

ORAL INTERVENTION - THE OBSERVATORY

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 19th session Item 3 of the order of the day

Joint oral intervention by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of their joint programme, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

March 5, 2012

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Madam President, Madam Special Rapporteur,

OMCT and FIDH, within the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, welcome the fourth report to the Human Rights Council by Special Rapporteur Margaret Sekaggya, and its focus on the specific risks and challenges faced by certain categories of defenders.

Madam Sekaggya,

As you point out in your report, journalists and media workers are frequently targeted for reporting on human rights violations, and in specific contexts such as armed conflicts and elections. In **Colombia, Honduras** and **Mexico**, several were killed, while others were subjected to threats against their lives in other Latin American countries. In **Turkey**, journalists and writers were arrested after they reported on minority rights issues. We are also appalled by the fact that **Dieu Cay**, a prominent blogger in **Viet Nam**, has been unaccounted for the past 17 months while in detention.

In addition, environmental and land rights defenders are also harassed or otherwise threatened, often by non-State actors, and in some cases killed, as in **Brazil, Guatemala** and **Ecuador**, often in a climate of impunity. Several countries also continue to repress the demands of indigenous peoples to live in their ancestral territories, such as in **Chile**. Moreover, **Colombian** environmental activist Ms. **Sandra Viviana Cuéllar Gallego** has remained disappeared since February 2011. Such defenders also routinely face harassment in a number of Asian States, as in **Cambodia, China, India, Sri Lanka, The Philippines** or **Malaysia**.

Madam Special Rapporteur,

What measures should be taken by States and other relevant stakeholders to guarantee effective protection of those categories of defenders and to fight against impunity for attacks and violations against them, including by non-State actors?

Madam Sekaggya,

We also welcome your mission report on **India**, and we strongly support your recommendations calling upon the Indian Government to:

- Publicly acknowledge the importance and legitimacy of the work of defenders.
- Conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations on violations committed against defenders, and prosecute perpetrators on a systematic basis.

- Develop and enact a law on the protection of defenders.

We are also alarmed by the number of States that persistently deny country visits, and by the lack of replies to your communications. We urge all member States to accept all outstanding country visit requests and to cooperate fully with your mandate.

We finally call for the end of arbitrary detention of defenders worldwide, as illustrated by the recent imprisonment sentence against **Ales Bialiatski** in **Belarus**. In this regard, we are particularly concerned over the increasing trends of criminalising defenders for accessing funding for their legitimate work, as now in **Egypt**, an issue that we suggest you to take up in one of your follow-up reports.

Madam President,
Madam Special Rapporteur,
I thank you.