



CZECH REPUBLIC

Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic to the United Nations

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Agenda Item 74 b

**Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving
the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

Statement by

H. E. Mrs. Marie Chatardová

Permanent Representative

New York, December 18, 2018

Thank you Madam President,

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I would like to thank all speakers for their valuable statements.

Human rights cannot be effectively promoted without human rights defenders who deserve our respect and support. Unfortunately, the increase of reprisals and the shrinking space for civil society continue to be a significant challenge in today's world. In this context we welcome the report of the Secretary General which refers to the implementation of the Declaration. As stated in the report, a renewed commitment to the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders presents the best pathway towards the realization of the human rights and freedoms enshrined in the Declaration.

Two weeks ago, we in the Czech Republic, also commemorated 30th anniversary of the legendary breakfast of the then French President Mitterrand with 8 Czechoslovak human rights defenders including with Václav Havel and Jiří Dienstbier. This memorable meeting has proved that even a symbolic international support to those who actively defend human rights was a significant assurance of the importance of active engagement in public affairs.

Defenders work is crucial for thriving civil society and democracy. Yet, we see that human rights defenders still face harassment, persecution and attacks, including unlawful imprisonment, disappearances or even blatant killings. Human rights defenders and representatives of NGOs are often referred to as terrorists or criminals, and concrete measures are designed to suppress their activities. We are especially concerned about reprisals for their efforts to work with the United Nations and its mechanisms. In this regard, the Czech Republic fully supports the work of the UN focal point on reprisals.

We also believe that more can be done to prevent and effectively tackle allegations of reprisals at the Human Rights Council level, including through its President and the bureau. Furthermore, women human rights defenders face additional gender-specific threats including sexual violence, retaliation or harassment and suffer from physical attacks or attacks against their credibility.

We condemn all attacks on human rights defenders and journalists and express respect for all those who advocate the protection of human rights often in life-threatening conditions. All states need to recognize the importance of their work and provide a safe environment for them to operate. There cannot be a world based on the full enjoyment of human rights if their defenders are under threat. We pay tribute to all those who dedicate their effort to the protection of human rights.

I thank you.