

Interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders

Human Rights Council – 16th session – 10 March 2010

Mr President, Madam Special Rapporteur,

As a member of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition we welcome your report. Your focus on women human rights defenders is an important contribution to efforts emphasising the particular challenges specific protection needs. States have responsibility to develop tailored responses to these needs, whether violations are committed by State agents or non-state actors. Your focus on women human rights defenders is an important signal to the Council, the entire UN system, and regional human rights systems who look to you for guidance. We therefore encourage your continued leadership in this regard.

We particularly welcome reference to addressing structural discrimination and inequality in regard to the protection of women human rights defenders, and applaud the acknowledgment of States this morning that the ‘rights of women to participate in public life, including through the promotion and protection of human rights’ is key. These risks – as you rightfully point out in paragraph 103 – ‘cannot be conceived of separate from the political, social, economic, environmental, and other systemic factors which produce and reproduce conflict, displacement, inequality, violence, patriarchal attitudes and practices....’ Challenging these structural and systemic factors are fundamental measures to effectively protecting women human rights defenders. This is the starting point for understanding why the experience of women human rights defenders is particular, and we hope that States will continue to build on this foundation for the future.

We also look forward to hearing from you how you will continue to build the gender perspective in your mandate?

Mr President, ISHR welcomes the consistent and inclusive approach you have brought to this mandate. We appreciate the clear focus in your report on violations against defenders working on women’s rights or gender issues, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual and intersex issues. As you point out, this group is ‘thoroughly heterogeneous’ and includes both women and men working on a large range of issues.

You clearly demonstrate that violations against women human rights defenders, including against persons working on LGBTI issues are not exclusive to any region of the world – to the contrary, such violations exist around the world. It is therefore vital that States from all regions take their responsibility of protecting all human rights seriously, even if that requires arduous work in promoting an inclusive human rights culture in their societies. In this regard, we also welcome the contribution of the Mr

Bielefeld in highlighting the central role education plays to combat stereotypes. Such stereotypes undermine the environment for defending rights.

Unfortunately, we heard today renewed attempts by some States to undermine the universality of human rights and discredit women human rights defenders. Seeking to exclude some groups of defenders from equal protection by creating absurd notions of 'social entities that are not consistent with the recognised human rights in the UN system', puts the concept of human rights on its head. Human rights are held by individuals by virtue of their inherent dignity as human beings. The resistance by some States to serious discussion in the Council of violations faced by LGBTI defenders is an insult to human rights defenders who continue to be killed, threatened, illegally detained and discriminated against. The same States recently told the Council that 'a new dawn has come' and that they will QUOTE 'no longer tolerate inequalities and injustice' in their societies.

This interactive dialogue, Mr President, would have been an important opportunity for all States to affirm their support to all human rights defenders, without distinction. Madam Special Rapporteur, what do you plan to do when faced with States that fail to protect women defenders including those working on women's or LGBTI rights?

Finally, ISHR continues to strongly support your mandate. We thank the delegation of Norway for its continued leadership on ensuring the renewal of a strong mandate. We are happy that the renewal of your mandate enjoys broad support. In this context, what specific additions would you see as helpful to further strengthen your mandate?

Thank you.