

Statement at 26th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Expression and Special Rapporteur on Peaceful Assembly and Association

THE RIGHT OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS TO ASSOCIATE, ADVOCATE AND ACCESS RESOURCES

Mr President

ISHR welcomes the reports of both Special Rapporteurs. We also acknowledge and thank them for their engagement with and support for civil society.

The report of the Special Rapporteur on Peaceful Assembly and Association highlights continuing attacks against human rights defenders and activists.

These attacks vary in nature and form – from sexual attacks against women protesters demanding equal participation in Egypt, to the de-registration of the Fundación Pachamama for its work to protest corporate human rights abuses in Ecuador, to the denial of ECOSOC status to the International Dalit Solidarity Network at the UN. What these attacks have in common, however, is that they show that human rights defenders continue to be targeted, both because of their identities, and because of their advocacy on behalf of those who are subject to discrimination and stigmatisation.

The report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression demonstrates that there is a heightened risk of such attacks in electoral periods and periods of transition.

In this respect, ISHR is deeply concerned at the continued harassment and imprisonment of human rights defenders and journalists solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in Bahrain and Egypt. We are also alarmed at recent raids on human rights NGOs, such as the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights.

Both Special Rapporteurs have reported on the importance of the right of NGOs to organise, register and access funds. In this regard we welcome the guidelines developed by Maina Kiai and the Community of Democracies on civil society's right to access resources. Laws such as Russia's 'foreign agent law' and Ethiopia's Charities and Societies Proclamation are manifestly incompatible with this right.

Mr President, the work of human rights defenders is crucial to challenge repression and to promote democracy and the rule of law. In this regard, while the Special Rapporteurs' reports understandably focus on laws and policies which restrict this valuable work, we would welcome their observations as to examples of laws and policies which support and enable such work.

Thank you.