

Human Rights Council 42nd session - item 5 – interactive dialogue with assistant secretary-general on secretary-general's report on cooperation with the united nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights

Mr President,

Human rights defenders must be able to access and communicate with the UN freely and safely so it can do its crucial work to monitor countries' compliance with human rights obligations and protect victims from abuse.

Cases of reprisal are direct barriers to this, and to effective and meaningful civil society participation with the UN. Yet the SG's *reprisals* report points to 'alarming trends' of reprisals, including killing, torture, arbitrary arrests and detention, travel bans, surveillance, criminalisation, freezing of assets, and stigmatization.

This year's report implicates more countries than ever—47 in total or approximately ¼ of the UN membership. It includes 15 current Human Rights Council members: *The Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Hungary, India, Iraq, Mexico, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia*; and four candidates for membership.

We accept that many cases go unreported for self-censorship, and some cannot be included for fear of doing more harm to the victims. However, excluding cases for political reasons severely undermines the report's powerful potential for accountability. Missing in particular from this year's report are cases implicating Brazil, Russia and the USA.

The US policy to revoke or deny visas in relation to cooperation with the ICC is a blatant effort to intimidate and retaliate against ICC personnel as well as lawyers and advocates seeking justice for victims of *alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity*. The intimidation of Brazilian citizens by State officials during side events held at the UN undermines the UN's potential as a space for open *debate, reflection and dialogue as well as exchange of critical ideas and experiences by civil society actors*. And a travel ban by Russia in retaliation for comments made at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights has a profound chilling effect on those working for *greater promotion and protection of indigenous peoples rights*.

By listing some perpetrators but not others, and pandering to certain States, Secretary-General Guterres is ignoring victims' legitimate claims and undermining efforts to protect victims from reprisals *and ensure safe access to international bodies and mechanisms*. Mr Gilmore, what steps will you take to ensure a more comprehensive report to the Council next year?

We welcome the statement made today by Germany on Egyptian lawyer Ebrahim Metwally who was arrested on his way to Geneva to attend a meeting with the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, and Costa Rica on Nicaragua.

We urge (more) States to stand up for the critical voices of human rights defenders and seize the opportunity to take up specific cases in the report during future interactive dialogues.

