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**Video-statement prepared for**  
Lawyers Are Responsible  
*Climate of Injustice*  
*What next for the law's silencing of protest and dissent?*  
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- Good afternoon.
- As some of you may not be familiar with my mandate, I will start with a few words to explain how it is relevant to the topic discussed today.
- The mandate of Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders was established in October 2021, under the Aarhus Convention.
- This Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, is a legally binding international treaty.
- The United Kingdom has been a Party to the Aarhus Convention since 2005, and as such, it has binding obligations: one of these obligations is to protect environmental defenders.
- This obligation lies in article 3 (8) that says that, I quote, « *Each Party shall ensure that persons exercising their rights in conformity with the provisions of (the Aarhus) Convention shall not be penalized, persecuted or harassed in any way for their involvement.* »
- The mandate of Special Rapporteur was established to urgently deal with violations of article 3 (8). This means that, in a nutshell, my role is to provide a rapid response to cases of penalization, persecution, or harassment of environmental defenders.
- To bring a case to my attention, any member of the public can submit a formal complaint. There is a form to fill, it is available on my webpage.
- I have many tools at my disposal to deal with the complaints I receive, such as diplomatic talks, public statements, or trial observations for instance.
- The tools I use depend on the particular situation: each complaint is carefully considered on a case-by-case basis.
- However, as a general rule, the first step in dealing with a complaint is the letter of allegation that I send to the Government. After I have sent this letter, the Government has 60 days to reply to the allegations and to provide clarifications. During these 60 days, the complaint is confidential: I cannot discuss it, neither with the complainant, nor publicly. After these 60 days, both my letter of allegation and the Government's reply are made public.
- When it comes to the UK, for instance, I have received several complaints, but none is public yet. These complaints are currently being dealt with, which leads me to closely monitor the evolution of the situation. I may soon come back to the UK to meet with the Government.
- Beyond the complaints, I conduct various outreach activities. This includes visits at the invitation of civil society. In January 2024, I was in London for a couple of days to meet with environmental defenders and Government representatives.
- I had been travelling to many different countries before that. And I had received many concerning reports of the crackdown on environmental defenders in these countries.
- But I must say, I had not seen a situation as concerning as the one in the UK.
- The gravity of what I heard prompted me to immediately release an *End of Mission Statement*, at the end of this visit to London. You may have read this statement, in which I said very clearly and publicly that the increasingly severe crackdown on environmental defenders in the UK –

and especially of their right to protest – was a major matter of concern for me and posed a serious threat to the healthy functioning of democratic life in the UK.

- Since then, the situation does not seem to have improved. On the contrary, there are various developments that were brought to my attention and that I understand you have been discussing since the event started this morning, that added to my initial concerns.
- I am thinking, for instance, about the fact that several medical doctors are currently facing the risk of losing their license – and all that goes with it – for having participated in peaceful environmental protests in the UK.
- It is important for me to stress that professional sanctions can definitely be considered as a form of “penalization, persecution or harassment” and would therefore fall within the scope of my mandate.
- As I have been repeating many times: it is essential to change the narrative.
- Protests are not a threat to democracy. They are a sign of its healthy functioning.
- I could not join you today, but I look forward to receiving more information on the content of your discussions.
- Thank you.