Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

We are deeply concerned about an apparent new UN rule that effectively bars human rights dissidents from speaking at the United Nations.

At an event that we hosted for human rights dissidents last month at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, two of our invited speakers, Mr. Dhondup Wangchen and Dr. Yang Jianli—former political prisoners in China now resident in the United States—were informed by the UN registration desk that they could not enter the premises without a passport from a UN Member State. When Dr. Yang noted that on multiple prior occasions he had been accredited without the passport of any country, but rather with other valid ID, the officer said the rules have recently been changed.

As you may know, dissidents are often forced to flee their home countries due to persecution for their human rights activism. Those governments typically deny the dissidents a passport. Once the dissidents have found a country of refuge, they will often be issued travel documents from that government—but not a passport. What this means is that the most compelling human rights witnesses in the world—dissidents who recently fled authoritarian regimes—typically have no valid passport.

The ability of these brave men and women to spotlight human rights abuses in their home countries—committed by regimes which in many cases sit on the UN Human Rights Council—is critical to the functioning of the UN human rights system. Any rule which effectively prevents dissidents from entering the UN and participating in human rights proceedings violates their right to freedom of expression—which is typically suppressed in their countries of origin—and hinders the human rights work of the UN.

We urge you to confirm that the UN will not require a country passport for accreditation to UN meetings, and will instead continue its previous policy of accepting other valid forms of identification.

Sincerely,

Hillel C. Neuer
Executive Director