

37th Session of the Human Rights Council
Clustered Interactive Dialogue with
The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders &
The Special Rapporteur on Torture
Statement by Austria, Liechtenstein, Slovenia & Switzerland

Mr. Chair,

I have the honor to make this statement on behalf of Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland and my own country, Austria.

Let me start by thanking Special Rapporteurs Mr. Forst and Mr. Melzer for your efforts and hard work. Mr. Forst, as you and many others are pointing out, the **global climate for human rights defenders** is an **increasingly challenging** and often dangerous one, and the repressions against them are growing [be it through direct measures targeting and harassing them, or more indirect ones restricting their activities and freedoms for example through foreign funding rules]. We therefore welcome your efforts, including in the context of the **20th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders**, on **changing the narrative of human rights defenders and promoting a more positive image**, [highlighting their important contributions to a democratic and pluralistic society based on human rights].

Mr. Forst, your **report on human rights defenders and their activities related to people on the move** is very timely in light of the current negotiations on the **Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees** [“(Global Compacts”)]. In these processes, our countries have underlined that States must fully protect the human rights of all migrants and refugees and have called for all policies relating to people on the move, including the two Global Compacts, to be underpinned by a human rights based approach.

The important role played by defenders of people on the move and the legitimacy of their work cannot be overstressed. We recognize that persons defending the human rights of people on the move face a constellation of challenges and are **often particularly vulnerable** [due to the fact that many of them are people on the move themselves]. The role and contribution of human rights defenders could figure more

prominently in the discussions of the two Global Compacts and we therefore **support civil society's active participation in the negotiations.**

[In the discussions on the Global Compacts, it is often said that the narratives and mindsets need to shift and that States have to recognize migrants' and refugees' positive contribution also to their host countries. Linked to this is the observation in your report that defenders of people on the move often face criminalization and stigmatization. Against this backdrop,] we particularly welcome your recommendation that **journalists, media organizations and social media activists have an important role to play in highlighting the vulnerability of those defenders, but also realizing their agency.**

What other measures would you recommend to change the narrative about defenders of people on the move?

We furthermore welcome the decision of the General Assembly to devote a **high-level plenary meeting later this year** to the **twentieth anniversary** of the adoption of the **Declaration** [which we hope will contribute to a renewed commitment towards its implementation].

As Special Rapporteur, what are the activities and measures you intend to carry out in view of this important anniversary and how can the international community support you in this regard?