

Human Rights Council March 2011

Human Rights First, OMCT and FIDH

Intervention Presented by Pamela Kling Takiff

Thank you Mr. President. I am speaking on behalf of Human Rights First, OMCT and FIDH.

HRF has worked for many years to reverse the tide of hate crimes and religious and other forms of discrimination by offering positive recommendations to governments to confront hatred while respecting freedom of expression. In that regard, we welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Although we recognize a global problem of hostility, discrimination and violence targeting persons on account of their religion or belief, we have opposed the concept of “defamation of religions” as counterproductive to efforts to protect individuals from these human rights abuses.

The recent outbreak of religiously motivated violence - including the assassinations of Governor Taseer and Minister Bhatti in Pakistan and the incidents of mob violence in Indonesia - serve as a tragic reminder of the dangerous and sometimes deadly consequences of national blasphemy laws. HRF has documented over 70 recent cases from 15 countries demonstrating how blasphemy laws have also been used to stifle discussion and dissent and settle private disputes.

HRF urges Council Members to vote against any resolution which refers to “defamation” or “denigration” of religions” and to focus instead on the implementation of existing obligations to combat discrimination and violence.

HRF, OMCT and FIDH wish to thank the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders for her report on women human rights defenders and defenders working on women's rights and gender issues. We hope the mandate continues to have a gender specific approach in the years to come. The brutal killing last January of David Kato, a Ugandan human rights defender working on LGBTI issues, shocked the community of defenders. We call for an immediate and transparent investigation into his killing and all attacks against defenders working on women's rights and gender issues.

We are alarmed by the increase of violations committed by non-State actors against human rights defenders.

We are also concerned about recent attacks on defenders in the Middle East and urge you to continue to request country visits to Egypt and Tunisia during this crucial transitional phase.

We see opportunities for progress for defenders in some countries in the region, and call for an immediate end to repressive legislation that undermines their work, an end to

arbitrary detention and torture, and meaningful progress on constitutional reform to protect them.

We note that in Iran that women human rights defenders active in the "One Million Signatures" Campaign seeking to end discriminatory laws against women face constant harassment, and some remain arbitrarily detained.

A member of Mothers for Peace, Ms. Haleh Sahabi has also recently started to serve a two-year sentence. Others have faced abusive judicial proceedings. New charges have also been brought against the spokesperson of the Defenders of the Human Rights Centre (DHRC).

We call upon the Special Rapporteur to provide technical assistance, which includes a gender dimension, to those countries which are in the process of drafting national protection measures such as Mexico and Brazil.

Thank you