

Statement at 23rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council

10 June 2013

Item 8: Follow up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, INCLUDING WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND THOSE WORKING ON ISSUES OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Mr President,

There has been significant progress in the protection of human rights in all regions of the world since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

However, twenty years on many provisions of the VDPA have not been fully implemented and there are threats of regress in key areas. ISHR would like to highlight three such areas.

First, the VDPA recognised that women all over the world are exposed to discrimination and violence. Women human rights defenders, in particular, are often subject to harassment and violence – including sexual violence – in connection with their work for women's rights. We applaud Canada's leadership in tabling a draft resolution on violence against women at this session. We call on States to ensure that this resolution explicitly condemns the use of rape and sexual violence as a means of stigmatising, harassing and silencing women defenders.

Second, the VDPA reaffirmed the importance of the right to equality and non-discrimination on all grounds. Discrimination and violence on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity is widespread around the world. We welcome the joint statement made by Norway (on behalf of States) and their commitment to ensuring that the issue of human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity stays on the agenda of this Council and the United Nations. There is an urgent need for follow-up to resolution 17/19, including establishing a process to ensure systematic and expert attention to violations suffered by LGBT people, a forum for sustained dialogue, and a space for offering recommendations and technical assistance to States.

Third, Mr President, the VDPA recognised the important role of NGOs and their members in promoting human rights and called on States to ensure that they enjoy the rights and freedoms set out in the UDHR and the protection of national law. Article 38 explicitly provides that 'NGOs should be free to carry out their human rights activities, without interference'. In this context, we condemn attacks, restrictions and reprisals against human rights defenders, including the recent conviction of 43 NGO workers in Egypt and the prosecution of two NGOs in Russia allegedly in retaliation for their cooperation with the Committee against Torture.

Thank you.