

[UN and States must address continuing failure to prevent and ensure accountability for reprisals](#)

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(New York and Geneva) – A [new report prepared by ISHR for the UN Secretary-General](#) demonstrates the need for the UN and States to prevent and ensure accountability for acts of intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN, and lays out a series of recommendations for reform in that regard.

The publication of the report coincides with the revelation by the Human Rights Council President at the opening of the 32nd session in Geneva that a [State representative from Russia recently made a serious online threat against a human rights defender](#), Florian Irmingier of the Human Rights House Foundation, in retaliation for his Council advocacy. HRHF is known globally for its work to support and protect human rights defenders at risk, including in Russia.

'This serious threat targeted not only me as an individual, but also amounted to an attack on my organisation and a veiled threat against all human rights defenders working in or in relation to Russia,' Mr Irmingier said.

Welcoming the Human Rights Council President's strong denunciation of acts of intimidation and reprisals against civil society actors engaging with the Council, ISHR Director Phil Lynch said, 'An online threat of violence made by a state representative, albeit one hiding behind the cowardice of anonymity, is a threat not only against the targeted individual, but the very integrity of this important institution. We encourage the Russian delegation to publicly report to the Council on the steps they have taken to ensure accountability for the perpetrator, justice for the victim, and to guarantee non-repetition.'

Update (14 June 2016): ISHR Director Phil Lynch has delivered a [statement](#) to the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council during the general debate session with the High Commissioner, calling on Russia to publicly report to the Council on the steps taken to ensure accountability for the perpetrator, justice for the victim, and to guarantee non-repetition.

Human Rights Watch's Geneva Director, John Fisher, said, 'The Human Rights Council must be and remain a safe and accessible place for human rights defenders and victims of violations. We look to the President of the Council, consistent with his role and responsibility to safeguard the institution and those who engage with it, to follow up, speak up, and promote accountability and justice in this case.'

Meanwhile, the ISHR report is intended to inform the Secretary-General's own annual report on reprisals, to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2016.

The report documents a disturbing pattern of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders seeking to engage with the UN, including cases of arbitrary detention and travel bans in China and Sudan, defamation and stigmatisation in Honduras and Venezuela, judicial harassment in the Maldives, and serious threats against defenders, including that outlined above.

The report also highlights the [ongoing harassment of NGOs by the UN Committee on NGOs](#) – a Committee whose mandate it is to approve NGOs for accreditation that has come under fierce criticism for discriminating and arbitrarily blocking NGOs that work on human rights.

In the overwhelming majority of reported cases, the steps taken by States to prevent, investigate or ensure accountability for reprisals have been inadequate or non-existent. This ongoing impunity serves to license

further attacks in many States.

The report also notes recent steps taken by various UN and regional human rights mechanisms, as well as by international financial institutions, to address the issue of reprisals and intimidation. Some progress has been made by individual mechanisms but the response in others remains wholly inadequate. Overall there remains a serious lack of coordination between the various UN mechanisms, and a pressing need for an effective system-wide response. In this regard, [the report reiterates previous calls](#) to the Secretary-General to appoint a focal point on reprisals without further delay.

'Where States fail in their duty to refrain from intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating with the UN, the UN itself has a duty to step up, including by speaking out publicly and following up with States to ensure that allegations are investigated, perpetrators held accountable, and victims provided with effective remedies,' said ISHR's Legal Counsel Madeleine Sinclair.

'The UN simply must do more to live up to its legal and moral responsibility to protect and support those on whom it relies to carry out its work,' she said. 'Unfortunately, experience suggests that States will continue to carry out reprisals while the political costs of doing so remain low. The UN, and the Secretary-General in particular, are in a position to raise those costs and it's high time it did so.'

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