

**Joint Statement by the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect  
(Geneva)  
Interactive Dialogue on the UN Secretary General's report on reprisals**

28 September 2023

Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

We thank the Secretary General for his report and are deeply alarmed about ongoing reprisals against civil society actors.

Repression of civic space and independent voices can be one of the early warning signs for, and precursors to human rights crises and possible atrocity crimes. This includes reprisals against and harassment of those cooperating with the UN system, legislation curtailing the exercise of fundamental freedoms, arbitrary criminal prosecutions, systematic violations of due process rights, arbitrary detention, smear campaigns, and intimidation of activists' family members.

We stand in solidarity with human rights defenders. Ensuring their protection, both in online and offline environments, helps make societies more resilient to human rights violations and atrocity crimes. HRDs are vital actors in documenting, mitigating, and preventing violations and abuses, including those at risk of escalating into atrocity crimes, and are often the first to witness warning signs.

We must become better at ensuring the protection of human rights defenders and wider civic space, including through targeted follow-up action on information provided by the UN system, including the Secretary General's report. We call on all Member States to put into place protection mechanisms for victims, survivors and human rights defenders and to speak up loudly, clearly and consistently against reprisals.

We must speak up, not only for the victims, but indeed for the integrity of the UN human rights system.

Thank you.

*250 words*