

There are many pressing, urgent and current “Human Rights Situations Requiring Council Attention” which unfortunately and inexplicably are not receiving it. We continue to see disturbing attacks and encroachments on well-established human rights principles and on the very individuals and organizations seeking to further those principles in the attempts of some governments to intimidate, constrain and suppress human rights defenders and civil society organizations and to restrict or shut down their human rights and democracy efforts.

Unjust laws have been wielded as political weapons against those with independent views. There also have been attempts to silence independent voices by extralegal means. Human rights defenders not only must defend others who suffer repression for exercising basic rights, they must now defend themselves and their families from harassment, and worse. The International Community has a responsibility to speak out to defend human rights.

From **Cuba to North Korea to Uzbekistan**, those who seek to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly face unrelenting reprisals, including imprisonment of up to 20 years.

In **Iran**, the harassment and imprisonment of opposition activists, journalists and scholars continues.

In **Zimbabwe** the Mugabe regime's crackdown on civil society and human rights defenders continues. Just last month, leaders and supporters of the Congress of Trade Unions were arrested and beaten as they prepared to march in a peaceful protest against worsening economic conditions.

The **Sudanese** government continues to harass international and local humanitarian personnel in Darfur by denying visas, subjecting humanitarian organizations to lengthy registration and documentation procedures and arbitrarily removing them from their lifesaving work in IDP camps.

Meanwhile, **Burma's** extremely poor human rights record continues to worsen, and the military regime continues to commit widespread and systematic abuses, including extrajudicial killings, rape, torture, forced relocation of entire villages and forced labor. The recent brutal crackdown on citizens peacefully expressing frustration over increased fuel prices resulted in the imprisonment of more than 150 activists (currently more than 1,200 prisoners languish in jail), with many more forced into hiding.

In **Belarus**, human rights and democracy activists, opposition politicians, independent trade union leaders and journalists continue to be targets of repression.

In addition, we have serious concerns regarding human rights restrictions on NGOs and the media, and the independence of civil society, in other countries, notably in China and Russia.

This Council is increasingly becoming less and less relevant to the situations human rights defenders face because it continues to ignore the many pressing country situations. This Council may well be content to stand silent in the face of governmental repression of its citizens; however the United States strongly urges action in this council and in the third committee in joining the members of the international community who seek to give voice to the voiceless.