

## ORAL STATEMENT - THE OBSERVATORY

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**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**  
**25th session**  
**Agenda Item 3**

**Joint oral statement by the International Federation for Human Rights Leagues (FIDH)  
and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the  
Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders**

**Clustered Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteurs on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and on Torture**

March 10, 2014

*Check against delivery*

Mr. President,  
Madam Special Rapporteur,

FIDH and OMCT, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, commend the work Special Rapporteur Margaret Sekaggya has carried out the past six years as she is presenting her last report to the Council, and welcome the latter's focus on the work of the mandate and on the main elements of a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders.

Madam Sekaggya,

We are concerned by the number of States that persistently deny country visits, and by the lack of replies to your communications. As the review of the mandate offers an important opportunity for the Human Rights Council to reaffirm its strong commitment to the protection of human rights defenders, we call on the Council to renew the mandate, to urge States to cooperate fully with it and to take effective measures to ensure defenders' unhindered access to regional and international human rights bodies without fear of reprisals.

While States have the duty to protect human rights defenders and to ensure that they operate in a safe and enabling environment as rightly mentioned in your report, attacks, judicial harassment, restrictive laws, smear campaigns as well as impunity for human rights violations against the latter continue to perpetuate an environment of hostility for their activities.

In **Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ethiopia, India and Russia**, laws restricting access to funding for NGOs have continued to jeopardise human rights actions, as was recently the case for the Russian NGO ADC "Memorial", which was officially declared a "foreign agent" following an unfair trial in December. Drafts on the question of NGO funding are also still pending in **Bangladesh, Bahrain, Egypt and Israel**.

The multiplication of anti-LGBT laws have been another dangerous setback in a number of countries such as **Nigeria, Russia**, and more recently **Uganda**, putting the activities of defence of LGBT rights at serious risk.

In addition, in many countries known for repressing dissenting voices, we are concerned that human rights defenders remain arbitrarily detained in relation to their peaceful activities: **Hilal Mammadov** in **Azerbaijan**, **Nabeel Rajab** in **Bahrain**, **Ales Bialiatski** in **Belarus**, **David**

**Ravelo Crespo** in **Colombia**, **Abdolfattah Soltani** in **Iran**, **Mazen Darwish** in **Syria**, **Muharrem Erbey** in **Turkey**, **Somyot Prueksakasemsuk** in **Thailand**, as well as a number of defenders in **Uzbekistan**, to quote a few among many others.

Impunity for violations such as extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances is another worrying trend that maintains civil society in a climate of fear, and impedes the development of a safe and enabling environment. In **Thailand**, as March 12 will mark the 10-year anniversary of the disappearance of human rights lawyer **Somchai Neelapaijit**, we are seriously concerned over the Thai government's recent indication that it wants to close the investigation. In **Mexico**, **Sri Lanka** and **Syria**, the whereabouts of human rights defenders have remained unknown, and no proper investigation has been conducted.

Over the past years, in a number of countries, defenders advocating for the right to land or denouncing the environmental impacts resulting from the activities of transnational corporations have also been on the forefront of repression from both State or non-State actors. Here again, the general context of impunity has compelled these defenders to operate in a disabling environment.

In light of this alarming situation, we sincerely hope, Ms. Sekaggya, that the States will comply with the recommendations of your report, so that the space of action for human rights defenders be expanded rather than shrunk, that human rights defenders be duly protected rather than criminalised, that all violations against the latter be duly investigated and sanctioned.

Thank you very much.