



Oral statement to the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 5: General debate on human rights bodies and mechanisms

[Text in italics not read in oral version delivered]

Your Excellencies,

This is a joint statement by 17 NGOs with ECOSOC status.

Ten years ago, Chinese human rights defender Cao Shunli died in custody. She had pressed the Chinese government to consult civil society when preparing for its UPR, and shared information on *extralegal* detention and torture with the UN. She was wrongfully detained trying to leave China for Geneva in September 2013, denied adequate medical care, and died of multiple organ failure on 14 March 2014.

UN Special Procedures experts publicly [called for a full investigation](#) into her death in [2014](#), [2019](#) and once again [last week](#). Her case is one of the longest-standing cases in the Secretary-General's reprisal reports. Countless other human rights defenders pay a heavy price for cooperating with the UN, including many women human rights defenders in China: Li Qiaochu, Xu Yan, Huang Xueqin, Li Yuhan, Chow Hang-tung, among others.

It is unacceptable to give a free pass to the Chinese government, which—exactly ten years ago—disrupted this Human Rights Council for one hour and a half to block a moment of silence by ISHR in honour of Cao Shunli. It is unacceptable to normalise reprisals.

Cao's courage inspires defenders globally, so let her legacy and name resonate in this room until there is accountability for all victims of reprisals. Cao said: “Our impact may be large, may be small, and may be nothing. But we must try. It is our duty to the dispossessed and it is the right of civil society.”

Before concluding... this is a moment of silence in honour of Cao Shunli.

I ask everybody present in this room, State and NGO representatives, to mirror the courage of all human rights defenders and victims of reprisals and always stand in solidarity with them.

亲爱的曹大姐，安息吧，天会亮的！ [Read in Chinese. Approximate English translation: Dearest Big Sister Cao, rest in peace, there will be light at the end of the night!]

Thank you.

Co-sponsored by the following NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC:

1. Amnesty International
2. Anti-Slavery International
3. ARTICLE 19
4. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
5. Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR-Centre)
6. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
7. Conectas Direitos Humanos
8. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide)
9. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
10. Front Line Defenders
11. Human Rights Watch
12. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
13. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
14. International Service for Human Rights
15. Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
16. Minority Rights Group
17. Society for Threatened People

Endorsed by the following NGOs not in consultative status with ECOSOC:

1. Art for Human Rights
2. Asian Lawyers Network (ALN)
3. Campaign for Uyghurs
4. HK Labour Rights Monitor
5. Hong Kong Centre for Human Rights
6. Hong Kong Democracy Council (HKDC)
7. Hong Kong Watch
8. Human Rights in China
9. Humanitarian China
10. International Campaign for Tibet
11. International Tibet Network
12. Martin Ennals Foundation
13. Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders
14. PEN International
15. Safeguard Defenders
16. The 29 Principles
17. The Rights Practice
18. Tibet Justice Center
19. Uyghur Human Rights Project
20. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)