

# Declaration of the FIDH Congress in solidarity with human rights defenders at risk

Friday 26 August 2016

**The 39th FIDH Congress, meeting in Johannesburg (Republic of South Africa) from 25 to 27 August 2016, wishes to express its solidarity and its support with human rights defenders who, across the planet, are subjected to harassment, attacks, repression and criminalization for promoting human rights [1].**

Stressing that safety of human rights defenders is especially precarious in conflict, post-conflict and security crisis situations.

Emphasising that the vulnerability of human rights defenders is often compounded by a lack of visibility, lack of recognition and understanding of their role, by the impunity of perpetrators of violations, by the campaigns to discredit and stigmatize human rights defenders and the hinderance of their work, by the insufficient recognition of categories of human rights, such as rights related to land and environment and rights related to gender identity and sexual orientation, by the limited capacity of protection mechanisms and by the collusion of state and non state actors.

Denouncing the recent assassination of human rights defenders committed in several countries, such as in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burma, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, the DRC, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Kenya, Libya, Pakistan, South Africa, Syria, Thailand, The Philippines and Turkey.

Denouncing also the smear campaigns against human rights organisations and threats targeting human rights defenders, such as in Israel and Palestine, where those defending the rights of the Palestinians suffer death threats, in particular Al Haq lawyer Nada Kiswanson as well as an Al Mazan staff.

Stressing that many human rights defenders are victims of forced disappearance, arbitrarily detained often in inhumane conditions, prosecuted on trumped-up charges and following proceedings marred with violations of the right to a fair trial, in particular those working under authoritarian regimes or in situations of political crises or social protest movements, such as in Angola, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Colombia, the DRC, Egypt, Guatemala, Iran, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

Adding that representatives of FIDH members or partners are languishing in prison today, to silence or punish them for having defended human rights, such as:

- in **Uzbekistan**: Azam Formonov, Former Head of the Syrdaryo regional branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), Gaybullo Jalilov, Member of the Karshi regional branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), Yuldosh Rasulov, Member of the Kashkadarya regional branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) and Zafar Rakhimov, Member of Kashkadarya regional branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) arbitrarily detained since April 2006, September 2009 and April 2007

- in **Kyrgyzstan**: Azimjan Askarov, Director of "Vozduh" (Air) human rights organisation arbitrarily

detained since June 2010

- in **Colombia**: David Ravelo Crespo, member of the Regional Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights (CREDHOS), detained since September 2010

- in **Iran**: Abdolfattah Soltani, Founding member of Defenders of Human Rights Center (DHRC) and human rights lawyer and Narges Mohammadi, Spokesperson and Vice-President of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC) both arbitrarily detained since April 2011 and May 2015 respectively

- in **Bahrain**: Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, Former President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Naji Fateel, co-founder of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYHRS) and Nabeel Rajab, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), and FIDH Deputy Secretary General, arbitrarily detained since April 2011, May 2013 and June 2016 respectively

- in **Thailand**: Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, Editor of the magazine Voice of Thaksin and member of the Union for Civil Liberty (UCL) arbitrarily detained since April 2011

- in **Laos**: Sombath Somphone, victim of enforced disappearance in December 2012

- in **Syria**: Razan Zaitouneh, human rights lawyer, who headed the Violations Documentation Centre (VDC) in Duma, together with her husband Wael Hamada, and human rights colleagues Samira Khalil and Nazem Hamadi, abducted since December 2013

- in **Bangladesh**: Mahmudur Rahman, Acting Editor of the Amar Desh newspaper, detained since April 2013

- in **Egypt**: Alaa Abdel Fattah, blogger and member of the “No to Military Trials for Civilians” group arbitrarily detained since June 2014

- in the **DRC**: Christopher Ngoyi Mutamba, National President of « Synergy Congo Culture and Development » (SCCD), detained since January 2015

- in **Zimbabwe**: Itai Dzamara, human rights activist founder of the protest movement “Occupy Africa Unity Square”, a victim of enforced disappearance since March 2015; Linda Masarira, Founder of Zimbabwe Women in Politics Alliance, arbitrarily detained since July 2016

- in **Turkey**: Ayşe Acinikli and Ramazan Demir, lawyers and members of the Association of Lawyers for Freedom (ÖHD) both arbitrarily detained since April 2016

- in **Cambodia**: Ny Chakrya, former Head of the human rights section of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) and Ny Sokhan, Nay Vanda, Yi Soksan and Lim Mony, four senior staff of ADHOC, arbitrarily detained since May 2016

- in **Sudan**: Khalalla Alafif, Director of Tracks Training Center and Mustafa Adam, Director of Alzarqa Organisation and Midhat Hamdan Affi, Officer at Tracks Training Center, arbitrarily detained since May 2016

- in **Ethiopia**: Abebe Wakene, member of the Human Rights Council Organisation (HRCO) from West Ethiopia region, Tesfaye Takele, HRCO member from North Ethiopia region, North Wollo zone of the Amhara region (Weldia town) and Bulti Tesema, HRCO member under West Ethiopia office, Nejo town (welega) of the Oromia region, arbitrarily detained since July and August, 2016

- in **Zimbabwe**: Itai Dzamara, human rights activist founder of the protest movement “Occupy Africa Unity Square”, victim of enforced disappearance since March 2015 and Linda Masarira, Founder of Zimbabwe Women in Politics Alliance, has been imprisoned since 6 July 2016 for protesting peacefully at the Unity Square

More generally, firmly denouncing and rejecting all forms of attacks targeting human rights defenders around the world.

Therefore, the 39th FIDH Congress urges competent authorities to:

- provide information as to the whereabouts of human rights defenders victims of enforced disappearances
- release immediately and unconditionally all human rights defenders who are arbitrarily detained, including representatives of FIDH members or partners
- guarantee the protection, physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders, in particular those most vulnerable to attacks, and their family members
- put an end to campaigns to discredit human rights defenders
- tackle the issue of the impunity of crimes targeting human rights defenders and carry out an immediate, thorough, impartial and transparent investigation into all allegations of attacks against human rights defenders, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before an independent tribunal, and sanction them as provided by the law
- ensure that, until charges are dropped, all the judicial proceedings are carried out in full compliance with human rights defenders' right to a fair trial, as protected under international law
- publicly and unequivocally recognise the legitimate, positive and necessary role played by human rights defenders in society
- withdraw all laws and provisions restricting and criminalising the defense of human rights and harmonize the national legislation with international human rights standards
- establish, and reinforce, when applicable, national protection mechanisms by ensuring they are provided with the necessary means to work effectively
- conform under all circumstances with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted on December 9, 1998 by the UN General Assembly, with the European Union and OSCE guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, as well as the Resolutions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on Human Rights Defenders in Africa and the decisions of the mechanism on human rights defenders of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
- implement the decisions of the United Nations and Regional mechanisms on the protection of human rights defenders, such as the OSCE, EU, ACHPR, including the precautionary measures decided by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights concerning defenders who are at risk
- fully cooperate with UN and regional mechanisms on the protection of human rights defenders.

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## Footnotes

[1] See actions undertaken by FIDH under the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).