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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Liberal International (World Liberal Union), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Intensification of repression against human rights defenders and in particular democracy activists around the world

Liberal International welcomes the report submitted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders-Ms. Margaret Sekaggya, 21 December 2011, to the nineteenth session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (OHCHR). Ms. Sekaggya emphasized the extraordinary risks that these groups of defenders face which affects directly not only their physical integrity but also that of their own family members. She also noted that she was extremely concerned with the fact that State actors, including Government officials, State security forces and the judiciary, are the perpetrators of many of the violations committed against these defenders.

However, we wish to draw attention to the continued mistreatment and detention of human rights defenders who are at particular risk for promoting democracy and freedom of assembly and speech. According to the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1998, human rights defenders have basic political and civil rights like the right to form associations, to meet and assemble peacefully and to make complaints about official policies and acts relating to human rights. Most importantly states have a responsibility to ensure that all of these rights are respected and as per Article 12.2. of the Declaration “take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration.”

The freedoms of opinion and expression, assembly and association are essential for the functioning of a democratic society. Unfortunately, human rights defenders and their families often face grave dangers when trying to promote these very same values. It is therefore important to not only ensure the protection of such individuals but to also hold states that have failed to protect their own citizens accountable for their actions.

Liberal International would like to address this grave situation and appeal to the UN Human Rights Council to pay particular attention to human rights defenders trying to promote democracy and freedom of speech in the following countries:

Myanmar¹

Liberal International (LI) welcomes the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest as well as the recent steps that the government has undertaken to release a number of other political prisoners.

However, LI remains gravely concerned about the fate of the remaining prisoners of conscience who have been arrested for exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of assembly, association and speech by peacefully calling for democracy and freedom in the country. As per the September report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, Thomas Ojea Quintana, to the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly “serious human rights violations, including the continued detention of a large number of democracy activists who are denied fair trial and due process” continue to occur.

Stressing that once in prison democracy activists continue to face torture and inhumane conditions including electric shocks, rape, iron rods rubbed on their shins until the flesh rubs off, severe beatings and solitary confinement.

¹ Until 1989 referred to in the UN lexicon as Burma as it is still referred to within Liberal International.

Noting that most prisoners of conscience are still in remote jails making it more difficult for family to visit and bring essential medicine and supplemental food.

Noting the deteriorating health condition of many political prisoners who are denied essential medical care and access to proper health facilities.

Noting the widespread international condemnation of the detention of members of the National League for Democracy and the harassment and intimidation directed towards those fighting for democracy in the nation.

Noting that the detention and mistreatment of political prisoners in the country implicates breaches of Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and as such it is a crime against humanity.

Urges the international community to continue monitoring the Human Rights situation in the country and to keep pressuring the military junta to organise open, free and democratic elections that will reflect the will and aspirations of all citizens and all different ethnic communities.

Calls for the immediate unconditional release of all democracy activists as a necessary step towards national reconciliation and supports the previous recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar for the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry into the gross and systematic human rights violations that have occurred in the country.

Syria

Liberal International (LI) welcomes the decision of the Arab League to suspend all diplomatic relations with the Assad's repressive authorities and to support the Syrian opposition by providing all forms of political and material support to it.

However, LI notes with concern the continuous use of lethal force by the Syrian army against peaceful demonstrators and their arbitrary arrest in the city of Homs and in the rest of the country.

LI expresses deep regret over the fact that the Security Council was unable to reach a collective action on the situation in Syria following Russia and China's veto on the draft resolution endorsing Arab League efforts to end the crisis.

Noting that more than 5000 people have been killed since the beginning of the uprising in the country, part of the broader Arab Spring movement across the MENA region.

Stressing that the recent intensification of sectarian violence and indiscriminate shelling on populated areas in Syria constitutes a serious human rights violation.

Underlining that the situation is aggravated even further by the blockade of the areas under attack which prevents the residents, included those wounded by the attacks, from getting access to food and adequate medical treatment.

Calls for the Syrian authorities to release immediately and unconditionally all of those imprisoned for their efforts to fight and promote basic political rights within the Syrian society.

Insists for the Syrian Authorities to comply with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and put an end to the violent persecution of innocent civilians.

Condemns the actions of the Syrian government and urges the international community to put further pressure on President Assad to resign and hand over his powers to the National Transitional Council.

Supports the opposition forces in the country in their demands for a democratic, free and pluralistic society and multi-party elections.

Singapore

Liberal International deplores the on-going severe limitations to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech in Singapore, including media censorship in favour of the ruling party.

