



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

ICSFT ACTIVITY OVERVIEW AT THE 40TH HRC (HRC 40)



The United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, 40th session (HRC40) has begun this morning, with an opening statement by H.E.Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garces, president of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights, and H.E. Mr. Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland. The session will run from 25 Feb – 22 March 2019 at Palais de Nations , Geneva.

H.E.Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garces in her opening address highlights the importance of multilateralism and cooperation to uphold the founding principles of U.N. and Human Rights. She further reiterated that the respect for international law and norms is vital for the whole human rights agenda, “it will protect us from regressing back to times where HRs

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where compromised”. H.E.Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garces said exclusion of minorities, indigenous peoples, injustice and inequality remain to be a critical challenge to date, as we approach 2021 as the council reviews its work we need to review our performance to have an efficient and council and bring long overdue practical accountability framework to this mechanism .

H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, in his address of the 40th HRC stressed prevention must be a priority for human rights agenda, diplomacy and multilateralism should be rooted in protecting and promoting human rights. UPR is a key mechanism to hold nations accountable to international human rights standard. He highlighted “the human rights agenda is losing ground but I am not losing hope, troubling trends must be addressed and stopped as we owe it to the bravery of our founding fathers that established this mechanism. Grassroots level initiatives and activists are fighting on the ground and they need our unwavering support”. UNSG Mr. Guterres said he is alarmed by the increasingly shrinking space of civil society and crackdown against HRDs, journalists and activists, and the growing use of technology to target dissent and invade privacy in contravention with international human rights laws. H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres finally remarked “let us progress for and with human rights and human dignity”.

Ms. Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights, while addressing the 40th HRC attendees highlighted the dramatically increasing injustice and inequality across the globe, especially highlighting that there cannot be optimal development when the voices of civil society is absent. Ms. Michelle Bachelet said governments should have political will and commitment to promote the human rights agenda, we cannot watch on the side line as human rights architectures fall apart. She finally remarked her office will continue to serve and advance the important work of civil society.

During the session, ICSFT will host a delegation of human rights defenders from Kuwait, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, hold two side events on the human rights situations in the Gulf region and Libya, Sudan and Western Sahara on 8 and 15 March

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respectively, hold a peaceful demonstration supporting freedom of expression and association on 7 March at 2pm in front of the broken chair at Palais des Nations, and participate in a number of bilateral and multilateral meetings and events pertinent to the session. As well we will intervene on Interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and the Commission on human rights on South Sudan, General Debates including the human rights situation in Yemen Palestine, and UPR.

Our activities will focus on addressing the grave human rights situation in Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Sudan, Western Sahara, and Libya in particular, the alarmingly increasing crackdown against human rights defenders, rights groups, journalists, opposition parties, and obstacles to the implementation of the UN human rights agenda and call for a functioning accountability framework for rights abuses in these countries and the meaningful inclusion for peaceful political and human rights reform. On the issue of human rights defenders, we will also be following the negotiations of the resolution, presented by Norway, on the situation of human rights defenders.

We will continue to advocate for the immediate release of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners and disclosure of the fate and whereabouts of all those who have been forcibly disappeared or abducted in the above mentioned countries. We will advocate for the strengthening the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen stressing the need to end war on Yemen and provide access for humanitarian aid. ICSFT will reiterate its calls on States to address the particular threats and attacks against this group of defenders, in particular the specific risks faced by women human rights defenders, to combat impunity for attacks against them, and ensure full civil society participation in political and human rights reforms. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders will present his report on the situation of women human rights defenders on 28 February. ICSFT urges States to use the interactive dialogue to publicly recognize the specific risks and threats women human rights defenders face and commit to take further measures to enhance their protection, underline the legitimacy of their work, their specific protection needs and adequate remedies to the specific violations they face. As illustration women

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rights defenders in Saudi Arabia are targeted and arbitrarily detained for their human rights related work.

ICSFT remains deeply concerned about reprisals against defenders who try to engage with UN mechanisms, despite previous calls by rights group and UN human rights defenders from Bahrain, Yemen, Saudi, Kuwait, Libya, Western Sahara and Sudan face ongoing intimidation and reprisal for cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the UN. Intimidation and reprisals violate the rights of the individuals concerned, they constitute violations of international human rights law and undermine the UN human rights system. Thus we will continue our call all States and the Council to do more to address the situation. In line with this ICSFT urges the President of the Human Rights Council to publicly identify and denounce specific instances of reprisals by issuing formal statements, conducting press-briefings, corresponding directly with the States concerned, and urging the state involved to investigate, hold the perpetrators accountable and report back to the Council on action taken. The adoptions of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) outcomes for Saudi Arabia and Jordan will be opportunities to do so; ICSFT has been engaged in the UPR of Saudi Arabia.

As such as part of ICSFT's advocacy plan to hold states accountable for their abuses and international obligation, we will urge States to collectively press for the immediate and unconditional release of detained human rights defenders in the above listed countries of interest including women human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia. Over 170 organizations from across the globe have previously called for the Council to hold an inquiry into human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia.

As per usual our focus during the Human Rights Council session is to bring more visibility to the dire human rights situation in the above mentioned priority focus countries with the aim raising accountability of respective governments within the frame work of the Human Rights Council.



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#HRC40 | ICSFT events

**Peaceful demonstration in support of freedom of expression #opinion not a crime, 7
March from 2-3pm in front of the UN by the broken chair**

The human rights situation in the gulf region, 8 March from 5-6pm in room XXVII

Human rights in Libya, Western Sahara, and Sudan, 15 March from 2-3pm in room XXVII

Details of these events will be posted on our website and social media platforms

How to keep up with the hrc40 updates?

For more information on the issues that are coming up at the session, refer ICSFT HRC40 update on twitter @icsft, www.icsft.net

Make sure that you are subscribed to our News and Alerts or follow our social media channels for live updates of events or to read the statements we will deliver at HRC40.

The official hash tag to follow and use is #HRC40.