



HRC 52 - General Debate Item 5 - 23 March 2023

**Belgium on behalf of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (BENELUX)**

**Speaking time: 2 min 30**

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Mister President,

I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the three countries of the Benelux: Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

25 years ago the General Assembly adopted by consensus the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Article 1 of the declaration states that *“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”*.

And yet, since the adoption of the Declaration, we have witnessed all too many disturbing attacks against human rights defenders in all too many places in the world.

Mister President,

The Benelux wishes to express its concern about the following cases of intimidation and reprisals for cooperating with the UN on human rights:

1. Ibrahim Metwally Hegazy in Egypt, who is the co-founder and coordinator of the Association of the Families of the Disappeared.
2. Jiang Tianyong in China, a legal rights activist working at grassroots level to defend land and housing rights, to promote the rights of vulnerable social groups and to expose root causes of systemic rights abuses.
3. The Human Rights Center ‘Viasna’ in Belarus, which works towards the development of civil society and the promotion of human rights in Belarus.
4. In Venezuela: El Comité de Familiares de Víctimas del Caracazo (COFAVIC); El Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS); El Centro de Justicia y Paz (CEPAZ); Control Ciudadano (and its director Ms. Rocío San Miguel); and Espacio Público (and its director Mr. Carlos Correa): five NGOs and two individuals working for the promotion of human rights and who have a history of cooperating with the UN
5. In Burundi, Human rights lawyers and defenders Armel Niyongere, Dieudonné Bashirahishize, Lambert Nigarura and Vital Nshimirimana prominent and well-respected figures within Burundian civil society and their local communities.
6. In Cameroun, the cases of Jan Capelle and Elvis Brown remain outstanding.

Finally, Mr President,



We welcome your pledge to follow up on all allegations of reprisals against individuals who have engaged with the UN human rights system. We commend your strong call on all states to prevent such acts. We encourage you and the Bureau to make public statements on serious and unresolved cases of reprisals and to address such cases systematically.

We thank you.