

We condemn all acts of intimidation or reprisal against those who cooperate with the UN

Thank you Chair,

I have the honour to deliver this cross-regional statement on behalf of Ireland and 79 other countries, as well as the European Union.

The world owes a debt to civil society actors and human rights defenders. Without their cooperation and meaningful engagement, we cannot make informed decisions here at the United Nations, and UN entities, agencies, missions and human rights mechanisms cannot effectively carry out their mandates.

When individuals or organisations face threats, retaliation or harm when engaging with international bodies, not only do the individuals involved suffer, but our collective efforts towards peace and security, towards upholding human rights and towards sustainable development suffer.

We therefore unequivocally condemn all acts of intimidation or reprisal committed against those who have cooperated or who seek to cooperate with the UN.

We welcome the Secretary General's most recent annual report on reprisals, as well as the presentation last week to the General Assembly by Assistant Secretary General Ilze Brands Kehris of this report. The cases documented in the report show the breadth of this issue, with reprisals perpetrated by State and non-State actors, online and offline, and across many countries throughout regions. It is essential that this issue is addressed in a coordinated manner, and therefore we welcome the opportunity to discuss it in New York during the Third Committee, as well as in Geneva.

We share the Secretary-General's concerns about a number of trends identified in the report, in particular:

- That women, minorities, members of indigenous communities, peacebuilders and human rights defenders continue to be disproportionately targeted;
- That there is evidence of an increase of online surveillance, privacy intrusion and cyberattacks used against victims and civil society;
- That the application of laws and other instruments regulating NGOs and their access to funding have placed additional obstacles for civil society's engagement and advocacy efforts at the UN;
- That counter-terrorism laws have been misused against organizations and individuals for their cooperation with the UN;

– And that these restrictive measures, as well as stigmatizing public discourse, have had the effect of deterring victims and civil society from cooperating with the United Nations.

These persistent patterns indicate a concerted effort by both State and non-State actors to silence those who are speaking out and sharing information with the UN. They are compelled to exercise self-censorship out of fear of retribution and harm. This has a profound effect on the impact of the UN operations on the ground and reflects a wider trend of closing civic space globally.

We therefore call on all States to take proactive steps to address reprisals. This involves conducting robust investigations, fully complying with international law obligations, and ensuring accountability. It also involves supporting and protecting victims from threats and violence.

We also encourage all States to promote a safe and enabling environment for civil society in their own countries, including online. Human rights defenders should be able to operate in a safe and open environment, free from coercion, threats of violence and intimidation. They should not be silenced.

We also urge all member states to promote cooperation with the UN, and to support the work of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. We call on all to report any cases of reprisals, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors, that occur within their countries.

We also call on States to provide emergency grants to those facing intimidation or reprisal in conflict settings following engagement in multilateral spaces.

Finally, the United Nations itself has a heightened responsibility when those who cooperate with the organisation are targeted. We therefore call on the UN to ensure that it is doing all it can to facilitate a safe environment. This involves a coordinated response across all agencies and bodies of the system in ensuring robust measures are in place to mitigate risks of reprisals. We welcome initiatives to reinforce UN coordination and readiness on this issue, including the 2020 Guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space, and the guidance on mitigating reprisals for the Security Council, and we call on the UN to ensure these are effectively implemented.

We also encourage the UN to continue its efforts to improve data collection, analysis and documentation of cases, and to use this information to actively improve policies and practices so that the gaps existing in our collective efforts are closed.

Chair, those who cooperate or seek to cooperate with the UN are performing a public service on a global level. They should never face intimidation, threats or harm as a result.

Thank you.

Signatories:

Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Belgium, Belize, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile , Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, Fiji, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Maldives, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nauru, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Palau, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Samoa, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Vanuatu, The European Union.