

27th session of the UN Human Rights Council

JOINT NGO END OF SESSION STATEMENT

International Service for Human Rights on behalf of 13 organizations (see below)

Thank you,

From its beginning, unacceptable attempts to silence NGOs within the Council characterized this session. The Council's membership – and in particular its Bureau and Presidency - have an obligation to prevent and overrule procedural maneuvers which stifle constructive dialogue and block effective NGO contributions.

The road to universal human rights protection is long and winding; but outright attempts to block the route run contrary to the spirit of this institution. Council members are mandated to 'uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights', not to shield themselves from criticism and obstruct constructive dialogue. We believe this is less and less the case. Those who truly want to see the Council fulfill its function must vigorously and proactively safeguard civil society participation and vibrant debate here.

It is also urgent that this Council address the unbridled increase in its activities, which is already undermining and risks overwhelming the Council's ability to fulfill its mandate.

Nonetheless we have arrived to significant junctures at this Session.

First, we acknowledge the reaffirmation of the universality of human rights in the resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity. We had, however, expected the Council to be stronger in its action and therefore we see this resolution as the foundation upon which longer-term, sustained attention to this critical issue will be built.

Second, we were glad the Council committed to greater involvement in the Central African Republic, condemned violations in Sudan and addressed priorities in Yemen and the DRC. However, concrete mechanisms to ensure international accountability where none exist at the national level, were once again weak. Nowhere was this clearer than in the Council's failure to heed the Commission of Inquiry's calls for Syria to be referred to the ICC.

Lamentably the Council's reputation on country engagement was severely undermined by failing to heed calls from human rights defenders to tackle and provide accountability for both past and ongoing human rights violations in Egypt and for the violent and administrative means used to restrict human rights activism there and in Bahrain.

Third, for human rights defenders it was encouraging to see the Council call for a reinforcement of civil society space. This important expression of support is sharply undermined by continuing intimidation and reprisals against those engaging with the UN, as made evident in the Secretary General's annual report and incidents that have taken place as the Council has been sitting.

These include the criminalization of the Maldives Human Rights Commission for participating in the UPR and the travel ban on Russian activists hoping to attend the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. We are also aware of several cases of reprisals against human rights defenders interacting with this session itself. It is therefore evident that this is an ongoing, system-wide problem requiring an institutional response. We welcome the reference to HRC resolution 24/24 in today's resolution on Civil Society Space and urge all States to work for its implementation without delay.

Here in Geneva, we recognize those States which have spoken out, but lament the weak response to the several instances of reprisals communicated to the Council Presidency around this session.

Mr. President, we urge you and your colleagues on the Bureau to be alert, to act, and to ensure that those who came to tell their story and strengthen global action, can return home to continue to defend our human rights in safety.

Joined by:

- Amnesty International
- Allied Rainbow Communities (ARC) International
- ARTICLE 19
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
- CIVICUS
- Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
- Conectas Direitos Humanos

- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defender Project
- Forum Asia
- Human Rights House Foundation
- International Lesbian and Gay Association
- International Service for Human Rights