

## **Council reviews countries that seriously violate human rights**

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The Human Rights Council this week turned its attention to serious human rights violations in countries around the world. The Council has mandated experts to monitor the situations in Syria, Myanmar, Iran, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and report back at regular intervals to States. All these experts are due to have their mandates renewed through resolutions to be adopted on 21 and 22 March. The Council relies on the information received from these experts to take appropriate action in response to developments on the ground.

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### **Lack of access for UN experts**

In the cases of the commission of inquiry into the situation of Syria, and the Special Rapporteurs set up to monitor the situations in Iran and the DPRK, access to the countries concerned has never been granted by the authorities.

The lack of cooperation by these countries with the UN system came in for criticism by other States. Estonia and the US 'deeply regretted' the DPRK's refusal to recognise the Special Rapporteur, while New Zealand urged cooperation with the Special Rapporteur as a means to guarantee the rights of its citizens.

Qatar and the EU denounced the Syrian regime's denial of access to the commission of inquiry. Japan, Slovenia, the Netherlands, and Switzerland reiterated the appeal to Syrian authorities to allow the commission to enter Syria.

As for Iran, the US remained concerned that Iran refused access for the Special Rapporteur. Slovakia, France, the US, New Zealand, Belgium, and Macedonia all urged Iran to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur.

In contrast, Myanmar has granted access to the Special Rapporteur set up to monitor its own situation, and has extended an invitation to OHCHR to open an office in the country, an initiative that was supported during the dialogue by Germany, France, Denmark, and the US.

### **Reprisals against human rights defenders who cooperate with the UN experts**

The Special Rapporteur on the situation in Iran, Mr Ahmed Shaheed, noted that he relies on cross-checked evidence submitted to him by sources both inside and outside the country. He criticised Iran for, among other things, imprisoning people for providing him with information, including five Kurdish prisoners who have been charged with 'contacting the office of the Special Rapporteur'.

### **UN experts attacked by States**

Mr Shaheed was also attacked by Iran in the Human Rights Council, and his report was criticised as the product of an 'unhealthy exercise' initiated by the US and European allies, and as a result non-objective, unfounded, and in contradiction to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

The President of the Human Rights Council, Mr Remigiusz Henczel, intervened to reprimand Iran for its derogatory remarks. Mr Henczel stated that no personal attacks against the Rapporteur should be made, adding that everyone has the right to express his or her views about the report, but that this should remain within the accepted framework of ensuring respect.

Venezuela, Ecuador, Cuba, the DPRK, Belarus, Zimbabwe, and Syria criticised country-specific mandates, holding that these mechanisms come about as a result of politicking. The DPRK accused the Special Rapporteur of using false material in his report, alleging that his information was fabricated and invented by hostile forces and was nothing less than a political plot to sabotage the DPRK's socialist system under pretext of human rights protection. Syria accused the commission of inquiry of ignoring the geo-political situation in the region, and of emphasising partial information received from untrustworthy sources.

### **Calls for accountability**

The need to ensure accountability for the violations in these countries was a common theme throughout the discussions. Mr Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the commission of inquiry into the situation in Syria, held that the initiative by the UN and the Arab League Joint Special Representative for Syria, stating that the UN would be willing to facilitate negotiations between the parties, was a step in the right direction. However he called urgently for a sustained diplomatic initiative and a political settlement, including referral to justice for those responsible for grave violations. The commission's report states that the Security Council should take appropriate action to secure justice, including possible referral to the International Criminal Court.

This call was reiterated by 63 countries from all regions of the world in a statement read by Libya, which emphasised the imperative need for accountability if sustainable peace is to be secured.

Calls for accountability were also made in the case of the DPRK. The Special Rapporteur on the DPRK called on member States of the Council to set up a mechanism of inquiry with the ability to carry out more in-depth investigations into the situation in the country. In response to this call, Syria accused the Council of 'throwing sovereignty out of the window', and of blocking efforts to towards sincere dialogue and interactive cooperation.

The Rapporteur listed nine key patterns of violations documented by the UN: violation of right to food, torture and other cruel treatment, arbitrary detention, violation of human rights associated with prison camps, discrimination, violation of freedom of expression, violation of right to life, restrictions on freedom of movement, and enforced disappearances. Although the majority of States condemned the atrocities in the DPRK, Belarus pushed the point of view that what the DPRK required was 'technical assistance'.

### **Technical assistance**

In contrast to the reports on the other countries, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar commended the country's progress, praising the release of over 800 prisoners of conscience. However, the Rapporteur stated that on-going torture needs to stop, and that vulnerable people's situations have not improved. Thailand on behalf of ASEAN stated that they welcomed positive developments, encouraged Myanmar to seek assistance, and reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to extend help. Thailand also made its own statement supporting Myanmar, as did Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. China noted that the government has taken effective measures to calm down the situation.

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