

Check against delivery



**Statement by Mrs Margaret SEKAGGYA**  
**SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE SITUATION OF**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

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Mr Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

### **Introduction**

It is an honour for me to present my first report to this distinguished assembly following my appointment in March this year as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders by the Human Rights Council when it renewed the mandate. Resolution 7/8 of the Human Rights Council lays down my terms of reference, and recognizes the fundamental contribution of Governments' collaboration for the fulfillment of the mandate.

### **Methods of work**

In this first report, I present the methods of work I have adopted which build on the ones developed by the former Special Representative. These include:

- a) Communications to Member States on allegations of human rights violations affecting human rights defenders. Communications remain a major means of protection that the mandate can provide to human rights defenders, and greater attention will be given to follow-up by engaging with all stakeholders concerned;
  - b) Country visits which constitute the most effective means to make a difference on the ground, in terms of fact-finding and monitoring, recognition and protection of defenders, and policy decisions that can be prompted by the momentum created; and
  - c) Reporting to the Human Rights Council and this august body the General Assembly.
- In addition, of importance are thematic studies aimed at completing the body of knowledge already developed, and exploring new areas of analysis, relating to the Declaration on human rights defenders, and the many facets of the work of and challenges faced by defenders.

### **Vision and priorities**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like now to discuss my vision and priorities on the implementation of the mandate entrusted to me.

### **1) Analysis of general trends and challenges**

First, I believe that a thorough analysis of general trends and challenges affecting human rights defenders is essential so as to fully apprehend the context in which those defenders operate, and therefore better protect them. Such analysis can be undertaken at different levels within the activities of the mandate.

### **2) Vulnerable groups of defenders**

I am also determined to reinforce scrutiny on defenders exposed to specific forms of violations and attacks. These include: women human rights defenders who are at greater risk of suffering violence and are targeted by forms of prejudices, exclusion and repudiation by different parts of the social and political establishment, particularly when they work on women's rights; defenders working on economic, social and cultural rights; defenders working on the rights of minorities, indigenous peoples, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT); defenders working on past abuses; and defenders engaged in student protests. These defenders need specific and enhanced protection as well as deliberate efforts to make the environment in which they operate a safer, more enabling and accepting one.

### **3) Rights and freedoms of human rights defenders**

I further intend to continue the analysis of the challenges and obstacles that defenders face in enjoying the rights to core freedoms of association and peaceful assembly set forth in the Declaration on human rights defenders, with a view to formulating recommendations aimed at overcoming these challenges and removing these existing obstacles. This will complement and update the work already done in previous reports by my predecessor.

#### 4) "Early-warning mechanism"

With a view to strengthening the protection function entrusted to me, I am interested in engaging in processes and initiatives aimed at promoting the development of strategies, programmes, institutions and mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders under threat. I am particularly interested in studying the facts necessary to devise an "early-warning mechanism" for the protection of defenders with a view to anticipating systematic threats against defenders by activating appropriate sectors of the national protection system.

#### 5) Follow-ups

Another avenue of action will be the intensification of efforts on follow-up to various initiatives, including on individual cases taken up in my communications. It is not only sources of communications that have a role in following up cases and recommendations but, more broadly, the whole human rights community in all its ramifications at the national, regional and international levels, and of course States whose obligation is to protect the rights of all.

#### 6) Collaboration with stakeholders

I am resolute about giving priority to the strengthening of collaboration with regional mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders, namely the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Unit for Human Rights Defenders within the secretariat of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the Focal Point on Human Rights Defenders within the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. On intra-mechanism cooperation, a first meeting between all regional mechanisms was held recently in Brussels to discuss ways of improving such cooperation. I have also undertaken a joint visit with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to Togo in

August this year. I have further attended a conference in Brussels organized by the European Union and the United Nations entitled: "60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: human rights defenders take the floor". I will shortly meet the Unit for Human Rights Defenders within the secretariat of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. In addition, I will continue collaborating with other special procedures' mandate-holders so as to improve the effectiveness of special procedures, both as a system and individual mandates. Finally, the work of treaty bodies is and will remain a reference for the mandate's thematic and country reports.

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#### **7) Popularization of the Declaration**

I am of the opinion that more efforts are needed to improve the understanding of the rights and obligations set forth in the Declaration on human rights defenders. Ten years after its adoption, the Declaration is not an instrument which is known enough both by those who bear the main responsibilities for its implementation, namely Governments, as well as by its rights-holders, namely human rights defenders. Therefore, I will engage in activities aimed at the popularization and dissemination of the Declaration on human rights defenders, including by facilitating the understanding of the rights and obligations it entails, primarily Government's accountability towards its implementation, and by contributing to building the capacity of defenders to claim the respect of the rights they are entitled to in the Declaration.

#### **8) Sharing good practices**

While the protection function of the mandate is to remain predominant, I am keen on studying, sharing and reporting on good practices on human rights defenders. I believe that more awareness on good practices in this area will encourage replication and therefore contribute to a better implementation of the Declaration on human rights defenders. I see my engagement in activities aimed at the sharing of good practices on human rights defenders, particularly at the regional level, as part of my overarching priority to popularize the Declaration.

### 9) **Universal Periodic Review**

Finally, I consider the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council a mechanism of strategic value in reviewing, and hopefully improving, the situation of human rights defenders in countries under review. As the Declaration on human rights defenders is not a binding instrument and does not have a reporting mechanism, the potential of the UPR is even greater. To this end, I will share in my next report to the Human Rights Council some good practices that might emerge in this area.

### **Conclusion**

I look forward to engaging in a constructive dialogue with all States so as to ensure a safer environment for all human rights defenders. To this end, and on the occasion of the forthcoming tenth anniversary of the Declaration on human rights defenders on 9 December, I have annexed to my report ten key messages to enable you to know defenders better. I trust you will find these messages inspiring, and welcome any feedback you may wish to provide.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.