

## ***Letter to Member States of the UN Human Rights Council***

### **Re: Support resolution on the protection of human rights defenders addressing economic, social and cultural rights**

22 March 2016

Your Excellency,

The undersigned civil society organisations, coming from all regions, urge your delegation to **support the adoption of the resolution on the protection of human rights defenders working to promote economic, social and cultural rights** as tabled. We urge you to **resist efforts to undermine and weaken this resolution**.

The draft resolution entitled ‘Protecting human rights defenders addressing economic, social and cultural rights (A/HRC/31/L.28) is being considered by the 31<sup>st</sup> session of the Human Rights Council. It will be presented for adoption on 23 or 24 March.

South African jurist and former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, has articulated the importance of such a resolution in the following terms:

*As a South African, I have seen and experienced first-hand the role of ESC rights defenders in combating poverty and injustice and in promoting universal human rights for all, even the most powerless and disadvantaged. I have seen how the work of those who defend ESC rights benefits entire communities; just as attacks against those who defend ESC rights harm entire communities. That is why it is so important and timely that the UN Human Rights Council is currently negotiating a resolution on the protection of ESC rights defenders.*

The draft resolution has been developed through a number of **open and transparent** informal negotiations.

The text, as tabled, is **balanced and appropriate**, in recognising the vital contribution of human rights defenders to the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. It is currently cosponsored by a broad group of States from all regions of the world.

The text also identifies the threats, attacks and challenges facing this group of defenders and the obligations, duties and interests of State and non-State actors in terms of supporting and safeguarding this work. It provides good practice guidance to both State and non-State actors in this regard.

Despite the importance of the resolution – so tragically illustrated at the commencement of the 31<sup>st</sup> session with the murder of Honduran woman human rights defender Berta Caceres – a small group of States, led by the Russian Federation, China, Egypt, Cuba and Pakistan are seeking to seriously undermine the text. A large number of adverse amendments being pushed by these States include proposals, which have the purpose or would have the effect of:

- Removing any reference to the term ‘human rights defenders’;
- Denying the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders;
- Weakening protection against, and accountability for, intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders and others who cooperate with the United Nations;
- Failing to acknowledge the specific risks and violations faced by women, indigenous, and land and environment human rights defenders, their families and communities;
- Diluting and regressing from consensus language and terminology from past human rights defenders resolutions; and
- Seeking to justify limitations on human rights that are impermissible under international human rights law.

The amendments being advocated by the Russian Federation, China, Egypt, Cuba and Pakistan should be seen in the context of the systematic efforts currently underway in several of these States to restrict and criminalise the important and legitimate work of human rights defenders and independent civil society organisations in violation of international human rights law. The proposal to weaken language on reprisals should similarly be understood in the context of several of the proposing States being the subject of allegations of intimidation or reprisals in both the Secretary-General's report and the joint communications report of Special Procedures.

We urge you not to associate with such positions. **Instead, we respectfully urge your delegation to co-sponsor resolution L.28 as tabled, vote against the amendments presented, and vote in favor of the resolution as drafted.**

Civil society and human rights defenders around the world look to the HRC and its Member States for support and protection, and we hope your delegation will stand with us.

Yours sincerely,

International Service for Human Rights

Acción Solidaria on HIV/Aids

Alkarama Foundation

Amnesty International

Arc International

ARTICLE 19

Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development

Asian Association of Police Studies

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development

Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security

Avam NGO

Boys of Bangladesh

Bread for the World, Germany

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)

CELS (Argentina)

Center for Inquiry

Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)

Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género - Corporación Humanas (Chile)

Child Rights Connect

Child Rights International Network CRIN  
CIVICUS

CIVILIS Derechos Humanos

Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CIDDH)

Colombian Commission of Jurists

Community Resource Centre Foundation (Thailand)

Conectas Human Rights (Brazil)

Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights

Corporacion Reiniciar

Defend Defenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)

Digital Empowerment Foundation (India)

ECLT Foundation

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)

The Honorable Justice Elizabeth Evatt AC, former member of the Human Rights Committee

Equitable Cambodia

Federatie van Nederlandse Verenigingen tot Integratie van Homoseksualiteit - COC Nederland

FIAN International

FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Fiji Women's Rights Movement

Foundation HELP (Tanzania)

Franciscans International

Front Line Defenders

Function 8

Global Bersih

Global Human Rights Clinic  
Global Initiative for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights  
Global Justice Clinic, NYU School of Law  
Globe International Center  
Groundation Grenada  
Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)  
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor  
Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan  
Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone  
Human Rights House Foundation  
Human Rights Law Centre (Australia)  
Human Rights Watch  
Humane, Koraput  
Inclusive Development International  
Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety  
International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute  
International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran  
International Commission of Jurists  
International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO)  
International Humanist and Ethical Union  
International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)  
International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)  
International Platform against Impunity  
International Women's Development Agency  
Ivorian Observatory for Human Rights (OIDH)  
Just Associates (JASS)  
LGBT Centre (Mongolia)  
Loretto Community  
MiningWatch Canada  
Minority Rights Group International (MRG)  
Mongolian Women's employment supporting federation  
Mosaiko Instituto para a Cidadania  
Movimento Xingu Vivo para Sempre  
Movimiento Homosexual de Lima - MHOL, Perú  
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative  
Nazra for Feminist Studies (Egypt)  
Ogiek Peoples' Development Program  
OT Watch (Mongolia)  
Peace Brigades International  
PODER

Polish Institute for Human Rights and Business  
Project Maisha  
Promo-LEX Association, Moldova  
Protection International  
Public Interest Advocacy Centre  
Public Verdict Foundation  
Rede Pantanal de ONGs e Movimentos Sociais  
Reporters Without Borders  
Réseau International des Droits Humains "RIDH"  
Rights and Accountability in Development  
Rivers without Boundaries Mongolia  
Salmmah Women's Resource Centre (Sudan)  
Shia Rights Watch Inc  
Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)  
Steps Without Borders NGO  
Terra de Direitos (Brazil)  
The Tibet Bureau  
Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights  
US Human Rights Network  
Uthnau  
West African Human Rights Defenders' Network  
Workplace Pride Asia  
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders  
World Uyghur Congress  
Yemen Organization for Defending Rights & Democratic Freedoms

*As of 23 March 2016*