

Opinion: "Reprisals against human rights defenders must stop"

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By Remigiusz Achilles Henczel, President of the Human Rights Council

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Indeed, civil society's ongoing and strong engagement is of the utmost importance not only for the Council, but also for the whole UN human rights promotion and protection system. This special role is widely recognized in a number of the UN documents, including the Council's founding resolution 60/251. As stipulated in this resolution the Council shall work in cooperation with Governments, regional organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society.

Civil society and national human rights institutions are essential in providing the Council with reliable and updated information directly from the ground. Without this information, the Council would not be as effective given its reliance on information provided by civil society. One ought not forget civil society's engagement in the daily Council's work through its participation in general debates, panels and informal consultations either. During my term as the Human Rights Council's President, I will remain deeply committed to ensuring the fullest possible participation of civil society in the Council.

In that context, any instances of reprisals against persons or groups cooperating with UN mechanisms are unacceptable and must end. They not only violate human rights, but also undermine the UN human rights protection system, which in its work relies to a large extent on information provided by civil society and human rights defenders. All alleged cases of reprisals should be investigated without any delay and perpetrators should be brought to justice. It is the responsibility of the international community, particularly the Human Rights Council and the UN treaty bodies, to address this problem in a swift and effective manner. Building on the experience of my predecessor, Ambassador Laura Dupuy Lasserre from Uruguay, I will continue to speak out strongly against any cases of reprisals, particularly if they happen here in Geneva.

I shall count on civil society's support and cooperation over the course of this year.