



International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights
Red Internacional para los Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales
Réseau international pour les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels
الشبكة العالمية للحقوق الاقتصادية والاجتماعية و الثقافية

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Chris Grove
Director

211 East 43rd Street
Suite 906
New York, New York
10017
United States
phone: +1 212.681.1236
fax: +1 212.681.1241

info@escr-net.org
www.escr-net.org

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To: Mr. Chaloka Beyani, Chair of the Coordinating Committee of Special Procedures

CC: Mr. Olivier de Frouville, Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth, Mr. Tomás Ojea Quintana, Ms. Frances Raday, and Ms. Farida Shaheed, members of the Coordinating Committee of Special Procedures

September 23, 2013

Dear Mr. Beyani,

The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) is the largest global network of organizations and activists devoted to achieving economic, social and environmental justice through human rights, consisting of over 250 organizational and individual members, in 68 countries.

We write to express our collective concern regarding a series of statements issued by members of the parliament (MPs) of the United Kingdom following a preliminary report from an official mission to that country by the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik.

We reject allegations by the MPs that Ms. Rolnik's findings were tainted by "political bias" as well as the decision to file a complaint against her (reported in *The Guardian* on 11 September, 2013). Furthermore, we deplore the personal, petty, and in some cases racist and sexist, attacks against the Special Rapporteur amplified by some popular British news outlets (reported in the *Daily Mail* on September 12 and in *The Guardian* on September 14, 2013). We also reject any suggestion that the conduct and findings of the mandate-holder in her mission to the UK has in any way undermined the reputation of the UN and its mechanisms. On the contrary, it is public statements like these, and the name-calling that has followed, that serve to undermine the Special Procedures mechanism and the critical work of its mandate-holders, who should be recognized in their capacity as human rights defenders.

The Coordinating Committee of Special Procedures is mandated, among other things, to promote the standing of the special procedures system, enhance the effectiveness and independence of mandate holders and facilitating their work and encourage States to cooperate with Special Procedures. We applaud recent measures taken by the Coordinating Committee to address other attacks against mandate-holders, including a statement issued on 2 August 2013 by the Chair of the Committee following a break-in in the private office of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression in Guatemala. That was an appropriate response to that regrettable incident.

In the present context, we believe that it is imperative that the Coordinating Committee issue a strong statement to the Government of the UK regarding recent remarks made against Ms. Rolnik following her official mission. These statements contribute to an environment that enables States to ignore the diligent work of reputable human rights

experts and publically question the legitimacy of the Special Procedures mechanism when officials disagree with their findings. Such remarks also suggest that states will be immune from consequences stemming from actions to belittle, harass and attack human rights defenders, a regrettably common challenge that many human rights advocates and experts face in their work around the world.

We also wish to call your attention to a troubling new trend, made evident following the presentation of the findings of reports by several Special Rapporteurs on various economic, social and cultural rights issues in more affluent countries, which may be related to the recent verbal assault against Ms. Rolnik. In May of 2012, following the conclusion of his official mission, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier DeSchutter, was also subjected to scathing attacks against his character by members of the Canadian government. Responses by government officials to his report, similar to the UK, also questioned Mr. DeSchutter's competency as an international human rights expert, because of his country of nationality.

We are concerned that these public statements by British and Canadian members of government reflect a position held by several representatives of higher-income countries that suggests that economic and social rights are issues of concern only for developing countries. As multiple treaty- and charter-based mechanisms of the UN human rights system have established, all human rights apply to all countries. All States should be held accountable for their compliance with international standards relating to rights to adequate housing, food, health and education. Compliance with these rights is assessed relative to available resources and other factors; therefore, mandate holders are entirely justified in expressing concern about increasing violations in affluent countries. These countries should be equally expected to cooperate in good faith, and utilizing appropriate modes of conduct, with the human rights procedures and mechanisms of the United Nations.

Finally, these statements are particularly troubling in light of the upcoming appointments of new mandate-holders, and pose a real risk of discouraging qualified candidates, who do not wish to be subject to such disparaging commentary, from agreeing to be nominated.

In the spirit of upholding the UN Declaration on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders and in defense of the mechanisms established to enable human rights experts to carry out their critical work, we collectively urge you to issue a strong, public statement to the Government of the UK condemning the personal attacks against Ms. Rolnick, as well as to consider seeking some time for discussion of this emerging problem at the Human Rights Council. This would be a valuable step in the effort to promote a civil dialogue, in good faith, consistent with the standards of international diplomacy, between member states and the UN Special Procedures in the future.

On behalf of ESCR-Net,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Grove', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Chris Grove, Director