

Joint Statement

International Service for Human Rights, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Human Rights House Foundation, The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), CIVICUS, Peace Brigades International Switzerland, International Federation for Human Rights Leagues, Conectas Direitos Humanos, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), West African Human Rights Networks

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Thank you Mr. President,

We want to highlight key features for the next High Commissioner – one of the world’s premier human rights defender – whose mandate includes providing technical assistance and capacity building to States, as well as standing up for universal human rights and those who defend them.

The work of the next High Commissioner, and of human rights defenders more broadly, is essential to justice, fairness and dignity for all. Defenders contribute to sustainable and inclusive development. They combat corruption and the misuse of power. They promote good government, transparency and accountability. They seek to ensure that no-one gets left behind.

Despite this, around the world, defenders face mounting attacks and criminalisation for standing up to power, privilege, prejudice and profit. Their work has never been more important, nor more imperiled.

Mr President, it is in this context we say that the next UN High Commissioner needs to be a dedicated human rights defender. S/he need to be committed to working with and for human rights defenders; consulting and partnering with them, supporting their causes, and speaking out and protecting them when they are threatened or attacked.

The next High Commissioner needs to build strategic alliances with States, civil society, academics and business enterprises with a shared interest in human rights and the rule of law. S/he need to be fiercely independent, but also collaborative and capable of building influential partnerships and coalitions.

With the promotion, protection and realisation of human rights being linked to the attainment of peace, security and sustainable development, the next High Commissioner needs to be strongly supported by the UN Secretary-General and key UN agencies. Mr President, while the High Commissioner may be the UN’s premier human rights defender, it is time for the entire organisation to put human rights defenders up front.