

SUBMISSION BY NORWAY RE: A/RES/72/247 ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, 20 APRIL 2018

Background

Reference is made to the communication by the OHCHR of 22 March 2018 inviting inputs relating to the follow-up of UN General Assembly resolution 72/247 on human rights defenders.

Reference is further made to the letter concerning the follow-up of this resolution submitted to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres by Norway's Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide in New York on 12 January 2018, a copy of which has been provided to High Commissioner Zeid Raad al-Husseini and the OHCHR.

Reference is also made to the Memorandum of Understanding between the OHCHR and the Government of Norway of 26 February 2018, which highlights inter alia support to the UN system and OHCHR in assisting Member States in strengthening the role and security of human rights defenders in accordance with General Assembly Resolution A/RES/72/247.

System-wide approach

Importantly, UN General Assembly resolution 72/247 sets the stage for a system-wide assessment of UN assistance to States in strengthening the role and security of human rights defenders.

The unanimous resolution provides a solid and substantive basis for concretizing and giving system-wide effect to Secretary-General Guterres' expressed promise to human rights defenders: "*The United Nations is on your side.*" (Human Rights Council 27 February 2017). More can be done – and clearly needs to be done - in order to operationalize this promise, and the organization now has the mandate and opportunity to do so.

The anniversary assessment and analysis, to be presented in a report with conclusions and recommendations by the Secretary General, need to be an honest stock-taking and provide a road map for the UN system moving forward on the basis of and in accordance with the series of resolutions on human rights defenders, adopted by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

Operative paragraph 16 of resolution 72/247 is primarily directed at the UN system, i.e. "the OHCHR as well as other relevant UN offices and departments and relevant specialized agencies, including at the country level". A key part of the assessment and analysis, describing progress, achievements and challenges, will be to get a realistic and comprehensive picture of the situation, as seen by the various parts of the UN system itself.

Importantly, this goes beyond Geneva (the OHCHR and the Special Procedures), and it will require engagement and commitment by the different parts of the UN system. On such a basis, the system can make a meaningful overall assessment of the situation, draw meaningful conclusions and identify

recommendations that can yield the necessary progress, with the support of a range of actors in the international community laid out in operative paragraph 17 of the resolution.

As regards interaction with the Special Rapporteur and his reports, it should also be kept in mind that the mandate resolution (most recently A/RES/34/5) encourages all UN agencies and organizations, within their mandates, to support the Special Rapporteur, including in the context of country visits and through suggestions on ways and means of ensuring the protection of human rights defenders. In other words, the relevant agencies and organizations need not only be recipients of his reports, they can be proactive in furthering the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

Enhanced communication

The resolution unanimously underscores the role of human rights defenders in advancing all human rights at the national and international levels, including in support of the two other pillars of the UN. The UN system – like other actors - can at all levels probably do a better job in communicating this message, utilizing modern means of communication and social media can be used.

An important step towards promoting the Declaration on human rights defenders and ensuring its implementation will be for the UN country offices to communicate on the national level and in local languages a clear and supportive message to all constituencies recognizing the important, positive and legitimate role of human rights defenders in society, in accordance with the Declaration, the anniversary resolution and the statements by the Secretary-General as well as the High Commissioner. (In the words of SG Guterres to HRDs: “the UN is on your side”).

As part of such a message, it can be made clear by UN offices at country level that their doors are open to human rights defenders, and that Governments can seek technical assistance and capacity building in the implementation of their human rights obligations and commitments, including with a view to strengthening the role and security of human rights defenders, as called for by a number of UN resolutions on human rights defenders, including A/RES/68/181 on women human rights defenders, A/HRC/RES/31/32 on human rights defenders addressing economic, social and cultural rights and A/RES/22/6 focusing inter alia on the role of national legislation as it relates to human rights defenders.

The UN system has an important role in voicing and following up at country level the relevant messages and commitments contained in UN resolutions. The resolutions on human rights defenders apply to all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and they constitute a basis for making progress on human rights promotion and protection in this anniversary year and beyond.

Information by all parts of the international community to the HRD High Level Meeting in 2018

As discussed with OHCHR in New York during the negotiations of resolution 72/247 and in Geneva thereafter, it is presumed that all actors will be given the chance to communicate information pursuant to operative paragraph 15 of resolution all the way up until the High Level Meeting of the General Assembly at the end of the year in New York. A number of activities are currently under planning and are scheduled for the anniversary year at different levels, nationally and internationally, and the reporting provided according to the April 22 deadline will not provide a complete picture.

No PBIs were foreseen for the compilation of this reporting and it is presumed that the OHCHR may provide a compilation for the High Level Meeting of the submissions as submitted in their original languages. This may be electronic/web-based allowing for submissions all the way up until the High Level Meeting.

Awareness raising and promotion of the Declaration: Norway

Various awareness raising activities are planned undertaken in Norway during the anniversary year, including with the participation of Norwegian civil society and non-governmental organizations in the area of human rights, the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution, the United Nations Association of Norway, academia, decision-makers in government and parliament, as well as international participants, such as the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders.

Norwegian legislation and practices do not discriminate against human rights defenders or seek to limit or curtail their work or activities. On the contrary, great importance is attached to fundamental freedoms, such as the freedoms of expression, assembly and association as well as of the media, which are viewed as fundamental for human rights defenders to be able to operate in a safe and enabling environment. Maintaining a safe enabling environment for human rights defenders is a fundamental objective.

Norwegian authorities continue to give financial support to local, national and international actors in the area of human rights. Norwegian authorities do not steer the work of these organizations, but rather set out to give them autonomy and space to operate.

Human rights defenders work to make society better, and they should be recognized as a positive asset. This is the spirit of the Declaration on human rights defenders and the anniversary resolution.

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