

***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**

24 March 2016

Your Excellency,

The undersigned 150 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 today, 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,

- 1 International Service for Human Rights
- 2 Acción Solidaria on HIV/Aids
- 3 Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights
- 4 Alkarama Foundation
- 5 All India Network of Individuals and NGOs working with National and State Human Rights Institutions (AiNNI)
- 6 Amnesty International
- 7 Arc International
- 8 ARTICLE 19
- 9 Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)
- 10 Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development
- 11 Asian Association of Police Studies
- 12 Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
- 13 Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente (AIDA)
- 14 Association for Advancement of Legal Right
- 15 Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
- 16 Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)
- 17 Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
- 18 Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security
- 19 Avam NGO
- 20 Boys of Bangladesh
- 21 Bread for the World, Germany
- 22 Business & Human Rights Resource Centre
- 23 Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
- 24 Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
- 25 Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
- 26 CELS (Argentina)
- 27 Center for Inquiry
- 28 Center for Islamic Thought
- 29 Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)

30 Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos y Justicia de Género - Corporación Humanas (Chile)  
31 Child Rights Connect  
32 Child Rights International Network CRIN  
33 CIVICUS  
34 CIVILIS Derechos Humanos  
35 Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CIDDH)  
36 Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)  
37 Colombian Commission of Jurists  
38 Community Resource Centre Foundation (Thailand)  
39 Conectas Human Rights (Brazil)  
40 Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights  
41 Corporacion Reiniciar  
42 Defend Defenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)  
43 Digital Empowerment Foundation (India)  
44 ECLT Foundation  
45 Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)  
46 Equitable Cambodia  
47 EuroMed Rights - Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network  
48 Federatie van Nederlandse Verenigingen tot Integratie van Homoseksualiteit - COC Nederland  
49 Federation of Women and Family Planning  
50 FIAN International  
51 FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders  
52 Fiji Women's Rights Movement  
53 Fórum Suape Espaço Socioambiental - Brazil  
54 Foundation HELP (Tanzania)  
55 Franciscans International  
56 Freedom House  
57 Freedom Now  
58 Freemuslim Association Inc  
59 Front Line Defenders  
60 Function 8  
61 Gender Empowerment and Development GeED  
62 Global Bersih  
63 Global Human Rights Clinic  
64 Global Initiative for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights  
65 Global Justice Clinic, NYU School of Law  
66 Globe International Center  
67 Groundation Grenada  
68 Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)  
69 Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor  
70 Human Dignity  
71 Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan  
72 Human Rights Council of Australia  
73 Human Rights Defenders Alert - India  
74 Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone  
75 Human Rights House Foundation  
76 Human Rights Law Centre (Australia)  
77 Human Rights Watch  
78 Humane, Koraput  
79 ICCA Consortium ([www.iccaconsortium.org](http://www.iccaconsortium.org))

80 Inclusive Development International  
81 Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety  
82 International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute  
83 International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran  
84 International Commission of Jurists  
85 International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO)  
86 International Council on Social Welfare - Europe  
87 International Humanist and Ethical Union  
88 International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)  
89 International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)  
90 International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net)  
91 International Platform against Impunity  
92 International Women's Development Agency  
93 International Youth Human Rights Movement (YHRM)  
94 Ivorian Observatory for Human Rights (OIDH)  
95 Just Associates (JASS)  
96 Kvinna till Kvinna  
97 LGBT Centre (Mongolia)  
98 Loretto Community  
99 Martin Ennals Foundation  
100 MiningWatch Canada  
101 Minority Rights Group International (MRG)  
102 Mongolian Women's employment supporting federation  
103 Mosaiko Instituto para a Cidadania  
104 Movimento Xingu Vivo para Sempre  
105 Movimiento Homosexual de Lima - MHOL, Perú  
106 National Economic and Social Rights Initiative  
107 National Fisheries Solidarity Organization (NAFSO), Sri Lanka  
108 Nazra for Feminist Studies (Egypt)  
109 Nuremberg Human Rights Centre  
110 Ogiek Peoples' Development Program  
111 OT Watch (Mongolia)  
112 Peace Brigades International  
113 People's Watch - India  
114 PODER  
115 Polish Institute for Human Rights and Business  
116 POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti  
117 Professor Ben Saul, Sydney Law School, The University of Sydney, Australia  
118 Project Maisha  
119 Promo-LEX Association, Moldova  
120 Protection International  
121 Proyecto de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales (ProDESC)- México  
122 Public Interest Advocacy Centre (Australia)  
123 Public Verdict Foundation  
124 Rede Pantanal de ONGs e Movimentos Sociais  
125 Reporters Without Borders  
126 Réseau International des Droits Humains "RIDH"  
127 Rights and Accountability in Development  
128 Rivers without Boundaries Mongolia  
129 Salmah Women's Resource Centre (Sudan)  
130 SAVIA - Asociación para la conservación, investigación de la biodiversidad y el desarrollo sustentable

- 131 Scholars at Risk Network
- 132 Shia Rights Watch Inc
- 133 Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)
- 134 Steps Without Borders NGO
- 135 Terra de Direitos (Brazil)
- 136 The Honorable Justice Elizabeth Evatt AC, former member of the UN Human Rights Committee
- 137 The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People(MOSOP)
- 138 The Tibet Bureau
- 139 Think Centre
- 140 Transparency International
- 141 True Heroes Films
- 142 UN Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA)
- 143 Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA - International Association of Lawyers)
- 144 Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
- 145 US Human Rights Network
- 146 Uthnau
- 147 We Women Lanka (National conviner ) Marian Geetha lakmini
- 148 West African Human Rights Defenders' Network
- 149 Workplace Pride Asia
- 150 World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- 151 World Uyghur Congress
- 152 Yemen Organization for Defending Rights & Democratic Freedoms