

**Joint Statement – Reaffirming the Right to Freedom of Expression,
Including Creative and Artistic Expression
Human Rights Council Session 30**

As Prepared for Delivery

Joined by: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay

Thank you, Mr. President. This statement is read on behalf of a group of 53 states.

[Note: Additional states joined after the statement was read. The full list is provided above]

We wholeheartedly reaffirm the right to freedom of expression. This right is enshrined in Article 19 of the ICCPR and guaranteed to all without discrimination. Its scope includes creative and artistic expression — as the ICCPR specifically addresses expression “in the form of art.” States Parties to the ICESCR recognize the right, under Article 15, to participate in cultural life and benefit from the protection of interests resulting from one’s artistic production. Under Article 27 of the UDHR, everyone has the right “to enjoy the arts.”

We stand firm in our commitment to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression, including artistic and creative expression. In addition to being an integral part of the protected human right to freedom of expression, artistic and creative expression is critical to the human spirit, the development of vibrant cultures, and the functioning of democratic societies. Artistic expression connects us all, transcending borders and barriers.

Artistic expression can challenge us and change the way we view the world. Picasso’s painting *Guernica* and the poetry of Wilfred Owen vividly highlighted the horrors of twentieth-century warfare. Art can also highlight injustices and inspire opposition to it. Artists from different parts of the world challenged the Latin

American dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s through their poetry, music and visual arts.

We witness on a daily basis the powerful social and emotional impact of artistic expression. We are transfixed and moved by Karim Wasfi playing his cello at the site of explosions in Baghdad. Artists like him all over the world, through their work, are drawing global attention to human rights issues. They stand in the face of terror, offering a very different narrative — one of humanity, beauty, and hope.

Artistic expression is critical to culture, heritage, and identity. In Mali, through the Timbuktu Renaissance Initiative, musicians and other artists are working with the government to revive and strengthen Mali's rich arts and culture. We welcome this good practice, in response to efforts to destroy the country's artistic heritage.

Those who suppress artistic expression fear its transformative effect. We have seen artistic expressions and creations come under attack because they convey specific messages and articulate symbolic values in a powerful way. There are many reasons used, wrongly, to silence artists, to quell their music, to hide their works from the world. Reasons for censorship may include the suppression of political dissent and of different values or beliefs. Women and persons belonging to minority groups are among those affected most.

Artists in many parts of the world are facing threats, censorship, and violations of their human rights. We condemn such violations, which may include extrajudicial executions, attacks on their physical integrity and arbitrary detentions. We strongly believe that reactions to controversial

Artwork should be expressed not through violence but through dialogue and engagement that are based on the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. States must protect against and ensure accountability for violations of the right to freedom of expression.

We will continue to engage in the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression, including artistic and creative expression, wherever it is threatened.

We believe that this important topic merits the continued engagement of this Council and we look forward to doing so in a constructive manner.

Thank you Mr. President.