**UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
51st Regular Session**

**Item 5 - 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**

29 September 2022

**Statement by Austria, Croatia, Slovenia**

Thank you, Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Slovenia, Croatia and my own country, Austria.

We would like to thank Assistant Secretary General Brands Kehris for the presentation of the Secretary-General’s report. Creating and ensuring a safe environment for human rights defenders is one of the priorities for our countries.

We note with concern that the number of publicly reported allegations of reprisals against human rights defenders increased over the last year. Especially women human rights defenders are at risk of becoming victims of violence, intimidation and reprisals.

While we are encouraged to see stronger and more coordinated efforts throughout the UN to address and prevent attacks against human rights defenders, we are witnessing an increasing trend of a diminishing civic space, through legal and administrative measures by many states.

Civil society and human right defenders need a safe and enabling environment to participate freely online and offline. The digital transformation creates opportunities for increased participation in international fora but also bears serious risks related to access, privacy and confidentiality.

How can we make sure, that we strengthen the work and the digital participation of civil society and human rights defenders while limiting risks and concerns related to their safety and privacy in the process?

Thank you.