

48th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 5: Interactive Dialogue with the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights on the report of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights

September 29, 2021

Madam President,

We welcome the report of the Secretary General, which addresses the repressive actions against several Right Livelihood Laureates who are at the forefront of defending human rights.

In Western Sahara, since **Aminatou Haidar** was first mentioned in the 2020 report, acts of intimidation and harassment against her have continued, if not intensified, after the creation of her new organisation ISACOM. In August, she was once again physically attacked by the Moroccan police forces, while they were violently dispersing a peaceful demonstration.

In Saudi Arabia, **Mohammed al-Qahtani** is serving 10 years in prison. In 2021, he resumed his hunger strike multiple times to protest the dire conditions he and other prisoners are subjected to. Furthermore, the response of the authorities surrounding **Abdullah al-Hamid**'s passing in prison is appalling. No information on the reasons behind the delay for his medical treatment was provided. We continue to call for the authorities' full accountability in this regard¹.

In Belarus, **Human Rights Center Viasna**'s staff has endured arbitrary arrests and detention, home and office raids, interrogations and criminal proceedings, only for documenting human rights abuses. Currently, seven of its members are behind bars and could face lengthy sentences.

These reprisals can't continue unabated.

What concrete actions is the UN undertaking to hold accountable States that engage in reprisals, and how is it ensuring the protection of defenders on the ground, who are crucial to expose human rights violations?

Lastly, we urge all Member States to promptly respond to the increasingly shrinking space for civil society and guarantee an enabling environment for defenders.

Thank you.

¹ This paragraph enjoys the support of ALQST for Human Rights.