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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

29th session – June 17, 2015

Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the SR on Peaceful Assembly and Association

Oral statement delivered by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

Mr. President, Mr. Special Rapporteur,

Our organisations welcome the report on the **Rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in the context of natural resource exploitation** and call for States, business enterprises and other actors to use its recommendations as a blueprint for reforms.

The Observatory recently published its Annual Report: *"We are not afraid". Land Rights Defenders: attacked for confronting unbridled development*. It provides a global analysis on the particular vulnerability of land rights defenders and reflects on the work of the Observatory in the past few years.

Mr. Special Rapporteur, the Observatory notices the high degree of coincidences between the two reports.

At the heart of the problem lies the issue of the participation of individuals and communities affected by the development policies and investment projects for which the full respect of the freedoms of assembly and association are essential in order to prevent escalation of land disputes and put an end to serious human rights violations.

The Observatory calls for meaningful consultations that ensure the direct participation of those affected by the projects and for the recognition of land rights defenders as legitimate spokespersons. Furthermore, it is necessary to strengthen the capacity and independence of domestic judicial systems, and to strengthen international law in order to trigger effectively the responsibility of business enterprises, in order to combat impunity.

Mr. Special Rapporteur, finally, we would like to refer to the worrying and growing trend of laws restricting freedom of association tabled or approved across the world including in countries such as the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, Cambodia, Angola, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania, South Sudan, Sudan or Egypt just to mention some examples that illustrate the global dimension of this problem. The Observatory recalls the recommendations contained in its 2013 Annual Report which addressed restrictions in the access to funding and exhorts you, Mr. Special Rapporteur, to join forces with other mandate-holders at the UN but also in the regional human rights systems to address this global threat.

We thank you Mr Special Rapporteur.