



a joint programme
OMCT fidh
The Observatory
for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders



PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Adoption of an unprecedented resolution at the UN to end the financial strangulation of human rights NGOs

Cairo - Nizhny Novgorod - Saint - Petersburg - Paris - Geneva - Minsk, March 21, 2013. Today, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council gave a strong response to the increasing trend of curtailing - when not criminalizing - the activities of human rights defenders by limiting their right to access funding, especially when they come from foreign countries. The Council adopted by consensus an unprecedented resolution, introduced by Norway and co-sponsored by 62 States, affirming that “no law should criminalise or de-legitimise activities in defence of human rights on account of the origin of funding”.

“This is a strong signal of support sent by the United Nations to the defenders around the world who are prevented from funding their activities, de-legitimised and often criminalised for their human rights work”, declared Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

“We welcome the adoption of this important resolution, through which the UN Human Rights Council is calling for stronger protection for those actors for change and the guarantors of a free society”, said Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General. *“States have the responsibility to abide by the resolution and ensure that human rights NGOs are enabled to access funding, as such restrictions clearly aim at silencing them”,* he added.

This resolution confirms and reinforces the previous conclusions of UN human rights mechanisms affirming the non-compliance of restrictive and repressive practices and laws with international human rights law. This was illustrated recently by the decision of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) on Ales Bialiatski's case, which stated that Belarus was in breach of its international obligations in interfering in the funding of human rights NGOs' activities and requested Belarus to release him immediately.

All relevant UN mechanisms should now build on this text to enhance the protection of human rights defenders targeted by legislations and practices curtailing their legitimate activities in many countries.

According to Olga Abramenko, ADC Memorial Director in Saint-Petersburg, *“the new laws adopted in the Russian Federation to regulate NGOs are used to attack the civil society: right now in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other places of Russia many independent NGOs are simultaneously being checked by the police, prosecutors and even tax and fire inspections, with a special focus on sources of funding. It is an obvious repressive campaign against human rights defenders, and it is important to have international solidarity and support”.* Ziad Abdel Tawab, Deputy Director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies added that: *“While it is a positive step that Egypt is a co-sponsor to this resolution; Egypt should live up to its obligations and immediately repeal the draconian draft legislation on NGOs currently discussed at the Upper House that aims at strangling the work of national and international civil society”.*

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), has recently released a comprehensive study on restrictions on human rights defenders' access to funding, which demonstrates how NGOs' access to funding, in particular foreign funding, is increasingly being hindered by governments around the world. States resort to restrictive laws, smear campaigns and judicial harassment against human rights defenders as a way to stifle any criticism, such as in Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Egypt, Russia, but also Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, India, and many others in all regions in the world.

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