

Statement at 42nd session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 6: Consideration of UPR outcomes – Democratic Republic of Congo

Speaker: Salma El Hosseiny

Mr President,

ISHR takes the opportunity of the adoption of the UPR report for the review of DRC to note with satisfaction DRC's acceptance of several recommendations aimed at creating a safe working environment for defenders, improve the legislative framework protecting defenders and combat attacks and threats they face to guarantee freedom of expression, association and assembly.

However, ISHR continues to remain very concerned about the bill currently under discussion at the Parliament supposedly for the promotion and protection of human rights defenders. As it stands, the bill would in fact restrict human rights defenders, as it would allow excessive control and interference from the State and focuses on the sanctions entailed by the alleged failure of NGOs to comply with this oversight. The DRC must, at a minimum, align itself with the good practices observed in neighbouring countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali. *We urge the government to ensure the law is in line with the UN Declaration on human rights defenders and other international human rights instruments.*

Also, the amendment of the 2001 NGO law would, among other things, ban NGOs challenging the government or working on issues seen as undermining 'institutional stability'. The draft particularly targets NGOs working on issues related to corruption and democracy. Thus, we call on the government to refrain from adopting restrictive laws to limit the work of human rights defenders and close civil society space.

Finally, ISHR further calls on the DRC to:

- Ensure that business operations comply with international human rights, labour and environmental law;
- Provide the Protection Cell for Human Rights Defenders with the necessary resources and high-level political support for it to be fully functional and able to fulfil its mandate.

I thank you.