



Joint Oral Statement on Outcomes of
the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee

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Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, I'd like to thank Ambassador Braun very warmly for this opportunity to share the following observations on the outcomes of the Third Committee session of the 74th session of the General Assembly. These comments reflect the views of several human rights organisations that actively engage at the Third Committee.

The Third Committee session provides opportunity to define, and create momentum behind, timely and effective responses to pressing, global human rights concerns.

Beginning with thematic outcomes.

Agreement by States to implement effective policies for the protection of human rights defenders is significant. This includes recognition of the need to remove barriers to the right to defend rights. Record levels of support for the resolution on human rights defenders is important, but weakening of language regarding the urgency of implementing the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders is a concern. The scale and gravity of attacks facing defenders around the world demands urgency, and we insist that States seize increased support for this resolution to drive a conversation on enhancing implementation efforts.

A record number of States also supported the resolution on the Safety of Journalists, strengthening many commitments to prevent, protect against, and ensure accountability for attacks on the media. Yet, while the resolution calls for the release of arbitrarily detained journalists, a record number also remain behind bars, often on the basis of anti-terror laws the resolution commits States to reform. Impunity for killings remains an endemic problem. For the loved ones of murdered journalists like Daphne Caruana Galizia and Jamal Khashoggi, words on paper will mean little until justice is delivered for these crimes.

Implementation is therefore crucial. States should consider how recommendations such as the proposal for a standing UN mechanism to investigate serious crimes against journalists and defenders, might assist in this regard.

In a world where violence and threats against persons on the basis of their religion or belief is rising, renewed consensus on resolutions on Freedom of Religion or Belief and on Combating Intolerance based on Religion, is crucial. We appreciate the convening the seventh Istanbul Process meeting in November as a practical mechanism to further dialogue and implementation, and encourage States to maintain momentum with these efforts.

New language in the resolution on Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment brings a welcome new focus on three key elements: the elaboration of a set of universal standards for non-coercive interviewing methods and procedural safeguards; the need for states to adopt a gender-responsive approach in the fight against torture, as well as the recognition that the prevalence of corruption can have a negative impact on the fight against torture.

The resolution on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which focuses on Accessibility, provides useful references to the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Steering Committee on Accessibility, and relevant International Days. We regret, however, that references to the highly relevant Security Council Resolution 2475 – on Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict - were lost, but we welcome mention of humanitarian situations.

We regret that the Third Committee resolution on human rights and terrorism, while maintaining consensus, failed to restore important human rights language from previous UNGA resolutions on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism. States must redress this through proactive engagement to bolster the Fourth Pillar of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy when it is reviewed later this year.

The decision to establish a process to elaborate a new international convention on cybercrime, despite significant opposition, is deeply disappointing. As the resolution on human rights defenders importantly noted, cybercrime legislation is being misused in many parts of the world to target defenders, and hinder their work. Building on and improving existing instruments is more desirable and practical than diverting scarce resources into a new international framework likely to be lengthy and unlikely to result in consensus.

The foregrounding of the threat of the climate crisis to the realization of rights was welcome in the text on Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation. It is very positive that consensus was found on a new focus addressing menstrual hygiene management needs, including the widespread silence and stigma surrounding menstruation.

We were glad to see States reject attempts to water down language in the Rights of the Child resolution relating to sexual and reproductive health and comprehensive education, and emerge with a consensus outcome. However, we regret that the resolution on the Girl Child wasn't opened for negotiation. This was a missed opportunity for States to take stock of progress made and to reaffirm their commitments to the rights of girls, particularly within the context of increasing hostility and attempts to erode women's and girls' rights to bodily autonomy.

Resolutions and joint statements on country situations remain critical to the UN's response to human rights crises.

Once again, the Committee spoke in one voice condemning systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations committed by the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK). The Committee's call on the Security Council to engage more actively on DPRK is encouraging. Given that annual Security Council meetings on the human rights situation in the DPRK have stalled since 2017, we expect the Council to act on the Committee's appeal in 2020.

We welcome the overwhelming support to the resolution on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, negotiated as it was in a context of widespread protests, reported arbitrary killings of protesters, arrests and an internet shutdown in the country. Importantly, the resolution recognises the ongoing systemic and systematic rights violations taking place in the country. Given that the human rights situation has deteriorated significantly since the adoption of this resolution, it is all the more important that all States support the renewal of the Special Rapporteur mandate on Iran at the Human Rights Council in Geneva this March.

The resolution on human rights abuses against Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar is welcome, in particular the call on Myanmar to end ongoing human rights violations and abuses including those perpetrated by armed forces, and to open the door to UN mandate holders and mechanisms.

The welcome given to the Secretary-General's commitment to implement the recommendations in the independent Rosenthal Report is important. However, we are yet to see how the Secretary-General will address the report's finding of 'systemic failure' by the UN in Myanmar since 2010. We also underscore the importance the resolution attaches to a survivor-centered approach to all responses.

Partnership is key to UN impact. We welcome this meeting as a means to realise and solidify that partnership. With partnership in mind, we note with disappointment that the Committee did not commit to formalising the relationship between the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions and the UN - a measure to further enable the UN to benefit from the work of NHRIs.

Finally, we warmly welcome the backing given by 71 countries to the first ever Third Committee statement demanding more effective action to prevent and ensure accountability for cases of intimidation and reprisals. We look forward to seeing resolve at the General Assembly to stamp out reprisals, including against defenders' families and associates.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to share this brief assessment of Third Committee outcomes. We also thank those States that sought input on priority initiatives from civil society before and during the session.