

## **Draft Joint Statement – UNGA74 Third Committee – Report of the HRC**

Mr Chair,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of Australia, Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland.

We take this opportunity to reconfirm our strong support for the Human Rights Council as the preeminent United Nations forum for consideration, discussion and action on human rights. In light of increasing attacks against the international human rights system in general and the Human Rights Council in particular, it is all the more important that United Nations Member States safeguard the integrity of this Council. We welcome the important steps taken at the last session of the Council in addressing the human rights situations, including in Venezuela and Myanmar, and welcome the operationalisation of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar to strengthen accountability. “We also welcome the critical role of the HRC in providing the International community with reliable, unbiased, evidence-based reports on issues of common concern.”

We acknowledge that while being a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, a large majority of the Council’s decisions is taken autonomously and is immediately implemented. At the same time, we value the report of the President of the Human Rights Council to the plenary of the General Assembly and his interactive engagement with the Third Committee, in particular on recommendations from the Council to the General Assembly. Because of the important work of the Human Rights Council, the Third and the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly must act comprehensively and quickly upon the decisions coming out of the Council where that is necessary. It is however the responsibility of the plenary of the General Assembly to take action on the report of the Council, its addendum and its recommendations. It is not for the Committees to reopen these decisions.

Mr Chair,

We also take this opportunity to emphasise that members of the Human Rights Council should “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights” as mandated

by General Assembly resolution 60/251. There is room for improvement of human rights records in each and every State. However, tolerance of, acquiescence to, or the commission of “gross and systemic violations” is always reprehensible.

Such behaviour must not be tolerated, and is particularly inexcusable when displayed or condoned by a Member of the Human Rights Council. No State that commits or permits gross human rights violations should be allowed a seat at the table. We as Member States have to live up to our responsibility when electing the membership of the Council. We call on all States to renew their commitment and adapt their election practice accordingly, even in situations where regional groups present clean slates for elections. And we call on States running for the Council to issue standing invitations to all Special Procedures, as an expression of their will to fully cooperate with the Council, as mandated by General Assembly resolution 60/251.

Mr Chair,

Our seven countries are deeply concerned by the shrinking space for and the increasing hostility and violence against civil society and human rights defenders. Without these key actors the Human Rights Council would have little-to-no visibility of the lived experiences of individual rights holders in any country. Human rights defenders from every corner of the world keep us informed and engaged. They remind us of our duty to act, and of the cost of our inaction. As pressure on human rights increases, so does the pressure on human rights defenders. This underscores the central importance of the work done by civil society partners. We truly applaud those who tirelessly fight and risk their lives in order to promote the rights of others – of women, minorities and members of marginalised groups.

We reject reprisals against human rights activists and defenders, including when these reprisals arise out of participation in the Human Rights Council, contributions to its Universal Periodic Review, or engagement with the Council’s Special Procedure Mandates.

We are also deeply concerned by harassment, intimidation and obstructiveness by States towards Special Procedure Mandate Holders. The Special Procedures must be even-handed, fair and operate in line with their mandates. But a Mandate Holder is an independent voice. It is their job to shine a spotlight on human rights abuses and violations, research and report on

worrying trends and encouraging new norms, and share their expertise and best practice with the global community.

We call upon all States to work constructively with the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. To grant access where required, to consider their recommendations in good faith, and to engage respectfully even when common ground is difficult to find.

And we are deeply concerned by the increasing number of attacks against journalists, including killings. We call upon all States to promote the safety of journalists and to combat impunity for those who commit attacks. We demand the highest standards of transparency and integrity of criminal investigations into crimes against journalist and ask the United Nations to step in should investigations fall short of such standards.

I thank you.