

## Statement at 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council

### Item 2: General Debate

#### COMBATING DISCRIMINATION, ENDING IMPUNITY AND EXPANDING CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

Mr President, Madame High Commissioner

ISHR welcomes the High Commissioner's report and invaluable work. High Commissioner, throughout your term you have stood up for human rights defenders, been accessible to civil society, and pursued justice for victims. We look forward to your successor following the outstanding example you have set.

I turn now to address a number of themes from the High Commissioner's statement.

Human rights defenders play a crucial role in combating all forms of **discrimination**. We deeply regret the passage of laws in Russia, Nigeria and Uganda which effectively criminalise the work of defenders who advocate for LGBT equality. Such laws are one element of the worsening restrictions on civil society and are manifestly incompatible with the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, as well as the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Madame High Commissioner, human rights defenders play a crucial role in **combating impunity** and are themselves often victims of impunity. Ensuring that threats and attacks against defenders are properly investigated, and perpetrators held to account, is crucial to establishing a safe and enabling environment for their work. We would welcome any observations as to good State practices in this regard.

The work of defenders is also essential to **inclusive and sustainable development**. We are concerned at the disturbing pattern of attacks against human rights defenders who protest against business operations and major development projects, with recent examples in Mexico, Russia, Cambodia and Uganda. We call on States to take specific measures to respect and protect the work of defenders who work on these issues, including by guaranteeing their rights to peaceful protest and participation in decision-making processes.

Finally, the input of defenders is crucial to the impact and effectiveness of the **UN's human rights mechanisms**. Despite this, defenders such as Cao Shunli continue to be disappeared, detained, and denied access to adequate health care in an effort to prevent them from, or punish them for, cooperating with the UN. Intimidation and reprisals amount to an attack on civil society, the rule of law and the UN itself. They demand this Council's and the broader UN's attention and response.

Thank you.