

## **Joint Statement on Reprisals – HRC 25 - 19 March 2014**

1. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of a group of 54 countries. We wish to underscore the important and legitimate role played by civil society in the promotion and protection of human rights, the rule of law, good governance and in the development efforts of any country around the world (small or big), as well as in advancing and upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.
2. It is therefore essential to create a conducive environment for a free and vibrant civil society, capable of meaningful participation at the local, national, regional and international levels.
3. As we all know, the right of individuals and organisations to unhindered access to and communication with international human rights bodies is clearly articulated in international human rights law. However, we are deeply concerned that there are still many incidents of reprisals against individuals and organisations cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the UN human rights mechanisms. These have ranged from smear campaigns, harassment, intimidation, prosecutions and direct threats, to physical attacks and killings.
4. A number of the Council's resolutions have rightly indicated that reprisals are one of the means by which perpetrators of human rights violations and those who tolerate them seek to avoid accountability, and can have a very serious deterrent effect on people willing to cooperate with the UN. Reprisals are never acceptable, not in any circumstances, nor in any fora. It is therefore incumbent on all States to ensure civil society can fulfil its important role at local, regional and international levels, free from intimidation and harassment.
5. The issue of reprisals poses serious challenges to the UN system and its human rights mechanisms, especially because it limits the potential for international mechanisms to complement protection tools for victims of human rights violations. It also deprives the UN and Member States of the knowledge and experience they depend on to carry-out their mandates and responsibilities effectively.

6. In our view, the fact that there are still many incidents of reprisals against those cooperating with the UN system and its human rights mechanisms means that the current response by the UN and the member States in addressing reprisals is inadequate.

7. We therefore strongly feel that there is a need for the UN to address cases of reprisals through a more effective and coordinated approach. The UN Secretary General himself and the High Commissioner for Human Rights have called for 'organizational coherence and a systematic approach by the United Nations to protect civil society actors and organizations better'. Such systematic approach, we believe, should also take a holistic approach to the causes of reprisals with a view to ensuring that we all uphold the principles and purposes of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8. In her opening statement, the High Commissioner praised the adoption by the Council during its September session of a forward looking resolution on reprisals. We share her hope that this initiative will be followed through at the General Assembly.

9. We believe that the UN system and the member States have a responsibility to protect and support those who contribute to its work, often at great personal risk.

I thank you, Mr. President!