

## [UN passes strongest resolution yet on ending reprisals against human rights defenders](#)

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(Geneva, 27 September 2013) - The United Nations has taken a critical step towards ending the disturbing pattern of attacks, harassment and reprisals against human rights defenders and others who cooperate with the UN.

A [landmark resolution](#) adopted today by the UN's Human Rights Council is the strongest one to date on the issue of reprisals.

The resolution calls on the Secretary-General himself to appoint a high-level official 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. The resolution also urges States to enact laws to protect human rights defenders.

'Human rights defenders from all regions of the world continue to face intimidation and reprisals for their work to promote human rights, expose violations, and obtain justice for victims at the UN,' said Madeleine Sinclair, Legal Counsel with the International Service for Human Rights.

'Reprisals range from State-sponsored smear campaigns, to the de-registration or closure of NGOs, to arbitrary arrest, torture and even death.'

The creation of the UN 'focal point' marks a huge step forward in the UN's efforts to address reprisals. In twenty-three years of resolutions on this issue, no other resolution to date has gone this far.

'The UN has finally moved beyond rhetoric and reporting and has committed to doing something tangible to address this extremely serious issue,' said Ms Sinclair.

'Working together, the Council and high-level focal point could play a critical role in ensuring that States properly investigate cases of reprisals, prosecute perpetrators, and provide appropriate remedies to victims.'

The resolution adopted by the 47-member Human Rights Council - the world's top human rights body - calls on States to enact national laws and policies that protect human rights defenders, provide people with a right of unhindered access to UN human rights bodies, and prohibit all forms of intimidation or reprisal against people for their work to promote human rights at the international level.

It was adopted despite opposition by a number of States known for their repressive policies towards civil

society and human rights defenders, including Russia, Pakistan and Cuba.

'The laws and policies called for by the resolution would not only contribute to reducing reprisals, but also to building an enabling environment in which human rights and their defenders are recognised as essential contributors to peace, security and democracy,' Ms Sinclair said.

The resolution also recognises the responsibility of the UN itself to protect and support those who contribute to its work, often at great personal risk.

'Just last week, a group of Chinese human rights defenders was intercepted at the airport and prevented from coming to Geneva to advocate on human rights,' said Michael Ineichen, Director of Human Rights Council Advocacy with the International Service for Human Rights.

One of those defenders, Ms Cao Shunli, remains missing with her condition and whereabouts unaccounted for by Chinese officials.

Mr Ineichen said that while China must account for Ms Cao Shunli, it is also incumbent on the UN to protect those who courageously contribute to its work.

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A September 2013 report by ISHR on the role of national laws and policies in ending reprisals is available [here](#).