



HRC55 – Interactive debate with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

BENELUX Statement

(12 March 2024)

Thank you, Mr. President,

I speak on behalf of Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and my own delegation, Luxembourg.

Madam Special Rapporteur,

We warmly welcome your timely report on child and youth human rights defenders.

Child and youth human rights defenders are mobilizing across the globe to defend a wide range of human rights. Their activism is an important catalyst for change. When child climate activists took to the streets to demand a livable planet for future generations, however, restrictive school environments and protective parents held them back. Your report details many other forms of restrictions or backlash against young defenders' activism, including cultural and patriarchal structures, on- and offline smear- and intimidation campaigns, which have a particularly devastating gendered impact on girls and young women, as well as various forms of academic retaliation. You underline the urgency of pushing back against the backlash from authoritarian states and anti-rights groups, some of which are active at this very Council.

Our three countries have a history of youth activism and child participation, as well as national human rights institutions that promote the active and meaningful participation of young people and children. We welcome your recommendations that can help us do better.

We welcome, finally, the optimism that suffuses your report: the many large and small victories won by child and youth defenders; they inspire us, but do not absolve us of our responsibility, as governments, to provide protection and opportunities for meaningful and safe participation, as you recommend.

What measures did the young defenders you worked with insist on particularly?

Thank you.

(262 words - 1m30s)