

[Reprisals: States must reduce unacceptable human cost of cooperating with UN](#)

27.05.2014



(Geneva) - States should act through the General Assembly to reduce the unacceptable human cost of cooperating with the UN, the International Service for Human Rights and a [coalition of leading international and regional NGOs](#) said today.

'Regrettably, reprisals against persons cooperating with the United Nations, its mechanisms and representatives in the field of human rights continue. They take many forms, ranging from smear campaigns, threats, travel bans, harassment, fines, the closing of organisations, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests, prosecutions and lengthy prison sentences through to torture, ill treatment and even death,' said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2013.

In response, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a [landmark resolution in September 2013](#) calling on the Secretary-General to designate a UN-wide senior focal point to combat reprisals.

'It is incumbent on the UN to appoint a senior official to prevent and seek accountability for intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders and others who cooperate with and contribute to the work of the UN,' said Eleanor Openshaw of ISHR.

Regrettably, Human Rights Council resolution 24/24 was blocked by the UN General Assembly in New York in December 2013, but NGOs are now calling on States to revisit the issue as a matter of priority.

'The disappearance, arbitrary detention, ill-treatment and death of human rights defender Cao Shunli in retaliation for her efforts to hold China to account for its human rights record at the UN is just [one example among many of the unacceptable human cost of cooperating with the UN](#),' said Ms Openshaw.

'The UN and Member States have a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that people are able to exercise their right to communicate with the UN without being harassed, intimidated, attacked and even killed. The passage of Human Rights Council resolution 24/24 is critical in this regard,' she said.

A number of positive recent developments point to the need for the UN and Member States to prioritise the appointment of a senior focal point on reprisals, including a May 2014 [decision by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) in Angola to appoint its own focal point, and a [joint statement delivered by Botswana](#) on behalf of 56 States in Geneva in March 2014 recognising that 'the current response by the UN and the member States in addressing reprisals is inadequate' and calling on them to 'address cases of reprisals through a more effective and coordinated approach.'

'With the opportunity for the General Assembly to revisit the issue in September, NGOs are urging States to

transfer the political will shown on this issue in Angola and Geneva to New York, and achieve an outcome that challenges impunity for the perpetrators of reprisals and increases protection for human rights defenders and others who engage with the UN human rights system,' Ms Openshaw said

Contact: Eleanor Openshaw, Program and Advocacy Manager, ISHR on e.openshaw@ishr.ch or + 41 78 944 2552

ISHR