

Human Rights Council 28th session

GENERAL DEBATE, ITEM 5 18 MARCH 2015

Joint statement on behalf of the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Conectas, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, Human Rights Watch, Article 19 and the Human Rights House Foundation. Speaker: Michael Ineichen - check against delivery

Mr President,

A year ago, a human rights defender seeking to cooperate with this Council was arbitrarily detained, denied medical care and died in custody. One year on, there has been no adequate investigation or accountability in relation to the death of Chinese defender Cao Shunli.

When impunity reigns for reprisals against human rights defenders, attacks and threats against them continue. At this very session, there have been numerous reported cases of intimidation and reprisals – including against South Sudanese and Bahraini defenders.

This is simply not acceptable.

States' legal and moral obligations to protect those who cooperate with the UN are clear, and if a State fails to conduct an investigation, the UN has responsibility to act.

We welcome recent advances, such as the treaty body policies that recognise States' primary duty to ensure accountability in the case of reprisals, and the UN's own duty of care.

Similarly, we welcome the commitment and efforts of you, Mr President, and your bureau to step up your response to alleged reprisals.

These small examples show what is needed across the UN human rights system.

Mr President, today we remember Cao Shunli, and all those defenders who've suffered reprisals. But remembrance is not enough. It must be complemented by action.

We therefore make the following recommendations:

- First, China must ensure a full, independent and impartial investigation into the death of Cao Shunli with the outcome made public, and provide adequate remedies to her family. Failing this, the Council must take action to curb impunity;
- Second, all States must ensure that those cooperating with the UN can exercise their right to do so safely;
- And third, States must show their resolve to stamp out reprisals. Only a dedicated focal point on reprisals could coordinate investigation of and follow-up to individual cases, and address systematic causes of reprisals. It should be designated without delay, as decided in Council resolution 24/24.

Thank you.