

Human Rights Council

31st session – Item 3 – Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders

4 March 2016

Joint statement by International Service for Human Rights, African Democracy Forum, Amnesty International, Article 19, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, CELS, Frontline Defenders, Humanas, Peace Brigades International, Protection International

Thank you.

Mr Forst, we welcome your reports.

We join you and some States in expressing our sadness and outrage following the murder yesterday morning of Berta Caceres in Honduras. We call on Honduras to guarantee the thorough, impartial investigation of this crime, recognising that impunity fuels further risks for defenders in the country, and commence inclusive consultations on the effective implementation of its recently adopted defenders law.

Bertha defended ESC and other rights of indigenous and campesino communities, and denounced human rights abuses in the context of large-scale development projects including mining and hydroelectric projects. Her killing is emblematic of the grave risks faced by defenders addressing economic, social and cultural rights, and underlines the need for a strong, substantive resolution on this theme by the Council.

*With regard to your comprehensive observations report, covering almost 80 States from all regions of the world, we note that about one third of the communications dealt with follow-up to previous cases, and **urge you to make available a regularly updated list of 'outstanding' cases**, so as to facilitate follow up to previously covered incidents.*

Your report mentions the important work of the African Commission to highlight violations against defenders on the basis of their gender and/or their work in areas such as sexuality, reproductive health and women's rights. We encourage you to continue cooperation with this and other regional mechanisms, and to ensure coordinated implementation.

Turning to your annual report, we welcome the clear articulation of 7 principles that should underpin policies and practices to protect and support defenders. Overall, they provide useful benchmarks for both your mandate, and the Human Rights Council, to measure the extent to which States fulfil their obligation to protect defenders.

Key among these is that, in consultation with civil society, **States should develop and implement specific national laws and mechanisms to protect defenders and to investigate and ensure accountability for threats and attacks against them.**

We reiterate your recommendation to NHRIs to develop action plans and establish focal points for the protection of defenders, and welcome the call for business to contribute to the protection of defenders by supporting them and condemn attacks on their work, *and for donors to provide long-term, flexible financial support to defenders.* We also echo your call

on the UN itself to strengthen the protection of defenders, including through the 'Rights Up Front' initiative *and the Sustainable Development Goals*, and an enhanced institutional response to reprisals.

In concluding, Mr Forst, could you elaborate further on how States nationally and the Council in its resolutions could apply the 7 principles in contexts where defenders are at risk?