

## [China interrupts moment of silence for Cao Shunli at the UN Human Rights Council](#)

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(Geneva) - China must end a pattern of intimidation and 'deadly reprisals' against human rights defenders who seek to expose and ensure accountability for human rights violations at the United Nations, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

In a [statement to the Human Rights Council on 20 March](#), ISHR called on the human rights community to observe a moment of silence to remember Cao Shunli and other human rights defenders who have died or been killed as a consequence of their advocacy at the UN.

Following a procedural challenge and protracted debate, the moment of silence was interrupted, as China argued that NGO speakers in the Human Rights Council were not allowed to be silent.

'The opposition by China to silently honour human rights defender Cao Shunli who died for her attempt to participate in the work of the UN is shocking,' Michael Ineichen, Director of Human Rights Council Advocacy at the International Service for Human Rights said. 'However, Chinese efforts in Geneva and in many capitals around the world to interfere with the rights of NGOs to contribute to the work of the Human Rights Council are sadly only a glimpse of the brutal pattern of reprisals and intimidation that activists face in China'. Mr Ineichen said.

The right to freedom of expression includes a right to observe silence. China's repression of freedom of expression at home and attempted silencing of dissent at the UN demonstrate that it is unfit to be a member of the Human Rights Council.

Below is a full text of the ISHR statement made on the occasion of the adoption of the Universal Periodic Review of China.

*Mr President,*

*Among the recommendations accepted today is one to 'ensure that human rights defenders can exercise their legitimate activities, including participation in international mechanisms, without being subjected to reprisals.'*

*China's description of this as 'already implemented' is manifestly untrue.*

*A flagrant case of 'deadly reprisal' is that of Chinese human rights defender Cao Shunli. She was arrested as she attempted to board her plane to Geneva to attend the Human Rights Council's September session. While in prison, Ms Cao was denied proper medical attention, and died last week as a result.*

*Cao Shunli died for her attempt to cooperate with the UPR, for her unwavering dedication to the human rights struggle in her country. She paid with her life for her conviction that the United Nations' top human rights body would offer civil society some of the space that human rights defenders are denied at home in China.*

*On 14 September, Chinese Public Security officials arrested Cao Shunli as she attempted to board a plane to travel to Geneva, to attend the Council's September session. Her crime: demanding full civil society participation in the UPR process.*

*Several human rights defenders have since been either disappeared or detained, simply for showing their support for Cao Shunli.*

*Ms Cao was transferred from prison to hospital in a critical condition on 20 February 2014 after being denied access to proper medical care in prison. Authorities refused repeated requests by family and lawyers for bail on medical grounds. Sadly, she has passed away last Friday.*

*Mr President,*

*Cao Shunli's death is a direct result of China's denial of her basic civil and political rights, together with a denial of access to adequate health care in violation of China's obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention Against Torture.*

*As a Council member, China must uphold the highest human rights standards and fully cooperate with it. Cao Shunli's detention, ill-treatment and ultimately her death is manifestly incompatible with these obligations.*

*Mr President, ISHR and others will use the remaining speaking time allotted to ISHR to observe a moment of silence to remember Cao Shunli, and human rights defenders everywhere who have lost their lives in their struggle.*

*(silence)*

*Thank you Mr. President.*