



Concept note

The Permanent Missions of the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom invite you to an Arria Formula meeting to discuss:

Reprisals against women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders who engage with the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies

**21 FEBRUARY 2020, 10:00AM-1:00PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 2, UNHQ**

Objective:

The objective of this Arria Formula meeting is to discuss how to create an enabling environment for women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders to continue to engage with the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies, by sharing ideas on measures that the Security Council and the UN can take to prevent and respond to cases of reprisals in close consultation with targeted individuals and organisations.



United Kingdom
Mission to the
United Nations



Permanent Mission of the
Federal Republic of
Germany to the United
Nations



PERMANENT MISSION
OF ESTONIA TO THE UN



Mission permanente de la France
auprès des Nations unies



Context:

Since Security Council resolution 2242 (2015), which expressed the Council's intention to invite representatives of civil society to brief on a regular basis, increasing numbers of women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders are being invited to brief the Security Council. The United Nations, especially the Security Council, is a key space for civil society actors to share their expertise, and to advocate for rights relating to Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and other issues on the Council's agenda. Other Council documents, from PRST/2005/42 to recent resolution 2493 (2019) recognised that women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders provide specialised expertise and resources to support peaceful solutions to disputes. In these products the Council encouraged Member States to create safe and enabling environments for civil society, including those who protect and promote human rights in situations of armed conflict, to carry out their work independently and without undue interference.

Furthermore, the Secretary-General's most recent report on WPS (S/2019/800) highlighted women human rights defenders as one of six priority areas for UN entities, Member States, and regional organisations leading up to the 20th anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000). However as former Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour emphasised in October 2018: "Regrettably, we have several reported cases where individuals have been harassed, threatened, and slandered online for speaking out at the Security Council. This is happening right under our noses in the diplomatic hallways at headquarters". Reported incidents of reprisals take on different forms both online and offline, including intimidation, threats and harassment, smear campaigns, denying access to funding and travel visas, surveillance, and physical attacks.

The Secretary-General has documented, including through annual reporting on "Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights", this increase on reprisals against civil society, including women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders that engage with the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies. In his recent WPS report (S/2019/800) the Secretary-General urged Council members to explicitly condemn all forms of intimidation and reprisals against civil society representatives and those who provide briefings to the Council and to work with those individuals to determine the appropriate responses, on a case by case basis.

In the context of the work of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, women human rights defenders have reported travel bans, harassment, interrogation, arbitrary detention, and physical attacks before and after UN meetings. Women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders also face gender-specific risks including sexual and gender-based violence. Furthermore, in December 2019 the Secretary-General noted that youth activists and their families have also been targeted for their cooperation with the UN, and affirmed that young women are frequently at the forefront of advocacy at the international level and must be protected.

1. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Reprisals/Pages/GAEvents.aspx>

2. (A/HRC/40/60, paras. 48-51 and 109 (b)).

3. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-12-10/secretary-generals-remarks-human-rights-day-%E2%80%9Cyouth-standing-for-human-rights%E2%80%9Delivered>

These reprisals not only compromise the ability of the persons and groups involved to effectively carry out their work at the local or national level in contexts of insecurity such as conflicts; they also run contrary to the principles of the UN Charter and ultimately pose a significant threat to the integrity and impact of the work of the Security Council by undermining the Council's ability to inform itself and comprehensively understand different perspectives on the conflicts and issues on its agenda. They also have a negative impact on the entire WPS, human rights, and peacebuilding community. The issue therefore merits increased Council attention in order for the UN and the Council to prevent and respond to reprisals, and create an enabling environment for women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders to carry out their work.

Guiding Questions:

- What are the root causes of reprisals against women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders, in the context of their work at the local level and their engagement with the Security Council?
- What measures can be taken by the Security Council and/or its individual members, including accountability measures and others through existing mechanisms and international standards, to ensure that women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders can address the Security Council and work with its subsidiary bodies in a safe and enabling environment without fear of reprisals and intimidation?
- How can improved documentation of cases and trends of reprisals in relation to the Security Council and its mechanisms contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon? How can better risk and vulnerabilities assessments contribute to reducing the risk of reprisals against women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders who engage with the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies?
- How can these processes highlight ways that reprisals affect different sub-groups including young women human rights defenders and young women peacebuilders, those from different ethnic groups, and others?
- What measures, including accountability measures, can Member States develop, including through National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, and what efforts can United Nations bodies, agencies, and peacekeeping and political missions take to prevent and address intimidation and reprisals?





Date: 21 February 2020, 10am
Venue: Conference Room 2, UNHQ

Format


The event is hosted by the Permanent Missions of the Dominican and the United Kingdom and co-sponsored by Belgium, Germany, Estonia, France and Niger.

Opening remarks will be provided by the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom and the the floor will be given to our briefers.

The briefers will discuss the reality of the harsh reprisals women face and examine ways in to create an enabling environment for women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders to ensure they can, effectively and safely, engage with the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies.

Briefers

- **Ilze Brands Kehris**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- **Madeleine Rees**, Secretary General of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- **Shalini Eddens**, Director of Programs of Urgent Action Fund



Members of the Security Council, beginning with the co-hosts will then make short interventions and ask questions. time permitting, other Member States and Permanent Observers can make interventions. Countries should indicate their interest in making an intervention by writing to solangeblandino@hotmail.com. Member State comments and questions should not exceed three (3) minutes.

Please confirm your attendance to solangeblandino@hotmail.com by Thursday 20 February, 2020.

All Member States, Permanent Observers, and NGOs are invited to attend. Interpretation will be provided in all official languages of the United Nations.