Noting the constant harassment and judicial proceedings by the Singaporean authorities of Dr. Chee Soon Juan, the Secretary-General of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party and the leading defender of political freedoms in the country.

Underlining the on-going incarceration of outspoken activists for prolonged periods of time without trial under the Internal Security Act.

Expressing concern over the lack of willingness of the Singaporean government to introduce reforms in the political system of the country that would allow freedom of speech and the possibility for all democratic forces to freely advocate their policies.

Urges the Singaporean authorities to adhere to the rule of law and to pursue a progressive role in addressing human rights issues.

Calls for the abolition of the Internal Security Act which allows the Singaporean government to arrest and preventively detain individuals without trial for up to two years at a time which is in direct violation of article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which Singapore is a signatory.

Urges the Singaporean authorities to respect basic political and civil rights such as freedom of association, expression, and assembly and to allow for free and fair elections.

Calls on the Singaporean government to lift the travel ban on Dr. Chee and to recognize his political activities at the local, regional and national level as legitimate.

Cambodia

Liberal International (LI) notes with concern the Cambodian government's continued use of the legal system to silence government critics and opposition MPs, in particular the continued legal campaign against opposition leader Sam Rainsy, and his unconstitutional expulsion from Cambodia's National Assembly.

Underlining that the proposed draft law that would require NGOs in Cambodia to register and that would allow for the government to order the closure of organizations on arbitrary grounds is a serious breach of various international human rights treaties.

Stressing that the government is increasingly using criminal defamation, incitement laws and torture to intimidate critics and extract confessions.

Urges the Cambodian government to respect the core values of democracy, including tolerance of different views in a free society and lift all charges against Sam Rainsy.

Calls on the Cambodian authorities to implement the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Cambodia and ensure that the provisions of the Penal Code are in line with international human rights standards of freedom of expression.

Egypt

Liberal International welcomes the recent release of Egyptian blogger and democracy activist Maikel Nabil, a civilian tried by a military tribunal, for openly criticizing the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

However, LI remains concerned that Maikel Nabil's alleged crime, criticism of the government, remains a punishable offence as he was pardoned rather than found innocent of his charges.

Emphasizing the constant persecution by the Egyptian authorities of many other democracy activists besides Maikel Nabil who are critical of the SCAF.

Stressing that the ongoing criminal investigations against unregistered non-governmental organisations in Egypt such as Freedom House and the Budgetary and Human Rights Observatory are a clear sign of the deteriorating situation of human rights defenders in the country.

Underlining that a year after the fall of Mubarak's oppressive government there has been no improvement in the overall human rights situation in the country with violence and killings against peaceful protesters still prevalent (as per the 2012 World Report of Human Rights Watch).

Noting that the media in Egypt continues to be censored on all issues related to the Military Council.

Calls on the Egyptian authorities and the new parliament to change the legislation so that the military can no longer prosecute civilians in tribunals for expressing their opinions and beliefs freely.

Urges the Egyptian government to free all political prisoners and those incarcerated as a result of exercising their basic right to freedom of expression and assembly.

Encourages all Egyptian political parties to sign the Amnesty International's human rights manifesto and in particular its reference to the abolition of the death penalty and protecting women's rights.

Calls on the newly formed Parliament to abolish or amend laws and bureaucratic restrictions, which are seen as an obstacle to forming new political parties, issuing newspapers and/or establishing Radio and TV broadcasting as to facilitate such endeavours.

Belarus

Liberal International expresses its deep concern about the government's tight control over the political and journalistic activity in the country including the constant legal proceedings against political opponents of the authoritarian government and civil activists.

Recalls the violent repression of political protest in the aftermath of the Presidential elections on 19 December 2010 when more than 600 people were arrested which constitutes a serious crime on the part of the Belarusian government as per the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Defenders.

Calls for a continued international pressure on the Belarusian authorities to release all political prisoners being held in the country.

Urges the government to observe the basic tenets of democracy and human rights and respect the right of every Belarusian citizen to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

Stresses on the need for the Belarusian authorities to develop a clear roadmap for democratic reform and free and fair elections.

Liberal International fully reasserts its support for democratic supporters in the country, including, but not limited to, 2007 LI Prize for Freedom laureate Aliaksandr Milinkevich.

African Union

Liberal International welcomes the entry into force of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and in particular the Article 7 which calls on State Parties “to take all necessary measures to promote and protect human rights and to fight impunity and endow them with the necessary resources.”
