

## Human Rights Council 26th session

### Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Working Group on business and human rights

#### THE ROLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN PROMOTING CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Madame Vice-President, Mr Chair of the Working Group,

ISHR shares the grave concern expressed in the Working Group's report regarding the worsening trend of intimidation and attacks against human rights defenders who work on issues of business and human rights.

Human rights defenders have a crucial role to play in promoting corporate responsibility, and in advising both States and business as to the implementation of the Guiding Principles. They also have a crucial role to play in exposing corporate human rights violations, and working with victims to ensure accountability and achieve justice where they occur.

Despite the constructive and positive role they can play, from the DRC and Thailand, to [Mexico](#) and [Russia](#), human rights defenders are being criminalised and attacked for their work to identify, mitigate and remedy human rights violations associated with business operations.

In this light, we welcome the Working Group's recommendation that 'States ensure the protection of human rights defenders who raise awareness of the impact of business activities'. We call on States that are developing or contemplating National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights to ensure they include concrete measures to protect and support defenders.

Mr Chair, we also call on the Working Group itself to intensify its focus on the situation and protection of defenders working on issues of corporate accountability. Steps in this regard include ensuring that defenders are properly consulted and able to participate in all aspects of your work. We also urge you to strengthen the practice of issuing or joining other special procedures in press releases, letters of allegations and urgent appeals, both in relation to State and non-State actors, including business.

Madame Vice-President, members of the Council, this session provides an unprecedented opportunity – and indeed an obligation – to protect human rights defenders working on business and human rights. The Council should seize this opportunity by ensuring that any resolution on the issue recognises the threats and risks faced by human rights defenders. The resolution should also call on States to:

- Protect human rights defenders and civil society actors working on issues of business and human rights; and
- Investigate, and ensure accountability for, alleged threats, attacks, reprisals and acts of intimidation against human rights defenders or civil society actors in connection with their work on business and human rights.

Madame Vice-President, we wish to conclude with the following questions to the Working Group:

- First, could you share any examples of good practice where corporate engagement with human rights defenders, such as by consulting with them in the human rights impact assessment of business operations, has had a positive effect on both the protection of defenders and the business operation itself?

- What do you see as the roles and responsibilities of companies and home States in contributing to the protection of human rights defenders, especially in circumstances where a host State lacks the capacity or will to protect human rights defenders?

Thank you Madame Vice-President.