

Letter to Member States of the UN Human Rights Council

Re: Support consensus renewal of the mandate of Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders

6 March 2017

Your Excellency,

The undersigned civil society organisations, coming from all regions, urge your delegation to **support the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.**

The work of human rights defenders is vital to promoting human rights, upholding the rule of law, and achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Despite this critical role, the Special Rapporteur notes that defenders are under ‘unprecedented attack’ with ‘the number killed around the world continuously rising’.

In turn, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur is key to provide visibility of the situation of defenders and highlight the need for their protection. Since the creation of the mandate in 2000, successive mandate holders have made concrete contributions to the protection of those defending human rights and the dissemination and implementation of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. The mandate has also made significant contributions to acknowledging gender specific attacks targeting women human rights defenders and the need to develop intersectional responses.

During the Human Rights Council’s 34th session, States are **considering a resolution extending the mandate for a further three years.** The proposed renewal of the Special Rapporteur’s mandate provides a key opportunity for the HRC to strengthen the recognition of the crucial role defenders play in our societies, and towards the creation of a fair, just and equal world.

We call upon all States to show their commitment to human rights, peace and sustainable development through strong and unconditional support for the renewal of the mandate. The establishment of the mandate in 2000, and all its extensions have always enjoyed consensus in the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council.

Such strong support will lay the basis – in this resolution and the future work of the HRC, the General Assembly and the Special Rapporteur – to further strengthen the protection of defenders.

Assuming the extension of the mandate, the Special Rapporteur has foreshadowed a range of much needed and important initiatives, including expert technical assistance, to support States to ensure the full and effective implementation of human rights defender related resolutions and recommendations at the national level.

We therefore urge your delegation to support the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur by participating positively in the negotiations on the resolution, and in time co-sponsor the text.

Civil society and human rights defenders around the world look to the HRC and its Member States for support and protection, and we hope your delegation will stand with us.

Yours sincerely,

International Service for Human Rights
Human Rights House Foundation
DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa
Human Rights Defenders Project)

CIVICUS
International Commission of Jurists
AWID

And other co-sponsoring NGOs.