



## KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention of

H.E. Jeroen Cooreman, Deputy Permanent Representative of  
Belgium to the United Nations

**High Level Meeting on Human Rights Defenders**  
New York, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2018

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Madam President,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Madam High Commissioner,  
Excellencies, distinguished colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

This month of December has brought us all together on several occasions, to commemorate two historical birthdays: one for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights last week, and today for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Both documents symbolize fundamental steps in setting a framework for the promotion and protection of Human Rights and democracy, and we commend the men and women working every day to make the Universal Declaration a reality.

Belgium recognizes the crucial role of Human Rights Defenders: they are courageous, indispensable and often inspirational allies when it comes to promoting and defending human rights throughout the world. As the Secretary-General said earlier today, it is important to recognize these individuals' commitment to give a voice to the voiceless, and shine a light on the dark corners of the globe.

We salute these courageous individuals even more because their work is often dangerous. The space for civil society is shrinking in several countries, critical voices are too often silenced. An increasing number of Human Rights Defenders is under pressure, many of them facing attacks, threats, harassment and insecurity. The past two years, according to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human

Rights Defenders, over a one thousand Human Rights Defenders have been killed. Let us reflect on this for a moment. Over one thousand people being killed for defending the very human rights that are enshrined in one of the United Nations' most fundamental documents. The perpetrators of these crimes should be held responsible. We as governments should take our collective responsibility and defend human rights, creating a safe and enabling environment for civil society organizations and human rights defenders.

My country wishes to take this opportunity to salute the work of the UN system's focal point on reprisals and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Mr. Michel Forst.

Belgium will therefore, together with the European Union, continue to engage in efforts at all levels to improve the support for the diverse community of human rights defenders.

Thank you, Madame President.