

## Human Rights Council 29<sup>th</sup> session

### INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE: WORKING GROUP ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

16 June 2015

Thank you Mr President

ISHR welcomes the various reports of the Working Group, including in particular the mission report on Azerbaijan.

As the report points out, the Guiding Principles recognise the critical role played by human rights defenders in preventing, mitigating and seeking accountability for human rights violations related to business operations.

We share the Working Group's deep concern about the repression of human rights defenders by Azerbaijan, and regret that contrary to the Working Group's recommendation, the arrest and detention of prominent human rights defenders continues. In this regard, we would be interested in your views, Mr Addo, on how third States, but also business enterprises operating in the country, could contribute to the release of imprisoned activists?

More broadly, what is the role of companies to contribute to an overall better working environment for human rights defenders, and in particular those working to promote corporate accountability and to expose corruption?

We also welcome the allegations letters of the Working Group contained in the joint communications report, but regret that the Working Group has only sent a fraction of communications when compared to other mandates. For instance, the Working Group sent 3 communications in the reporting period, as opposed to 54 for defenders, 40 for freedom of expression, or 10 for the countering terrorism mandates. That said, we encourage the Working Group to continue to strengthen its communications work, and recognise ongoing efforts to this effect.

The allegations contained in the communications sent to Thailand, Kenya and Nicaragua – the latter two not having received any response during the reporting period – are serious, and range from adverse impact of business operations on the health and livelihood of the local population, to excessive use of force against peaceful protesters, arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention and killings of several human rights defenders. What is the Working Group currently undertaking to follow-up on these serious allegations?

Finally, ISHR would also be interested in learning what, if any, engagement the Working Group has had with the concerned companies, and why previous practice of also sending communications to these companies was no longer followed in these cases?

Thank you.