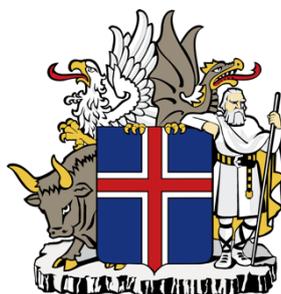


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***Statement by Mr. Thordur Sigtryggsson***

***ICELAND***

***Item 4: General Debate***



***Twenty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council***

***Geneva, 17 March 2015***

[www.iceland.is/iceland-abroad/efta](http://www.iceland.is/iceland-abroad/efta)



Mr. President

All States have a solemn responsibility to ensure stability and to combat threats such as violent extremism or terrorism. But this responsibility must never come at the expense of human rights; nor of those who defend them. The protection and respect of fundamental human rights including freedom of assembly, religion and association are indispensable for long-term peace and stability. So is an active and open civil society.

Regrettably, civil society groups, human rights defenders and the media – all essential voices for human rights - are under increasing threat in many parts of the world. And when these voices are silenced, the result is all too common.

In **Saudi Arabia**, the situation of human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents is deeply troubling. We strongly urge the Government to respect the rights to freedom of opinion and expression and to ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their vital work without risk of punishment and persecution.

In **Venezuela**, the overall human rights situation is deteriorating and we are concerned by the harsh treatment of peaceful protestors and human rights defenders. We call on the Government to protect and respect the rights of civil society and political opponents, including the right to peaceful expressions of dissent.

Concerning **Egypt**, we reiterate concerns about the recent surge in arrests of peaceful protestors and mass trial death sentences that raise questions about due process and the right to fair trial. We urge the Government of Egypt to safeguard civil rights, including the right to peaceful protest, and work closely with the OHCHR to fulfill its obligations under international human rights law. While acknowledging Egypt's efforts to combat terrorism, we emphasize that violations of human rights are never acceptable.

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The prolonged foreign occupation of the State of **Palestine** is a violation of international law, as are **Israel's** continued settlement activities. The occupation violates the most basic human rights of Palestinians. We urge the Israeli government to respect human rights and international humanitarian law, which are key elements for peace and security, and to work constructively towards ensuring lasting peace based on the two-state solution.