

**40<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council**

**Item 3: Clustered Interactive Dialogue, Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders and torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment**

**Oral Statement Delivered by Omaima Najjar**

**Thursday, 28 February 2019**

Thank you, Mr President.

I am here with women human rights defenders from across the world to take our place here, where decisions about our lives, work and bodies are made. We come from feminist movements, defend our land and territories, work for economic justice while confronting patriarchy and heteronormativity, work in situations of conflict, and challenge fundamentalisms in all their forms. Our struggle is for dignity, justice and rights. For this, our colleagues are being killed, tortured, disappeared, criminalised and smeared. Enough!

We are fed up of the failure to adequately address the backlash our movements are facing, including here in the UN; with leaders who spout misogyny and promote violence against WHRDs; and over States' lack of action on urgent cases requiring this Council's attention, for instance:

- The 18 Saudi WHRDs in continued detention, with reported cases of torture and sexual violence.
- The 14 Palestinian WHRDs in administrative detention on Durum prison.
- The 66 Nicaraguan women political prisoners.
- The 35 Sudanese WHRDs imprisoned for peacefully protesting against repressive and arbitrary policies.
- The 603 land WHRDs in Honduras who are facing unfounded charges since 2013.

We recall that existing protection mechanisms were insufficient to prevent the murders of Cao Shunli, Berta Caceres and Marielle Franco. There remains a lack of independent and impartial investigation into these cases to identify all those implicated through collusion. We ask the Special Rapporteur what is the means for follow-up on these cases through his mandate?

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report and consultative approach recognising the need to "strengthen and support women's leadership and feminist community-centred approaches to protection". This means:

- The Council fulfils its mandate to take action on credible allegations of violations against WHRDs by ensuring accountability at the international level;
- Ending the tokenisation of WHRD participation through genuine consultation;

- Including our own cumulative knowledge on our protection needs into any human rights defenders measures and mechanisms.

Finally, we welcome the Special Rapporteur's call to the UN Secretary General to develop a UN wide policy on supporting and protecting human rights defenders.

Thank you, Mr President.