

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

51st session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 5: Interactive Dialogue with the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights on the report of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights

Mr President,

We thank the Secretary General for the report, which highlights the many challenges facing HRDs across the world, including Right Livelihood Laureates.

In Western Sahara, threats and intimidation against Aminatou Haidar took the form of unlawful digital surveillance, with her devices being infected with Pegasus spyware in Oct and Nov 2021, in blatant breach of her rights..

In Belarus, where the targeting of HRDs and organisations has reached unprecedented levels, six members of Human Rights Centre Viasna remain behind bars in deplorable conditions. Four of them have now faced trial: Marfa Rabkova was recently sentenced to 15 years, which is the longest politically motivated sentence ever handed down to a woman in Belarus.

As highlighted in the report, in Russia, the Foreign Agent Law, and its recent amendments further expanding its scope, make virtually anyone engaging with the UN at risk of being labelled as a foreign agent. The legislation has been used to delegitimise and silence countless NGOs, including International Memorial.

Lastly, in Saudi Arabia human rights defenders are imprisoned for increasingly long periods of time and are subjected to severe restrictions upon release, Waleed abu al-Khair and Mohammed al-Qahtani, among others, are still languishing in prison simply for exercising their fundamental rights.¹

Madam Assistant Secretary General,

What can the HRC do to better address the dramatic shrinking space for civil society and the increasing reprisals, which are increasingly preventing engagement with international mechanisms?

Thank you.

¹ This paragraph enjoys the support of ALQST for Human Rights.