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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 The Institute for Protection of Women's Rights (IPWR), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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

[6 February 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Protection of human rights defenders

Human rights defenders are universally recognized as the custodians of rights, equality, freedoms and justice. All those who work individually or collectively to promote and improve human rights are considered as human rights defenders. On this basis, human rights defenders address various human rights concerns, such as degrading treatment, torture, arbitrary detention and imprisonment, unfair trials, violence against girls and women, racial discrimination, forced expulsion, lack of access to basic necessities, and so on. Just as a serious fight against human rights abusers is one of the most important duties of States, to the same extent, the defense and support of defenders and campaigns to promote human rights values, in any society, is deemed to be necessary.

In addition, the valuable achievements of the United Nations with the adoption of the Declaration on Defenders of Human Rights in 1998, which contains rights rooted in other binding instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, well demonstrates the strong will of all States to meet their obligations to protect human rights defenders. But, despite the legal requirements and the imposition of national and international responsibilities in this document and other international human rights instruments, and despite the existing international protection and monitoring mechanisms, regrettably, there are still growing problems and challenges in raising and defending human rights values, and the human rights defenders are facing serious obstacles and strong barriers which cannot be denied and ignored.

In a number of Arab countries in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the human rights activities of human rights defenders have been met with political confrontation, and their activities have been considered as tantamount to opposition to those governments; and despite playing a key role and contributing positively to the development of their communities and countries, human rights defenders have been facing hostility and ill-treatment from their own governments. They are exposed to threats, intimidation, harassment, violence and even the risk of death. In this regard, one may mention the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi, in 2018, the opposition journalist to the Saudi government who was targeted for challenging injustices. Meanwhile, a large number of human rights activists who have criticized the government or political figures of those countries, even on social media, have been imprisoned, and other human rights defenders in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, both men and women, are at greater risks comparing with the past. We are, presently witnessing a serious deterioration in the living environment of human rights defenders, every day, which has reduced the legal and operational capabilities of human rights defenders, the facts which reveals violation of the legal and political obligations of countries to create and maintain an environment conducive to human rights defenders.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, as in many other countries, human rights activities are carried out both individually and in groups. Countless NGOs, with official authorizations, operate in the fields of women's rights, social harms, refugees and immigrants, rights of children, the rights of religious minorities, victims of terrorism, citizenship rights, and many more.

The Institute for the Protection of Women's Rights (IPWR), which works as a human rights and women's rights defender in the Islamic Republic of Iran, wished to make the following statement hoping for full realization of the rights of human rights defenders around the world:

- The IPWR strongly condemns the policy of harassment of human rights defenders in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia through arbitrary detentions, unfair trials, judicial harassment and imprisonment in order to punish their human rights activities.
- The IPWR urges the Bahraini and Saudi governments to, immediately and unconditionally, release all the arbitrarily detained human rights defenders; they should also ensure that, in all circumstances, all human rights defenders in those countries are able to carry out their legitimate professional activities without fear of retaliation and without any restrictions.
- We also call on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Member States of the UN Human Rights Council to raise their human rights cases with those governments at the highest level and to press them to protect the rights of the human rights defenders. At the

same time, the perpetrators and the violators should be seriously dealt with and the perpetrators of this type of violation must be prosecuted and punished.

- We urge the governments of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to renew their commitment to protecting human rights defenders. They must ensure that human rights defenders work together to participate in human rights debates in regional and international forums; and avoid using security threats to silence and undermine the legitimacy of the civil society.

- We call on all governments conduct independent investigations to identify all perpetrators of threats and violence against human rights defenders in order to prevent and combat impunity, and, in particular, to protect their personal lives and health; and ensure that they continue their legitimate activities without hindrance or fear of retaliation.

- Time is ripe for UN Member States to take decisive actions to prevent attacks against human rights defenders and punish the violators by bringing them to justice. Given the widespread dangers and threats facing human rights defenders in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to, further, establish a strong and independent protection mechanism in those two countries.

- It is now the responsibility of human rights organizations and other members of the international community to fulfill their obligations both to protect human rights defenders in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and to provide a secure and dynamic environment for them. This requires the long-term commitment of governments, the financial support of the international community and, most importantly, the ongoing advocacy and oversight of the human rights community to ensure that these commitments are effectively implemented.
