

**37<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council Session**

**March 19, 2018**

**Item 6 – General Debate**

**Statement by the International Lesbian and Gay Association**

**Joined by: Amnesty International, Federatie van Nederlandse Verenigingen tot Integratie van Homoseksualiteit - COC Nederland, International Service for Human Rights and UPR-Info,**

Delivered by: Diana Carolina Prado Mosquera

Thank you, Mr. President,

One year since the start of the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, civil society organisations as well as governments have made calls to improve the mechanism. Crucially, there have been calls for enhanced follow-up on, and implementation of, recommendations. This call is of course also relevant for recommendations, decisions and concluding observations of other international human rights mechanisms, such as special procedures, this council, and the treaty bodies.

An effective follow-up process requires the involvement of civil society. It is therefore only possible where human rights defenders operate in an environment where they can safely conduct their work, and hence follow-up on recommendations. However, many defenders cannot operate freely. When engaging in follow-up activities or early stages of UN processes - including national and international advocacy, they may risk suffering intimidation and reprisals; some defenders are imprisoned, intimidated, fined, harassed, or attacked for seeking to hold their government to account to international recommendations.

We should all be deeply shocked and angered by the fact that civil society actors suffer reprisals simply for engaging with the UPR. Especially you, Member States. The targeting of individuals or groups seeking to cooperate with the UN runs contrary to the founding principles of the UN: of human dignity and human rights, including the right to life, freedom of association and expression, liberty and security. These acts demonstrate complete contempt and disregard for the UN system principles.. *The UPR is ultimately meaningless if defenders are not able to engage with the process freely and without fear.*

Mr. President,

In this context, we call on you and your Bureau to:

- create, elaborate and – crucially – implement a comprehensive policy on the prevention, investigation, prosecution and remediation of reprisals in the UPR and the Human Rights Council;
- Make strong, clear statements condemning cases of reprisals at the commencement of sessions and meetings whenever this happens; and
- Take proactive steps to investigate and follow up on allegations of reprisals, adopting the precautionary principle.

Further, we call on States to use the UPR to formally draw attention to situations of reprisals - making recommendations, delivering statements and posing advanced questions to the State in question.

Engagement by civil society is a vital part of any human rights mechanism. If defenders continue to risk intimidation and reprisals for communicating with UN mechanisms, the system will become completely compromised and fail those who need it the most.

I thank you, Mr. President.