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STATEMENT UNDER ITEM 11: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa

Madame Chair, Honourable Commissioners, State parties, fellow human rights defenders.

Madam Chair, the International Service for Human Rights takes this opportunity to congratulate the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) for the work done during the inter-sessional period.

Madame Rapporteur, we congratulate you on a successful HRDs colloquium hosted in Cotonou, Benin. This event was significant as it marked the end of your 12 years as Commissioner and 10 years as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs in Africa.

We will highlight the plight of defenders in Mauritania, as it is the only state under review at this session. Laws covering public disorder, resisting arrest and belonging to an unauthorized organisation have been used in politically motivated prosecutions against HRDs and government opponents.

We note with grave concern that the space for the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly has shrunk as journalists, HRDs and government critics were arrested and prosecuted by a politicized judiciary.

ISHR welcomes the 2016 legislative developments in the fight against torture, including the new torture law and the law establishing the National Preventive Mechanism. We call on the government of Mauritania to end impunity and give the judiciary space and independence to adequately investigate torture allegations, especially the torture of journalists, CSO representatives and HRDs in general.

ISHR also recognizes that Mauritania adopted the Maputo protocol in 2005. We echo your call to the government under review to refer to the African Commission's report on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa for the relevant measures to promote and protect the work of women HRDs.

Madame Rapporteur, as we are approaching the end of your mandate as a Commissioner and as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs in Africa, ISHR would like to appreciate the work you have done for the HRDs mechanism.

You worked tirelessly and through your leadership produced the African Commission's report on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders in Africa, the study on Freedom of Association and Assembly (FOAA) followed by the Guidelines for FOAA in Africa.



You called for adoption of national laws that protect and promote HRDs, went to the frontlines documenting the challenges of defenders in Burundi, Somalia and many other conflict areas. You strengthened the collaboration with your counterpart at the United Nations level and raised the visibility of HRDs and their work at the continental level.

We welcomed Resolution 273 designating you with the mandate to document, investigate and promote accountability for cases of reprisals. We look forward to working with your successor to fully operationalize this important mandate.

Based on your experience, what do you see as the critical challenges for the protection of HRDs on the continent? What do you recommend to strengthen the capacity of the African Commission HRDs mechanism to effectively address those challenges?

Madame Chair, ISHR calls on the African Commission to adopt a resolution that renews this important mandate at the 61st African Commission ordinary session.

I thank you.