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ORAL STATEMENT
Item 2: General Debate

UN Human Rights Council
Forty-fifth session
14 September – 6 October 2020

Madam President,

We thank the High Commissioner for her update to the Human Rights Council.

In **Belarus** millions are taking to the streets to exercise and protect their rights and freedoms. At the same time, authorities have stepped up their crackdown, including through the arbitrary arrest and forceful expulsions of key activists. We support the Human Rights Council's holding an Urgent Debate and call for a strong resolution mandating an investigation by the High Commissioner.

In **Beirut, Lebanon** people still sort through the wreckage of the blast last month that killed hundreds, injured thousands, and left hundreds of thousands displaced or homeless. Let us be crystalline: only an international investigation can set the course for justice, given the inability of any meaningful process to be established at the national level.

We welcome today's strong collective action by 29 states expressing concern about the human rights situation in **Saudi Arabia**. If the authorities are serious about reform, they would begin by releasing all those unjustly detained, including Loujain al-Halhouli and other human rights defenders detained for their peaceful expression and work.

We are concerned about increasing attacks on freedom of expression in **Algeria** as well as in **Morocco and Western Sahara**. In Algeria, we have documented the alarming use of arbitrary summons, arrests, prosecutions and heavy prison sentences to punish activists and journalists who dare to criticize the new authorities or speak up freely in support of the Hirak movement. In Morocco, we are aware of at least nine human rights activists and journalists who are currently detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression online or for covering or participating in protests. We urge the authorities to act in compliance with their international obligations, especially with respect to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Thank you Madam President.