

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

24 August 2018

Women human rights defenders call on EU foreign affairs ministers for support amid unprecedented crackdown on activists

A day before the informal ‘Gymnich’ meeting of EU foreign affairs ministers in Vienna, women human rights defenders from El Salvador, Poland, Indonesia, Kenya, Austria, Syria and Russia will meet EU representatives to demand greater protection and support for their work amid increasing attacks on fellow activists.

Speaking ahead of the 29 August [event](#), which will take place from 13:00 to 18:15, at the Haus der Europäischen Union, Wipplingerstrasse 35, 1010 Vienna, Guadalupe Marengo, Head of Global Human Rights Defenders Programme at Amnesty International, said:

“From Afghanistan to Egypt and from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Brazil, women human rights defenders often suffer horrific reprisals when fighting for justice and rights. Far too often these courageous women, who work for positive change, face threats, beatings, imprisonment and even death. It is our duty to stand in solidarity with them.”

“These brave women are here to remind us that the EU can and should take every opportunity to support women human rights defenders. This is crucial as human rights defenders across the globe are facing unprecedented levels of persecution and demonization. We are living in an age where those who dare to claim justice and rights are being targeted and attacked instead of protected and supported. Now more than ever, the EU must use its diplomatic sway to live up to its commitments.”

Organized by Amnesty International and Haus der Europäischen Union, the event, which will take place under the banner ‘Defending women, defending rights’, will focus on the specific challenges faced by women human rights defenders and on the ways in which the EU and its member states can promote a safe and enabling environment for their work.

“The EU and its member states have made strong commitments to promote human rights and to protect human rights defenders. They have proven that they can have a direct impact on individual cases when they take action in international fora and when they challenge repressive governments. Yet these commitments are all too often traded in for short-sighted political considerations,” Guadalupe Marengo said.

“The lack of public support for the Saudi women human rights defenders who have been behind bars for more than 100 days is but one case in point. The EU and its member states must honour their commitments everywhere, at all times with equal determination.”

The women human rights defenders speaking at the event will be raising issues that need to be addressed by diplomats and policy makers with representatives of the European Parliament and of the European External Action Service and with the Austrian presidency of the Council of the EU.

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact Gesine Schmidt-Schmiedbauer (Gesine.Schmidt-Schmiedbauer@amnesty.at; +43 6644001056) or Sorina Juglan (sorina.juglan@amnesty.org or +32 25482773).

Background

Human rights defenders is a term used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights. They come from all walks of life. They may be victims of abuse or they may be activists, whistle blowers, journalists, teachers, trade unionists, students etc.

In every region of the world, women human rights defenders face gender-based discrimination and threats, in addition to the attacks and reprisals other human rights defenders may face. Those who challenge traditional gender stereotypes or work on issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, or who defend the human rights of women and girls, are often targeted for gender-based attacks, including sexual violence.

The European Union (EU) and its member states have a number of key commitments and instruments that guide their actions to promote and protect human rights defenders. These include provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, country-specific strategies etc.

Amnesty International’s report [Human rights defenders under threat – A shrinking space for civil society](#) provides an overview of the dangers human rights defenders face everywhere and calls on those in power to take measures to ensure that human rights defenders are recognised, protected and empowered to do their work without fear. The report includes a chapter focusing on the specific gendered forms of abuses faced by women human rights defenders.

Amnesty International’s report [Deadly but preventable attacks: Killings And enforced disappearances of those who defend human rights](#), tells the story of over 90 human rights defenders from 40 countries across the globe who have lost their lives in the name of human rights.

On 30-31 August, EU foreign affairs ministers will convene at an informal meeting, known as Gymnich. These meetings take place on a biannual basis and are hosted by the country holding the presidency of the Council of the EU.