

## PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

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### **UNGA passes resolution on the protection of human rights defenders**

***Geneva-New-York-Paris, November 26, 2015. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a joint FIDH-OMCT programme) commends the passing of a United Nations General Assembly resolution on the protection of human rights defenders in the Third Committee yesterday. At a time when human rights defenders have come under increasing pressure amidst a growing crackdown on civil society in many parts of the world, this resolution is more important than ever.***

117 Member States voted yes on the resolution, entitled “Recognizing the role of human rights defenders and the need for their protection,” calls for accountability for attacks on human rights defenders (including attacks on their family members) and urges states to release defenders who have been arbitrarily detained for exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Norway, as the main sponsor of the resolution, faced many challenges in the negotiation phase with some States, notably members of the African Group, attempting to significantly weaken the text. Nevertheless, Norway and the co-sponsors of the resolution, resisted pressure and delivered a strong text.

While normally adopted as a consensus resolution, this year China and Russia asked for the resolution to be put to a vote. Fourteen States voted no on the resolution (China, Russia, Syria, Burundi, Kenya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe, North Korea, South Africa, Iran, Pakistan, and Sudan).

***“It is no accident that many of these States have poor records on the their treatment of human rights defenders, including Burundi which recently suspended 10 NGOs this week and promotes acts of violence against defenders. It remains however problematic that some of these opponents include democracies such as South Africa, which owes its anti-apartheid struggle and its beacon Constitution to a solid civil society movement”***, said Karim Lahidji, FIDH President.

***“The fact that the resolution was not adopted by consensus reinforces our concerns about the shrinking space for civil society organisations and human rights defenders across the globe. Now more than ever it’s essential that all of us who are supportive of independent civil society join our voices to defend not only the legitimacy of their work but also to reaffirm how essential it is for any society wanting to advance human rights and the rule of law”***, said Gerald Staberock, Secretary General of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

Just before the vote, Norway also urged States not to abstain, which would represent a failure to recognize the role of human rights defenders and the need for their protection. Overall, 40 States abstained (Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, CAR, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Fiji, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niger, Oman, Qatar, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Togo, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, and Yemen).

FIDH and OMCT, as well as their member organisations, will continue to stand up for human rights defenders across the world who have been unjustly targeted owing to their human rights work. This resolution will serve as an important tool for their protection.

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