

Key outcomes from the 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council

International Service for Human Rights

(31 March 2014, Geneva) The 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council has concluded with the adoption of significant resolutions in relation to human rights defenders, peaceful protest, and accountability for gross human rights violations in North Korea, Sri Lanka and Syria.

Delivering a statement on behalf of a coalition of over 20 NGOs from around the world at the conclusion of the session, ISHR's Director of Human Rights Council Advocacy, Michael Ineichen, said, 'We welcome the Council's contribution to advancing accountability for international crimes, as evidenced by the resolutions adopted on the Democratic Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka. We also welcome the renewal of several important special procedure mandates, including those of Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression.'

The session also concluded with the adoption of an important resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests. The resolutions on human rights defenders and peaceful protest were both adopted despite efforts by a group of States, including China, Russia and South Africa, to weaken the texts.

'Protests play a critical role in contributing to progress on human rights, promoting democracy and civic participation, and challenging repression and censorship. While the Council still falls short of responding adequately to human rights violations committed in the context of protests, particularly the abusive use of force by police, we welcome the adoption of a thematic resolution, and the joint statements – albeit modest – on Egypt and the Ukraine in this regard,' Mr Ineichen said.

The joint statement on Egypt, delivered by 27 States, came after a coalition of NGOs wrote an open letter calling on the Council to address the severe and worsening crackdown on peaceful political activists, human rights defenders and independent journalists in the country.

Throughout the session there was a significant focus on the role of civil society and human rights defenders, with positive initiatives including a dedicated Panel discussion moderated by ISHR Board member Hina Jilani, and a joint statement on the obligations of the Council and States to end reprisals, led and delivered by Botswana.

While welcoming these developments, ISHR's Michael Ineichen said, 'We deplore the continued occurrence of intimidation and reprisals against defenders in connection with their human rights advocacy work, both at national and international levels. The Council has already been made aware of several defenders who, during this session alone, were detained, ill-treated, watched and censored, one even losing her life, for their work in monitoring and exposing human rights violations. We therefore reaffirm the legal and moral obligation placed on the Council, its President, and member States to end reprisals, including by speaking out swiftly and publicly.'

Closing the session, Mr Ineichen said 'This Council will ultimately be judged by its impact on the promotion and protection of human rights on the ground. This paramount objective alone should define the positions of members in the Council, not short-term politics or allegiance to regional blocs. In this regard, we strongly emphasize the critical role of human rights defenders both in the development of resolutions at the Council and the implementation of these standards on the ground.'

Full text available at ISHR website: <http://www.ishr.ch/news/key-outcomes-25th-session-un-human-rights-council>