

Human Rights Council 28th session

ITEM 6 - UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR) GENERAL DEBATE

20 March 2015 – check against delivery – Ben Leather – b.leather@ishr.ch

Mr President,

ISHR urges States to use the UPR to make recommendations for the development of a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders. If defenders are safe and active, States have a better chance of implementing their other UPR recommendations.

This has been recognised by States including the Czech Republic, Norway, Ireland and Spain, among others, who have consistently made recommendations concerning the protection of defenders. We urge States who have championed human rights defenders elsewhere - as Botswana, Japan and Liechtenstein did in co-sponsoring resolution 24/24 on reprisals - to reinforce those actions by taking a similarly strong stance through the UPR.

In the 20th session we were encouraged to see an increased number of recommendations regarding defenders since the first cycle. Strong and relevant recommendations, such as those accepted by Angola, were also made on civil society space and freedom of assembly, association and expression. We look forward to seeing these implemented promptly.

If strong statements are to lead to concrete improvements, recommending States must follow-up their proposals consistently. Looking forward to May, we implore States to call on Honduras to incorporate civil society input and enact the law on defenders it began to draft in response to recommendations made during its last review.

The Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders recently called for specific measures to protect the most vulnerable defenders. We urge States to reflect this in future recommendations. Given the Rapporteur's inclusion of whistle-blowers and those working on sexual and reproductive rights in this category, recommending that the United States take steps to end harassment and increase protection for these groups would constitute a timely, appropriate response to the growing risks they face there and across the world.

We close by calling upon States to use the UPR to make, accept and implement recommendations for the recognition and protection - as well as the investigation of violations against - human rights defenders.

Thank you.