

UN top rights body must demand end to criminal persecution of human rights activists

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'In the last months alone, Russia and the Ukraine have moved laws to criminalise so-called "homosexual propaganda", Egypt has approved a law severely restricting public demonstrations, and Indonesia has proposed a bill curtailing the legitimate activities of non-government organisations,' Mr Ineichen said.

According to Mr Ineichen a recent report by the UN expert on human rights defenders, Margaret Sekkaggya, further demonstrated that many governments use the legal system to restrict, intimidate and harass human rights defenders and undermine their work.

'The UN expert's report shows that the legal system is used and abused in a wide range of ways to target human rights defenders. This ranges from laws which restrict NGOs from receiving foreign funding, to a reliance on vague notions of "public morals" to curtail advocacy on issues such as sexual and reproductive health rights.'

'This is despite the fact that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders impose legal obligations on states to protect human rights defenders and ensure that any limitations on their activities are strictly necessary, reasonable and proportionate.'

In response to this report, the UN Human Rights Council – the world's peak human rights body which is currently meeting in Geneva – is considering a resolution calling for the elimination of laws which restrict the work of human rights defenders and the passage of laws which ensure that they are able to fully exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and peaceful protest.

'The Council should prove its value as the UN's top human rights body and its support for human rights defenders by adopting this important resolution by consensus,' said Mr Ineichen.

The resolution, being negotiated over the coming 10 days, is expected to be adopted on 21 March 2013. Unsurprisingly, initial consultations have shown that states with the most restrictive laws on their books are lobbying to oppose the resolution.

'The diversity of situations in which governments misuse the legislative or judicial system to crush criticism as part of a more widespread campaign against human rights defenders underscores the need for concerted action by the international community', Mr Ineichen concluded.

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

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