

Statement at 23rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council

27 May 2013

Item 2: General Debate

PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Mr President,

The International Service for Human Rights welcomes the High Commissioner's update. We thank you, High Commissioner, for your strong support for human rights defenders, the work of whom is crucial to upholding human rights and the rule of law.

Around the world there is an increase in attacks and reprisals against human rights defenders, together with an expansion of laws which restrict and impair the work of NGOs. 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, we are 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.

Mr President, Madame High Commissioner, in March this Council adopted a landmark resolution on protecting human rights defenders. It was co-sponsored by 77 States and adopted by consensus.

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

Mr President, if this Council is to fulfil its mandate of 'promoting universal respect for all human rights for all', 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. We must close the gap between what States commit to here in Geneva and the reality of their laws and policies on the ground.

Accordingly, we call on States to report to this Council on the concrete steps and measures – including legislative reform – that they are taking to protect human rights defenders. Finally, Mr President, we call on the Council to hold States to account for the full implementation at the national level of their commitments and obligations under international law.

Thank you.