

## **UN Human Rights Council must act to protect human rights defenders**

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'Despite this, around the world we witness an increase in attacks and reprisals against human rights defenders, together with an expansion of laws which restrict and impair the work of non-government organisations,' Mr Lynch said.

The killing of independent journalists in Sri Lanka, the enactment of so-called 'homosexual propaganda laws' in the Ukraine, and restrictions on access to foreign funding for NGOs in Russia, Ethiopia and Egypt are all examples of this trend.

In addition to being alarmed by restrictions and reprisals, ISHR is concerned that selective appeals to culture, religion and 'traditional values' are being used to undermine the work of women human rights defenders and those working on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

ISHR's concerns are shared by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay, who will today tell the Council that it is 'particularly depressing to observe policy debates and legislative measures - in many countries, across all regions - which may severely undermine non-governmental organisations that are vital to the healthy functioning of democracy.'

In her statement Ms Pillay will tell assembled diplomats that, 'civil society remains vital to advancing the human rights agenda, both at the national level and internationally, and I must speak out to warn you of the real setbacks to human rights protection that will follow if civil society is threatened or restricted.'

Welcoming Ms Pillay's remarks Mr Lynch said, 'In March the Human Rights Council adopted a landmark resolution on protecting human rights defenders. It was co-sponsored by 77 States and adopted by consensus. We must close the gap between what States commit to here in Geneva and the reality of their laws and policies on the ground.'

The resolution on human rights defenders urges States 'to create a safe and enabling environment in which human rights defenders can operate free from hindrance and insecurity' and calls on States to review and amend legislation affecting human rights defenders to ensure compliance with international human rights law.

'If Council is to fulfil its mandate of "promoting universal respect human rights", and if Member States are to meet the requirements of "upholding the highest standards in human rights" and "fully cooperating with the Council", it is imperative that this resolution is observed and fully implemented at the national level,' Mr Lynch said.

ISHR's statement to the UN Human Rights Council is available [here](#).

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