
Joint NGO Statement to the Human Rights Council by Human Rights First and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

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Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

Presented by Andrew Hudson, Human Rights First

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Mr. President, Ms. Special Rapporteur,

Human Rights First and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of OMCT and FIDH, welcome the second report to the Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Ms. Margaret Sekaggya and its timely focus on protection and security mechanisms.

Ms. Sekaggya, since the beginning of your mandate, you have identified specific situations impeding the work of human rights defenders and leading to a dangerous environment for them. As you rightly pointed out in your report, we also believe that the growing trend to de-legitimise the work carried out by defenders is particularly worrying, and we are also concerned that States increasingly resort to legal actions to violate the human rights of human rights defenders.

In your report, you mention that several national protection mechanisms were put in place, such as in Guatemala, Brazil or Colombia, while also underlining the shortcomings of such mechanisms. Ms. Sekaggya, what measures should be taken by the States to ensure the full functioning of these mechanisms and how can your mandate could help in this process?

Given that much of your report is derived from answers received by States, NGOs and intergovernmental and regional organisations, could you please mention some of the worst country situations in terms of the safety situation of human rights defenders.

In your report, you also describe how ambiguous security laws are used to arbitrarily detain defenders. Could you elaborate on other ways that national laws are used to persecute defenders?

We also welcome the Special Rapporteur's mission report on Colombia. As members of the [international campaign](#) for the right to defend human rights in Colombia we highlight the Rapporteur's following conclusions:

- Death threats against Colombian defenders have worsened in the last year;
- The systematic stigmatization of defenders by government officials is a prime reason for their insecurity;

- Arbitrary detention and unfounded criminal prosecutions of defenders constitute a pattern of persecution.

We also endorse the Rapporteur's recommendations on Colombia and call upon the Colombian government to implement them as soon as possible, including:

- Promulgating a new Presidential decree recognizing the legitimacy of human rights advocacy and outlawing stigmatization of defenders by government officials;
- Ensuring the Attorney General reviews all criminal investigations against defenders and closes those found to be baseless;
- Decriminalizing slander and libel;
- Establishing a mechanism to purge all intelligence archives on defenders.

Our organisations also welcome your mission report to the DRC and strongly support your conclusions and recommendations. We call upon the Congolese Government to implement them as soon as possible.

Finally, we are alarmed by the number of States that have persistently denied country visits to the Special Rapporteur, including the following that have refused visits three or more times: Belarus, Chad, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Tunisia, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe

We are also concerned that states only responded to 90 of the 266 communications that your mandate sent last year. We urge all member States to accept all outstanding country visit requests by the Special Rapporteur, as well as to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and implement her recommendations.

Thank you.