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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Amnesty International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 February 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Women Human Rights Defenders

Amnesty International welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders in relation to the specific situation of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), highlighting how they face similar risks as other human rights defenders but also how they are further exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and specific forms of violence for who they are or what they do.

As the Special Rapporteur states, “the reasons behind the targeting of women human rights defenders are multifaceted and complex and depend on the specific contexts that they act in. [WHRDs] are often perceived as challenging traditional notions of family and gender roles in society, a perception that can generate hostility from State actors and from the public, the media and other non-state actors. They can be stigmatized and ostracized by community leaders, faith-based groups, families, neighbours and communities in the belief that they and their actions are a threat to religion, honour, culture or ways of life.”¹

WHRDs face human rights violations which are multi-faceted and are the result of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This increases the hurdles, risk and violence they face. The inequality, exclusion and discrimination they experience may be based on their ethnicity, race, language, religion or belief, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sex, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, disability, age, location, occupation, nationality, statelessness, migratory status, disability and class, caste or other status.

When States put in place measures to recognise and protect WHRDs, these factors need to be taken into account and specifically addressed so that they are able to act on a level playing field with others and are able to work in a safe and enabling environment.

Amnesty International has long documented and denounced how WHRDs worldwide are being threatened, attacked, harassed, and killed. The killing of Berta Caceres in Honduras still remains in partial impunity, while the killers of Marielle Franco in Brazil have yet to be brought to justice. Many more WHRDs continue to be targeted and are not sufficiently protected, as seen with the recent abduction of Otilia Eugenia Manuel in Mexico, who has long been at risk and should have been protected appropriately”. Senator Leila de Lima has been detained arbitrarily for two years simply for opposing the Philippines murderous “war on drugs”.² Last year, scores of women human rights defenders were arbitrarily detained in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt,³ simply for carrying out their legitimate human rights work.

LGBTI defenders experience intersecting forms of discrimination both for the work they do and due to pervasive transphobia and homophobia which directly target gender non-conforming identities. Amnesty International has documented numerous violations of the right to peaceful assembly when authorities have banned or inadequately protected Pride marches around the world, as seen in the case of Vitalina Koval in Ukraine, as well as violations of the right to life after members of Asociacion Arcoiris in Honduras were killed. In addition, same-sex sexual relations continue to be criminalized in many countries thus increasing the risks for LGBTI defenders, and LGBTI groups who are often banned from forming associations and openly demanding their rights.

WHRDs who work on sexual and reproductive rights and health are often seen as contrary to “traditional” or “family” values. Not only are they attacked and smeared, but they also face serious challenges in advocating and campaigning, securing resources for their work, and delivering sexual and reproductive health services. For example, the Global Gag Rule reintroduced by the United States of America in 2017, blocks US global health assistance to

¹ Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Situation of women human rights defenders, 31 December 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/40/60, paragraph 28.

² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/02/philippines-outspoken-senator-marks-two-years-arbitrary-detention/>.

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/mena-women-activists-defiant-in-face-of-repressive-crackdowns/>.

all foreign non-governmental organizations that use their own funding to provide abortion services, counselling or referrals, or advocate to decriminalize or expand these services. Due to this, Marie Stopes International is facing an 80 million-dollar funding gap which will affect their ability to provide contraception and safe abortion services, and to prevent maternal deaths and injuries. The recent expansion of this rule to further impose restrictions on all US-funded global health assistance not only impacted organizations involved in abortion-related services and advocacy, but also organizations who receive US funds for the HIV, malaria and tuberculosis response, maternal and child health care, contraception services.

In December last year, we marked the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Over 150 human rights defenders, many of countries present here today attended the Paris Human Rights Defenders World Summit in October 2018 to mark this anniversary. The Summit resulted in the adoption of an Action Plan⁴ with specific recommendations addressed to States, businesses, financial institutions, donors and intergovernmental institutions, which was then presented to the UN General Assembly in December 2018.

Based on the recommendations contained in this document, Amnesty International calls on all States to urgently create and adopt national-level action plans so that all human rights defenders, and in particular those who suffer the most discrimination and marginalization, such as WHRDs, are recognized as key players for the advancement of human rights, justice, equality and dignity, and ensure they are able to operate in a safe and enabling environment without discrimination.

Amnesty International urges States to take the lead in implementing the eight interconnected priorities for action that the Special Rapporteur has identified as requiring attention, resource and cooperation among different stakeholders⁵ and to ensure that they implement with urgency the eight fundamental recommendations highlighted by the Special Rapporteur.⁶

Unless all Member States take decisive action to move forward in tackling discrimination and ensuring the recognition and protection of WHRDs, a dangerous presumption that some people are less human than others or that some rights are less worthy of upholding than others will continue to undermine the global fight for human rights.

⁴ <https://hrdworldsummit.org/action-plan/>.

⁵ Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Situation of women human rights defenders, 31 December 2018, UN Doc. A/HRC/40/60, paragraphs 87 -106.

⁶ Ibid, paragraph 108.