Human Rights Council 31st session

ITEM 1 – END OF THE 31ST SESSION – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

24 March 2016

Speaker: Rumbi Masango


Thank you Mr President,

I am a **woman** human rights defender.

My work is important, and legitimate.

I am not an ‘organ of society’, I am a human rights defender.

We welcome the strong resolution on defenders, which speaks to the grave threats facing defenders of economic, social and cultural rights rights. We are encouraged by the rejection of all adverse amendments, which sought to undermine the resolution on human rights defenders, by making the draft resolution less specific, seeking to hide serious violations like the murder of women human rights defenders, and dilute the call for more protection for defenders. We deeply regret the attempts at undermining the resolution, and the fracturing by a small minority of members of a decade-old consensus for the protection of human rights defenders in an attempt to avoid accountability for their own crackdowns on civil society.

Reflecting on this session, we welcome the creation, *without a vote*, of an expert panel on accountability in the DPRK. It provides a key step towards ending decades of impunity for rights abuses in North Korea.

The three-person Commission to address the human rights situation in South Sudan is a long-overdue mechanism to address and ensure accountability for the gross human rights violations in the country, and we expect the Government of South Sudan to fully cooperate with the Commission.

Both resolutions usefully complement the Council’s existing toolbox to address critical situations, but we urge the Council to ensure that the tried and tested method of addressing situations of concern through ‘old fashioned’ Special Rapporteur is maintained.

We welcome the adoption of the resolution on Myanmar under item 4, the extension of the mandate, and the call for benchmarks. We hope that will assist the government to address systemic challenges and enable the Council to objectively assess the need for future scrutiny, *rather than deciding on content and item number based on political motives*.

We welcome the joint statement delivered by a range of States on China, which builds on the increasing attention the High Commissioner has paid to the situation, and should result in more concerted Council action *in the future*.

Our organisations regret the adoption - by vote - of the flawed resolution on ‘effects of terrorism’, and its instrumentalisation of victims for the purpose of shielding the lead States from scrutiny for their own poor human rights record.

On peaceful protest, we welcome the adoption of the resolution and look forward to the Council continued attention to this issue.
Finally, Mr President, while we thank you for your leadership, we look to you to ensure that civil society can participate fully in Council sessions, free from abusive points of order, or other forms of intimidation or reprisals, offline and online.

Thank you.