully with the UN human rights mechanisms. Under international law, governments must ensure that human rights defenders are allowed to pursue their legitimate activities without reprisals, threats, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination.

Defaming, stigmatising and undermining relevant human rights defenders for seeking to cooperate or cooperating with the Human Rights Council undermines the Human Rights Council as a whole and constitutes impermissible intimidation and reprisal. In this regard we recall Human Rights Council Resolution 24/24 which urges States to 'prevent and refrain from all acts of intimidation or reprisal

against those who seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, or who have provided testimony or information to them.'

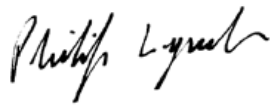
For a member State of the UN Human Rights Council to retaliate against human rights defenders for attending a workshop on engaging with the UN human rights mechanisms is tantamount to contempt and is plainly incompatible with membership of that body.

In light of the information above, we urge you, as the President of the Human Rights Council, to follow up with the concerned State's representatives in Geneva and ensure that this case of reprisal is fully and promptly investigated and effectively remedied in line with Council resolutions 24/24 and 27/18.

We are sending this letter with the consent of the other human rights defenders named and defamed in the broadcast.

We look forward to hearing as to what action you propose to take and would be pleased to provide you with any further information necessary.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Lynch', written in a cursive style.

Philip Lynch

Director

CC: Members of the Human Rights Council Bureau

Secretary of the Human Rights Council