

[World's leading human rights experts call for defenders to be protected from reprisals](#)

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A group of the world's leading human rights experts has condemned the continuance of attacks and reprisals against human rights defenders and called on States to cooperate fully with the UN human rights system and uphold the rule of law.

The International Service for Human Rights strongly welcomed the [statement by the United Nations Special Procedures Mandate Holders](#).

'It is unacceptable that around 30 States have not yet accepted any visit by a mandate holder and that some have ignored repeated written requests for visits,' said ISHR's Human Rights Council Advocacy Director, Michael Ineichen. In their statement, the Special Procedures report that in other cases States have only given access to a select few and that so-called 'standing invitations' are no guarantee that visits will occur.

"It is particularly concerning that UN Human Rights Council members are not immune from this behaviour", said Mr Ineichen. Last month, ISHR wrote a [letter on behalf of 40 leading NGOs](#) to all States regarding elections to and cooperation with the UN Human Rights Council. ISHR called on newly elected Member States to fully cooperate with the Human Rights Council's independent experts, including by accepting their requests to undertake country visits and by acting in good faith to implement human rights recommendations made by those experts.

ISHR also welcomed the emphasis in the Special Procedures' statement on combatting reprisals and intimidation. In September 2013, the Human Rights Council took a critical step towards ending the disturbing pattern of attacks, harassment and reprisals against human rights defenders and others who cooperate with the UN by [calling on the Secretary-General to appoint a high-level focal point](#) to coordinate the international response to the issue of reprisals, to strengthen protections for human rights defenders and to intervene in cases of alleged attacks.

In their statement, the Special Procedures said:

'The work we do relies on our interaction with civil society, national human rights institutions, human rights

defenders, individuals working on the ground, and victims of human rights violations. It is of serious concern that some of those with whom we engage become victims of intimidation and reprisals. The protection of these vital partners is of utmost importance. We must all respond firmly against any act which threatens them and seeks to obstruct human rights work.

Reprisals are a critical challenge facing the UN system and its human rights mechanisms. The designation of a focal point on this issue is currently under discussion at the General Assembly. We look forward to the designation of the focal point as soon as possible.'

Despite the Special Procedures' call for the focal point to be appointed as soon as possible, [some States in New York, led by the African Group, have undermined this important development in the Third Committee of the General Assembly.](#)

'Attacks, intimidation and reprisals against people who work to expose and seek accountability for human rights violations at the UN violate international law and undermine the UN itself,' said Madeleine Sinclair, Legal Counsel with the International Service for Human Rights.

'It is deeply concerning that the international community has not stood united in the fight against reprisals. It is particularly concerning that African States such as South Africa, home to so many courageous and legendary human rights defenders, appear to be actively opposed vital measures to improve their protection,' Ms Sinclair said.

'It is now imperative that the plenary of the General Assembly set aside the Third Committee decision, follow the Human Rights Council's lead and call for the appointment of an anti-reprisals focal point,' Ms Sinclair said.

'In doing so, the General Assembly should ensure that the focal point has the political authority and weight to confront States that tolerate reprisals, and engage the entire UN system in better protecting civil society'.