

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 48th SESSION

Interactive dialogue on the Secretary-General's report on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights

Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris - Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights:

- *Report of the Secretary General "Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights": [A/HRC/48/28](#)*

As the report presented highlights, 4 key trends are particularly concerning this year:

First, in close to half of the countries mentioned in the report, **allegations of monitoring and surveillance** have been received of individuals and groups who **cooperate**, or attempt to cooperate, with the UN. Numerous cases include **hacking of accounts, travel bans** and **movement restrictions**.

Second, we see signs of a possible **reprisal pattern in several countries**. They include **China, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia** and **Viet Nam**, as well as **India, Israel, Myanmar, Philippines**, and **Venezuela**. In the first five serious issues with the **detention of victims of reprisals** and **intimidation** were identified. UN entities also identified instances of "systemic" detention, such as in the **United Arab Emirates**.

Third, some cases concern the use of **restrictive legislation** that **prevents or punishes** cooperation with the UN, notably on grounds of **national security**, including **counter-terrorism** measures, or based on laws governing activities of civil society organizations.

Fourth, the **increasingly challenging**, or even at times **repressive, environments for victims**, human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society actors are indicated by the fact that many are **deterred from providing specific details about a case**.

There is also a worrisome trend where the office is requested to **report on a case anonymously**, out of **fear for additional acts of reprisal**. A large number of these concern **women**. The numbers speak for themselves. Out of a total number of **240 individuals** referred to in the report, more than **100 are not mentioned by name** due to protection issues. This signals a **high level of risks** affecting cooperation with the UN in contexts where **fear can inhibit such cooperation**.

Victims of acts of reprisal and intimidation for cooperation with the UN continue to be subjected to serious **human rights violations** – in particular **arbitrary arrests and detention**, but also **torture** and **ill-treatment**, and even **death in custody, killing and enforced disappearances**. Some individuals have been **charged**, and **detained**, with offences for activities related to their cooperation with the UN, such as engaging with **foreign entities** and **tarnishing the image of the State**.

The report documents incidents and **access-related issues** in more UN spaces and Security Council-mandated missions than ever before, including in the **Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Mali** and **South Sudan**. Access issues are also highlighted in relation to **Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Syria** and **Yemen**.

In the **digital sphere, activists and journalists** have been **attacked on social media** after speaking at **UN meetings**, and victims targeted for submitting information, or communicating with the UN. New risks have emerged, including through expanded **digital surveillance** and **coordinated online attacks** but the digital era has also brought **new opportunities**, with **greater access** for civil society actors.

We cannot tolerate those who bring critical perspectives to us **being silenced**. We need to do more and better to **provide safe and open spaces for interaction**, where those who speak up can be heard **without fear of any sort of retribution**.



INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (38 statements)

European Union, Belgium *on behalf of Netherlands and Luxembourg*, Austria *on behalf of Croatia and Slovenia*, Latvia *on behalf of Nordic-Baltic countries*, Cameroon *on behalf of the group of African States*, Ireland *on behalf of Fiji, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland and Uruguay*, Egypt *on behalf of the group of Arab States*, Liechtenstein, Germany, Australia, France, Armenia, Switzerland, Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, Venezuela, Cuba, Vietnam, Belarus, Morocco, United States, Sri Lanka, India, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Philippines, United Kingdom, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Moldova, Iran. UNHCR

Delegations taking the floor all agreed that **any act of reprisal should be condemned** and that **cooperation between the UN and Civil Society** should be protected at all costs. States were concerned by the **use of COVID-19 and the fight against terrorism** as a pretext to impose **restrictive measures** against civil society, including in its collaboration with the UN.

Several States **raised concerns over the report** of the Secretary General on reprisals. They demanded the information received to be **verified** and **checked** and deplored that the **report presented was biased, non objective** and **full of false information** provided by third parties with a **specific agenda**. Several of these States also deplored that fact the communications provided by them were **not included in the report** or not taken in account by the Secretary General. (Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, Venezuela, Cuba, Vietnam, Belarus, Morocco, Sri Lanka, China, Philippines, Cambodia, Yemen Iran).

Belgium (on behalf of **Netherlands, Luxembourg** and **Belgium**) expressed concerns about cases of reprisals in **Belarus, Lao, Iran, Turkmenistan** and **Nicaragua**. The **United States** condemned attacks against human rights defenders and civil society in **Afghanistan, Belarus, China, Cuba, Myanmar, Russia** and **Uganda**. **China** rejected the statement and the allegations made by the **United States**. **Pakistan** denounced harassment of civil society by **India** in **Kashmir**. **Afghanistan** denounced the threats and harassment of civil society by the **Taliban**. The **United Kingdom** denounced cases of reprisals in **Venezuela, China, Belarus, Burundi, Philippines** and **Iran**.

2 NHRI and 10 NGOs took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue:

NHRI: GANHRI, National Human Rights Commission of India. **NGOs:** ISHR, Human Rights House Foundation, Forum Asia, Institute for NGO Research, Asian Pacific Forum on women and Development, Cairo institute for Human Rights Studies, Right Livelihood Award Foundation, Asian Legal Resource Center, CIVICUS, Eastern Horn and Africa Human Rights Defender's Project.

GANHRI expressed concerns about the situation of NHRIs in **Philippines** and **Guatemala**. *ISHR* denounced cases of harassment of a **Taiwanese** activist and reprisals in **Egypt**. *Human Rights House Foundation* denounced **Russia's foreign agent law** used to silence civil society and targeting of human rights defenders in **Belarus**.

Forum Asia denounced reprisals against human rights defenders in **Bangladesh, Kashmir, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam** and **Lao**. The *Institute for NGO Research* denounced reprisals against **Jewish and Israeli civil society** organizations perpetrated by **Palestinian groups** funded by the Western States.

The *Asian Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development* denounced reprisals against civil society and opposition members in **Philippines**. The *Right Livelihood Award Foundation* mentioned cases of reprisal and harassment in **Western Sahara** by **Moroccan police** and in **Saudi Arabia** and **Belarus**. The *Asian Legal Resource Center* was concerned about the situation of civil society in **Bangladesh**. *CIVICUS* denounced reprisals in **Nicaragua** and **Cambodia**. The *Eastern Horn and Africa Human Rights Defender's Project* denounced the situation in **Cameroon**.

Watch the full Interactive Dialogue on UN WebTV: [Part 1](#) / [Part 2](#)