

We strongly condemn any act of intimidation and reprisal

Mr. Chair,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of United Kingdom as well as on behalf of 69 other countries.

Civil society and human rights defenders play a crucial role in supporting our work at the United Nations and the healthy functioning of democratic institutions. They not only enrich our process of decision-making, but their contributions also ensure that the impact of the decisions we make here at the UN reach those furthest behind, in line with our existing obligations and commitments, in particular under the UN Charter and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Acts of intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate, seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the UN undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the UN as a whole, including the human rights system.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report and share his alarm about the growing number of reprisals, which take many forms. We share in particular the concern that women human rights defenders are disproportionately exposed to gender-specific barriers, threats and violence, and are alarmed at the number of attacks against journalists and media workers. We strongly condemn any act of intimidation and reprisal, whether online or offline, against individuals and groups who cooperate, seek to cooperate, or have cooperated with the UN. In this respect, we urge States to prevent and ensure adequate protection against such acts by raising awareness and by investigating and ensuring accountability and effective remedy for such acts, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors as well as to inform the Secretary-General and the Human Rights Council accordingly. We must be determined to do all we can to enable them to work and live in safety and without fear of any kind of intimidation or violence. In this regard, we welcome the positive steps taken by those States who have responded to acts of reprisals against persons and groups in their respective countries.

We welcome the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 42/28, which invites the General Assembly to remain seized of all work in this area. We are convinced that the exploration of all avenues of action is crucial. We highly appreciate the work of Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Andrew Gilmour, who has lead the UN efforts to put an end to this condemnable practice. We strongly believe that this mandate ensures a more systematised, coordinated response to the deeply worrying issue of intimidation and reprisals, including against human rights defenders, and will help to put an end to impunity for these attacks. We encourage Member States to cooperate with the Assistant Secretary-General and assist him to fulfill his mandate. We place special emphasis on raising awareness and on the dissemination of best practices.

Mr. Chair, notwithstanding the primary obligation of States to prevent and address reprisals, and to uphold the highest standard of human rights promotion and protection, the UN system also has a duty to prevent and respond to alleged cases of intimidation and reprisals against those who provide information or seek to engage with it, and to ensure accountability when these acts occur. In this respect, we encourage all UN bodies, mechanisms and agencies to strengthen the collective response to reprisals and continue to give detailed consideration to such cases brought to their attention, and to take immediate steps, including by submitting them to Assistant Secretary-General Gilmour and to the Secretary-General as contributions for his annual report. We would also welcome more frequent reporting on the issue of reprisals and follow-up by Assistant Secretary-General Gilmour, including here in New York, thereby increasing awareness, accountability and ensuring a more timely response.

Mr Chair, civil society and human rights defenders are important parts of vibrant societies which encourage openness, transparency and dialogue between people and those in power. The UN, as a global community, must be an example of best practice and ensure all civil society organisations and human rights defenders who wish to engage with the UN system are able to do so without fear of reprisal or intimidation. This will send a message that we value their contribution and will continue to mitigate the risks they face and provide them with opportunities to engage meaningfully with the UN system.

Thank you, Mr Chair.