

Human Rights Council 30th session

Item 3 – Interactive dialogue with Working Group on enforced and involuntary disappearances

Thank you Mr President,

ISHR is deeply concerned at the worsening incidence of enforced disappearances and other attacks against human rights defenders advocating in relation to land-grabbing, corporate accountability, indigenous rights, labour rights, and other economic, social and cultural rights issues, particularly those advocating or protesting against major business projects and investments.

In that regard, we would be interested in hearing the Working Group's reflections on the role that business could play in speaking out against enforced disappearance of human rights defenders, even where the defenders' work is related to their own operations?

Mr President, we agree with the Working Group's assessment that 'when an individual becomes a victim of enforced disappearance as a result of exercising or promoting economic, social and cultural rights, the enjoyment of those rights is also violated.'

As outlined by the working group, enforced disappearances are increasingly used not only to punish protest and dissent, but also to intimidate and deter others. By way of example, the case of Lao defender Sombath Somphone, who has been missing for more than one thousand days illustrates this clearly.

In China, the enforced disappearance and ultimate death of Chinese human rights lawyer and housing rights activist Cao Shunli – notwithstanding claims by the delegation on Monday that Ms Cao was QUOTE not a human rights defenders ENDQUOTE – was intended to both silence *her* and send a *chilling message to others*.

The more recent enforced disappearance or arbitrary detention of Chinese economic, social and cultural rights defenders such as [Mi Chongbiao](#) and [Su Changlan](#) send a similar message.

The Working Group also rightly condemns the increased labeling of such activists as 'rebels, insurgents, terrorists or as being against development' and the use of such terms to 'justify, condone or minimise human rights violations committed against them'.

In that light, the Council should demand that States:

1. Prevent and eradicate enforced disappearances, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors;
2. Ensure that any disappearance of a defender is subject to prompt and thorough investigation, with perpetrators prosecuted and punished and victims and their families provided with adequate and effective remedy.
3. Ensure that high-level government officials *not only refrain from using and condemn derogative labels to stigmatise defenders when used by others, but also* publicly recognise the vital and legitimate role of defenders in promoting economic, social and cultural rights and sustainable development;
4. Enact specific laws and policies, and establish dedicated protection mechanisms, to ensure that human rights defenders are able to operate freely and safely and without fear and restriction.

Thank you.