

Right Livelihood

54th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Oral statement

Item 5: Interactive dialogue on the Secretary General's report on alleged reprisals against those who seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the UN, its representatives and mechanisms

Mr. President,

Right Livelihood thanks the Secretary-General for his report. We are particularly alarmed by the new trends identified, including widespread online and offline surveillance and increasingly stricter laws targeting civil society.

In Western Sahara, we continue to observe systematic reprisals against those defending the Sahrawi's right to self-determination, from acts of intimidation, even inside Palais des Nations, to torture and arbitrary detention. Activists such as Aminatou Haidar live under constant threats and surveillance. In 2021, she was targeted by the Pegasus spyware.

In Belarus, repressive laws have virtually eradicated civil society. Activists who were forced to flee the country can now be tried *in absentia* and stripped of their citizenship. In August, the government designated the Human Rights Center "Viasna" as an "extremist formation." This has further facilitated politically motivated persecution, placing even more individuals at risk.

In Saudi Arabia, activists are sentenced to increasingly extreme sentences, including death, for exercising their right to peaceful dissent. Those who endured lengthy imprisonment are being retried or are forcibly disappeared, as in the case of Mohammed al-Qahtani.

Madam Assistant Secretary General,

A vibrant civic space is a fundamental component of every democratic space, and is key to human rights monitoring, both at national and international levels. We cannot stay silent in the face of these blatant attempts at wiping out civil society and turning us blind.

How could the United Nations and INGOs better react to these trends and mitigate risks faced by human rights defenders interacting with them?

Thank you.