

Statement at 33rd session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 2: General Debate with the High Commissioner

Thank you Mr President, Mr High Commissioner

There is a growing refrain in this Council calling for greater cooperation and dialogue, and certainly States should fully cooperate with OHCHR.

There is a growing paradox, however, that many of the States loudest in this refrain are those identified by the High Commissioner as systematically failing to cooperate with the UN human rights mechanisms, and as seeking to silence civil society at the national level, and, in some cases, at the UN itself.

Like the High Commissioner, we are deeply concerned at the harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defenders in Bahrain. This Council, and those States in a position of influence on Bahrain, must ensure that the country pays a real political and economic price for its systematic repression of civil society.

Like the High Commissioner, we are also deeply concerned at the continued harassment of human rights defenders and their family members in China. This September marks the third anniversary of the enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention of Chinese human rights lawyer Cao Shunli in connection with her engagement with the UPR. We reiterate our call for an independent and effective investigation into these violations and Cao Shunli's subsequent death.

Reprisals committed by Member States of this Council deserve special condemnation. They are the antithesis of cooperation and dialogue. Burundi's failure to engage with the Committee against Torture, and its threat of reprisals against civil society actors who sought to cooperate with that body to end gross and systematic violations in the country, should be denounced. It is high time that the Council enforced basic membership standards and recommended suspension of those who fail them.

The worsening incidence of intimidation and reprisals – from Bahrain to Venezuela – are evidence that the UN Secretariat, this Council and Member States are failing to protect those who risk their lives to defend the universal human rights to which we are all purportedly pledged. This must not be the legacy left by the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner or Member States. We reiterate our call for a comprehensive, effective, high-level response without further delay.

Thank you.