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Geneva, 31 May 2017

Dear Mr. Neuer,

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, has asked me to respond to your letter dated 24 May 2017, which raises concerns on issues that are central to the “do no harm” principle which is at the core of human rights work.

As to your questions about our current policy and practices, we wish to be completely clear on the core issue: the UN Human Rights Office does not confirm the names of individual activists accredited to attend UN Human Rights Council sessions to any State, and has not done so since at least 2015. While our prior practices did allow for confirming names in limited circumstances, when there was no security risk, at no time did the action of this Office endanger human rights activists, including in the cases you mention.

As you know, given your own frequent attendance, UN Human Rights Council sessions are public meetings, which are widely televised and webcast in their entirety. Those attending the meeting are fully aware that their participation is likely to be public. Your allegation that the Office's earlier practices exposed activists relies on the contention that a State knowing “in advance of the session” that someone would be attending the Human Rights Council might have increased their level of risk. In the case you mention from 2013, however, the activists in question had themselves made public their plans to attend the Human Rights Council session. Indeed, they had issued a press release announcing their intentions on 27 December 2012, a full two months before the session. The same delegates have been regularly attending meetings of the Human Rights Council, which occur three times a year, since at least 2010. In addition, as we stated in our 2 February press release on this issue, all four of the NGO delegates were residents in Europe or the United States, rather than in their country of origin.

We wish to reiterate our request for you to publicly retract the assertion you made in February that the Office in some way contributed to the tragic death of Cao Shunli, the Chinese human rights activist who was detained in China prior to her travel to Geneva and subsequently died in custody.

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Mr. Hillel C. Neuer  
Executive Director  
UN Watch  
Geneva, Switzerland

As we pointed out at the time, your assertion on Twitter that we “informed China of dissident planning to testify at the HRC,” is not true. OHCHR was not involved in, or even aware of, Cao Shunli’s proposed Geneva visit, a fact that has been confirmed by the organizations involved in organizing the training session she had been planning to attend. Despite our clarification of those facts, we note that you have not made an effort to correct the record.

On one of your points, we are in fierce agreement: “No political dissidents should be subjected to harassment or intimidation for traveling to Geneva to campaign for human rights at the UN.” My Office works tirelessly to press that point, including in the case of Ti-Anna Wang, which you mention, where we engaged actively to protect Ms. Wang's rights, as did the President of the Human Rights Council.

Assistant Secretary-General Andrew Gilmour was appointed last fall by former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to act as the UN’s senior official on reprisals, and we are working to engage the States responsible for such cases in a concerted effort to end these abuses. The Office would appreciate your support and constructive engagement with the Office to that end.

Yours sincerely,



Vladlen Stefanov  
Chief, National Institutions, Regional Mechanisms and  
Civil Society Section