**ORAL STATEMENT**

Brazen criminalization of WHRDs still happening 25 years on from the Declaration on human rights defenders

**Item 3: General Debate**

UN Human Rights Council
54th session
11 September – 13 October 2023

Mr. President,

I deliver this statement on behalf of all co-sponsoring organizations, in solidarity with Women Human Rights Defenders here from Myanmar, the Philippines, Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, Spain, Armenia, Ukraine, South Africa, and Kenya. Three further women defenders from Sudan, where rape is a tool of war, and Egypt could not attend as their visa applications were denied and thus very worryingly excluded from this space.

The challenges they face are sadly familiar across all regions: discrimination, inequality, violence and all manner of threats and attacks, all deepened in contexts of militarization and authoritarianism.

- Many are brazenly criminalized: they are arbitrarily detained or face spurious charges solely for defending human rights: Virginia Laparra, a Guatemalan anti-corruption prosecutor and prisoner of conscience has been arbitrarily detained for 19 months. When the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention intervened in her favour, a Guatemalan official responded, “the UN is nobody”.
- Sophia Huang, a Chinese #MeToo activist and journalist has been detained for two years, amid allegations of torture and other ill-treatment. Along with her friend Wang Jianbing, she goes on trial on Friday 22 September on unjustifiable charges of ‘inciting subversion of state power’.

We demand their immediate and unconditional release.

Women human rights defenders in Myanmar, face abuse in detention for challenging the military and demanding democracy, and have been sentenced to death; in the Philippines, they are “red-tagged” and arrested, facing trumped-up charges and are forcibly disappeared.

In Europe, they are criminalized and harassed for defending sexual and reproductive rights and for denouncing the deadly cost of Europe’s border policies; and in Egypt, they are targeted for speaking out against sexual violence and unjustly imprisoned for their human rights work.

In this 25 years anniversary of the Declaration on human rights defenders, we call on this Council to ensure that their human rights struggles prevail for the sake of us all.

Thank you.