



Statement by  
**Quadrilateral Group**  
**(Austria, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland)**  
at the  
**45<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council**

**Interactive Dialogue on the report of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights**

*Geneva, 30 September 2020*

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Madame President,

I have the honour to read this statement in the name of Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland and my own country, Austria.

We welcome the Secretary General's report and would like to thank both Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General Brands Kehris for their efforts to counter the instances of reprisals against those who bravely choose to co-operate with the UN.

Creating and ensuring a safe environment for human rights defenders, including for those who work with the UN is a priority for our countries. We have voiced our support for the Secretary General's "Call for Action for Human Rights" during the 43<sup>rd</sup> session and want to stress again: The UN depends, vitally, on the active engagement with civil society actors. When UN organizations get under attack and when individuals, groups and communities are afraid to be associated with them, those who have most to lose are the poorest and the most vulnerable.

We are encouraged, in this regard, to see stronger and more coordinated efforts throughout the UN to address reprisals, including at the General Assembly and the Security Council. We welcome institutionalized mechanisms within OHCHR and the larger UN human rights system – including the treaty bodies and special procedures – to address and prevent attacks against human rights defenders.

We consider that COVID-19 is both an enormous challenge and an opportunity for civil society participation in the work of the UN. While flexibly adapting our working methods to the evolving situation, we think that the Human Rights Council should maintain some of the more innovative practices developed during the pandemic: Above all the use of flexible and safe channels to bring in the voices of civil society from all corners of the world in an even more representative way.

Madame Assistant Secretary General,

How can we ensure reporting and address reprisals when cooperation with the UN increasingly takes place online, what, at the same time, allows individuals from remote regions to make their voices heard?