ITEM 3 – INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE, SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR IN THE FIELD OF CULTURAL RIGHTS

SPEAKER: Gerald Hayo, WHRD

Thank you, Madam President/Mr Vice-President,

I am here with other women human rights defenders from across the world engaged daily in the struggle for human rights. Our work is hard, dangerous, silenced and ignored. But we stand firm and are certain that our transformative work is central for the human rights project to become a reality for all.

Our strength is forged in the feminist struggle against patriarchal oppression, fighting discrimination and inequality and we know that gender and cultural rights are deeply intertwined. We fight cultural and religious practices that are used to legitimize discrimination; we defend the right to education, to our cultures, spaces, languages and cosmovision; we demand to live our lives to be free from violence, fundamentalist ideologies, and with our identities and diversity fully recognised and enabled.

As recognised by the Special Rapporteur, women cultural human rights defenders ensure we can all enjoy cultural rights freely, disrupting oppressive structures and breaking down barriers for all those facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Because of this our lives are on the line. Only in January, Isabel Cabanilla, a young feminist artist and activist, was shot dead in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Others are equally facing attacks and pressure, for example:

- Indigenous and Afro-descendent women defenders fighting for the survival of their cultures in a way that is transformative and inclusive, such as the San women indigenous leaders in Namibia who are fighting land-grabbing and demanding access to education, the Mayan K’iche women leaders in Guatemala who are at risk for defending the territories and Sudan women indigenous leaders demanding language rights
- Feminist artists challenging cultural stereotypes: in Spain performers of the “Rebellious vagina” (Coño insumiso) were prosecuted for offending religious sentiment, and in Saudi Arabia, rap singer Asayel Slay was arrested for the song Mecca girl.
Women’s bodies continue to be a battleground, both in secular and in religious societies. In France, Muslim women are stigmatized for wearing the veil, while in Iran women resisting forced veiling are imprisoned;

In Kenya, women and LGBTI defenders are forced to endure homosexuality “cures”, corrective rapes, and are banned from cultural gatherings.

We demand that the Council and States ensure cultural women human rights defenders are given recognition and protection from attacks, and that they stop using narratives using hypocritical notions of “tradition”, “religion”, “family” that discriminate and stigmatize us, putting us at further risk.

We commend the Special Rapporteur for her report and ask her to continue monitoring and denouncing cases where cultural WHRDs are stigmatized and endangered, and to continue championing the role of WHRDs. We ask her to continue working with an approach that keeps taking into account the role and contributions of WHRDs in forging inclusive cultures and progressive cultural norms.

Thank you, Madam President/Mr. Vice-President.