

Statement at 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 5: General Debate

ENDING REPRISALS

Mr. President:

ISHR delivers this statement in the name of those human rights defenders whose testimonies this Council is not hearing, or will never hear. They are voices silenced by reprisals or the fear of reprisals for cooperating with this Council and the wider UN system.

We know of the death of Chinese human rights defender Cao Shunli. Disappeared, detained and denied adequate medical treatment, Ms Cao died last Friday. She was seeking to cooperate with this Council.

In January, Malaysian authorities pronounced illegal the 'Coalition of Malaysian NGOs' for reasons that reportedly included submitting a UPR report. Just this week, reports have emerged of the detention of activists in Sri Lanka on suspicion of providing 'false information' about the human rights situation in the country to advocates working at this Council.

The fear of reprisals is deterring engagement. Ahead of this session, we approached an African human rights defender regarding participation as a possible civil society speaker during the High Level Segment. The insights she has gained through a lifetime of human rights work would have greatly enriched Council debate. This defender declined to be nominated as a speaker for one reason only – the fear of reprisals.

Mr. President, engaging with the UN - with this Council - is a right. The UN has repeatedly stated that it cannot operate effectively without the input and engagement of civil society. Despite this, reprisals continue. The current system-wide response to reprisals is shown to be inadequate.

In this context, ISHR warmly welcomes the cross regional statement made by Botswana and many other States, reaffirming their commitment to a more unified, effective and coordinated response to the scourge of reprisals.

ISHR believes that such a response is essential and overdue. We consider the designation of a high-level focal point, as requested in resolution 24/24 to be appropriate. We join the calls of the Secretary-General and High Commissioner for the effective implementation of this important resolution and urge members of this Council to work with colleagues at the General Assembly to ensure expeditious action in this regard.

We ask you Mr President to defend the integrity of this Council by publicly and categorically denouncing all cases of reprisals and we ask you to engage robustly with States where reprisals are alleged in order to seek clarification, and assurances of redress and non-repetition.

Finally Mr. President, ISHR consider that any State that condones or is complicit in reprisals against individuals who cooperate with the UN, is not worthy of membership of this Council.