

43rd session of the Human Rights Council

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of
human rights defenders

4 March 2020

Statement by Austria, Croatia and Slovenia

Madam President,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Austria, Slovenia and my own country, Croatia. Our countries strongly support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders and its renewal at this session.

Human Rights Defenders always risk reprisals, even in regular situations. In conflict and post-conflict settings, where they work on different fronts, they face extreme risks. We welcome the focus of the report, which highlights the specific need for protection

In order for defenders to be able to contribute to peace efforts, all sides to the conflict must respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including treaty bodies and special procedures.

In conflict and post-conflict situations, people often become human rights defenders out of necessity. States must take all necessary measures to effectively tackle impunity and acknowledge their decisive role in developing a culture based on the rule of law, freedom of expression and public deliberation.

Our countries believe that the right of defenders to communicate with international human rights mechanisms must be respected at any time and any attempts of reprisals prevented. We agree that it is of great importance for countries to ensure the participation of diverse civil society actors, including women, children and youth defenders in peacebuilding processes.

We call upon States that have not done so, to endorse the Safe School Declaration and follow through on its Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict

We took note of the recommendations for donor countries and we will study them carefully.

Mr. Forst, could you elaborate on or maybe give a good example for specific legislation or policy frameworks states can enact in order to protect human rights defenders during conflict and post-conflict settings?