

APPEAL TO STATES WORLDWIDE FROM ALL THOSE ATTENDING THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WORLD SUMMIT IN PARIS 29 TO 31 OCTOBER 2018

We, human rights defenders from all over the world, have come together to celebrate 20 years of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and 70 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, common heritage of humanity.

We celebrate an ideal which proclaims the equal dignity of human beings, assuring each person's universally recognised human rights.

More than ever, we are convinced of the profound relevance of human rights in humanity's everyday life, in a world that currently faces many adverse forces: authoritarianism, religious fundamentalisms, hatred, and private interest driven by corporate power.

We are grateful to the States that adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to all the people, mostly anonymous, who have taken action all over the world to make this ideal a reality from their own homes and communities.

These are all **the human rights defenders** who have left their mark over generations and we are walking in their footsteps.

We recall the fact that the primary responsibility for fulfilling human rights lies with States, but businesses, financial institutions, donors and intergovernmental organisations also have responsibility in ensuring we live in an equal and just world.

We are acutely aware that human rights will become a tangible reality only if everybody participates in promoting and defending them.

This essential role, exercised individually or collectively, was recognised and praised by States when the **Declaration on Human Rights Defenders** was adopted at the United Nations in 1998.

With this Declaration, the international community committed to protect, recognise and encourage the right of each person to participate in the defence and promotion of human rights of all without discrimination, pledging to see them as allies and partners, not as agitators, opponents, enemies or criminals.

In the last 20 years, some progress has been made. The diverse community of human rights defenders has multiplied all over the world, and solidarity has been strengthened: regional and international networks have been formed. Human rights education has allowed many all over the world to learn about, understand their rights, and claim them in a peaceful manner.

This progress is undeniable and yet, from our privileged position as witnesses of the human rights situation at both local and international level, we have no other choice but to **ring the alarm bell**.

We warn about the fact that those who defend human rights have been increasingly targeted by the very States that are supposed to protect them.

We are distressed by the fact that in 2017, at least 312 human rights defenders were assassinated, twice as many as in 2015, mostly with impunity. We endure physical and psychological attacks, enforced disappearance, sexual violence, intimidation,

stigmatization, arbitrary detention and harassment. Many of these attacks are done by companies or other non-state actors, often with the complicity of the State.

We are alarmed by the fact that many States have followed others in passing legislation aimed at hindering or denying the right to enjoy and defend human rights. The rights to organize and demonstrate individually or collectively and to express oneself freely, have been curtailed and rolled back in many countries, at a time when illegal surveillance is growing exponentially. Those of us who want to defend human rights are subject to criminal charges, imprisonment, fines, administrative closures, restrictions on freedom of movement, and the inability to finance our activities.

We are alarmed that those who are most marginalised and discriminated against are the least protected from these attacks: women, defenders of LGBTIQ rights, those who defend the human rights of sex workers, of cultural or ethnic minorities, of young people, of people with disabilities, of indigenous peoples' rights to land, territory and communal goods. These human rights activists should be the most protected by States, yet they are often the primary targets.

We are alarmed that rather than recognising the contribution human rights defenders make to the well-being of their people, States prefer to depict them as foreign agents, terrorists, threats to national security, people opposed to development or to "traditional values".

These repeated attacks against those who defend human rights are attacks against everyone's human rights. In silencing human rights defenders, victims of grave human rights violations are deprived of crucial support.

Finally, we are alarmed that universally recognised human rights are currently threatened and that respect for these rights is presented as a hindrance to development, to business, to security and even to the identities of peoples. The primary victims are entire populations turned into scapegoats: people on the move, sexual, ethnic and cultural minorities, and those who defend them.

We are convinced, that only through the respect of human rights we will be able to access fair and inclusive economic and social well-being, in a way that respects our planet; and each person's safety will be assured as well as our multiple identities recognised and protected.

We call upon States to show that they are committed to their historic responsibility and meet their international commitments to human rights, instead of conveniently turning their backs out of cowardice or short-term interest.

We are fed-up with the increasing attacks we face. These attacks reflect the growing structural threat to human rights values everywhere.

No more half-measures or shy, words of support behind closed doors. It is time to strongly and unequivocally pledge support for our core and shared human values and principles and time to integrate human rights as a corner stone everywhere: in schools to enable the new generations to claim their human rights; in economic relations; in law; in protection mechanisms at all levels; and in foreign policy. Governments can no longer hide behind the blanket of sovereignty to cover their irresponsible behaviour that deprives their inhabitants from their human rights.

It is time for States and the international community to firmly commit to ensure that human defenders do not live in fear and are able to operate in a safe environment and that those responsible of these grave human rights violations are brought to justice.

We demand that as of now States publicly commit to adopting national action plans for change, in consultation with the human rights defender's community. We will be on the side of all those who show sincere commitment for improvement and progress, but for those who continue to undermine our rights, be aware, we will be on your back!