

High Level Segment Panel
Statement by Anna Dobrovolskaya

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Thank you Mr. Chairperson,

The freedom of any individual or group to act for the protection of fundamental rights is one of the pillars of the international human rights framework.

Human rights defenders make a unique contribution to promoting the values of non-violence, respect of human dignity and defending everybody's rights. Their role should be acknowledged as clearly distinct from political opposition, which criticizes the authorities with the aim of itself coming into power whereas human rights defenders perform their watchdog functions with any political force in power.

This special role of human rights defenders should be fully recognised in all the countries, as they are ambassadors of the universal ideas and values, which lay at the basis of the United Nations system. The states are not to forget that according to UN founding documents human rights issues are matters of legitimate concern of all the member states, not an internal affair protected by their national sovereignty. And thus any reprisals against those individuals, who appeal to the international community to prevent or stop human rights violations in their country, constitute a threat to the UN system as such.

Unfortunately, now we see that various countries from various regions attempt to present legitimate human rights activities as anti-state actions, hence criminalised. Some states adopted legal frameworks that bring human rights defenders to the position of criminals and make it impossible for them to carry out publicly their legitimate work without breaking the law.

They may be labeled as "extremists" for peacefully exercising freedom of expression, sanctioned for acting on behalf of unregistered associations or labeled as "foreign agents" for receiving foreign funding for their activities, as if they were acting as spies.

The creation of stable and peaceful societies is a shared interest of the international community and it is normal that this work receives the support of any interested parties. The promotion of values and principles that lay at the foundation of the United Nations and other international organisations cannot be subjected to repression under national laws.

We believe that the Human Rights Council needs to address situations, which undermine the work of human rights defenders by attempting to criminalize their activities.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.