



Human Rights Council 29th Session

ANNUAL FULL DAY DISCUSSION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Thank you, Mr. President.

ISHR makes this statement on behalf of AWID, FORUM-ASIA, Just Associates, Nazra for Feminist Studies and the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights - members of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition.

We appreciate that the panelists have already identified that patriarchal structures, discriminatory economic, social and cultural norms, gender stereotypes as well as unequal access to resources and opportunities have contributed to suppressing economic and political participation of millions of people around the world. Women human rights defenders are very much at risk because of these concerns as well. WHRDs who defend all human rights are targeted at a global level as a result of our advocacy and activism.

WHRDs are active in all movements, in all regions. We face systemic and pervasive attacks against our work, our identities and our bodies. Here are just a few examples documented recently:

- In light of the 1st anniversary of the arbitrary arrest and detention of Egyptian WHRDs including Yara Sallam, and the ongoing judicial harassment of Azza Soliman, feminist activists in Egypt continue to be targeted within the broader context of crackdowns on civil society activities
- The arrest of five feminist activists in China for their peaceful activities commemorating International Women's Day remain under constant surveillance even after their release. This appears to be part of a broader trend of suppressing women's rights movements in the country
- The website of our own Coalition was hacked by a group known to be hostile to human rights earlier this year.

Most alarmingly, women's rights and sexual rights groups engaging at the Commission on the Status of Women this year expressed their deep concern that their participation even in UN spaces had become increasingly contested, as they criticised the lack of opportunities for civil society input in the process of the development of the Political Declaration, calling for greater accountability and transparency. International human rights mechanisms are delegitimized when governments restrict independent civil society from providing input into the processes.

The vital contribution of WHRDs and their work on human rights and sustainable development is acknowledged in General Assembly resolution 68/181, which was adopted by consensus by all UN member States. To give it effect, governments must support and safeguard genuine inclusion, engagement and expression of WHRDs in international spaces, including at the Council, the General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women and in discussions about the SDGs. This requires that, at the very least, outcomes incorporate explicit recognition of the work of WHRDs and the specific challenges they face. Anything less would be a denial of the courage, legitimacy and strategic work of WHRDs worldwide.

Thank you, Mr President.