

## Statement at 24th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

16 September 2013

### Item 3: General Debate

#### **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: APPOINTING A HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND INDEPENDENT MANDATE HOLDER**

Mr President,

Human rights defenders are changemakers, and their work is critical to the promotion and protection of human rights in all societies. The Council itself has time and again “acknowledge[d] (...) the important and legitimate role of human rights defenders in the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law” (22/6), and reminded States of their obligation to “create a safe and enabling environment in which human rights defenders can operate free from hindrance and insecurity”.

Sadly, we see that the clear obligation articulated in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders that everyone should be able to enjoy the right “to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels” is far from being met. Around the world, we witness continued attacks, intimidation and restrictions on human rights defenders and their work. Several special procedures have reported to this session in this regard.

Both previous Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders have played a key role in informing the Council about the challenges and violations faced by defenders on the ground, and have lent important political support to their day to day struggle.

Your successor, Mr President, will appoint a new mandate holder next March. ISHR has submitted a joint written statement to this session setting out the criteria to guarantee that the appointee possesses the necessary independence and expertise, available at the back of the room. In terms of expertise, the new mandate holder should in particular have:

1. Extensive experience working and interacting with civil society and individuals whose human rights may have been violated or restricted as a result of their work of defending rights;
2. Experience in developing or advocating for the development of legislation and policy for the protection of defenders and in creating an enabling environment for their work;
3. A demonstrated commitment to universal human rights law, standards and values;
4. A thorough understanding of the challenges faced by defenders, including the particular protection needs of specific groups of defenders, such as women human rights defenders and defenders working on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity or on corporate accountability issues.

Thank you.