

**Interactive Dialogue on the report of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights**

**Statement by Austria, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland**

Madame President,

I have the honour to read this statement in the name of Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland and my own country, Austria.

We welcome the Secretary General's report and would like to thank both the Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General Brands Kehris for their efforts to counter the instances of reprisals against those who bravely choose to co-operate with the UN.

Creating and ensuring a safe environment for human rights defenders, including for those who work with the UN, is a priority for our countries. We have already voiced our support for the Secretary General's "Call for Action for Human Rights" during the 43<sup>rd</sup> session and want to stress again: The UN depends, vitally, on the active engagement with civil society actors. When UN organizations are under attack and when individuals, groups and communities are afraid to be associated with them, those who have the most to lose are the poorest and the most vulnerable.

We are encouraged to see stronger and more coordinated efforts throughout the UN to address reprisals, including at the General Assembly and the Security Council. We welcome institutionalized mechanisms within the OHCHR and the larger UN human rights system – including the treaty bodies and the special procedures – to address and prevent attacks against human rights defenders.

COVID-19 represents both an enormous challenge and an opportunity for civil society participation in the work of the UN. While we continue to adapt our working methods to the evolving situation, we believe that the Human Rights Council should maintain some of the more innovative practices developed during the pandemic. We particularly support the use of flexible and safe telecommunication technologies in order to bring in the voices of civil society from all corners of the world in a very representative way.

Madame Assistant Secretary General,

As cooperation with the UN increasingly takes place online, more individuals from remote regions can make their voices heard. At the same time, when cooperation takes place online, how can we ensure that cases of reprisals are being reported and effectively addressed?