

Geneva, 24 August 2018

Dear High Commissioner,

Let me begin by congratulating you on your appointment. I am delighted that OHCHR will have at its helm such a powerful advocate for human rights. I realise you will have many demands on your time as you begin your mandate, but am writing to request a meeting at your earliest convenience.

OHCHR has a poor record of protecting whistle-blowers. You may have been briefed on my case. To briefly summarise, in February 2013, the Chinese delegation asked what it termed a “favour” from the Human Rights Council Branch; that it be provided with advance information on whether specific dissidents planned to attend the Human Rights Council. I and all other OHCHR staff then working on NGO liaison opposed the suggestion, pointing out that it would endanger human rights defenders and their families. The Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch nonetheless instructed us to depart from long-established policy and transmit the names. I reported his decision to senior managers including the then High Commissioner, as I believed it to constitute misconduct, breaching the fundamental “do no harm” principle and the Secretariat’s obligation to treat all Member State delegations equally.

When my internal reports failed to prevent the transmission of the names and a temporary transfer meant I could no longer take the protective measures I had personally been applying, I reported the practice externally, to the delegation of the European Union. The delegation members indicated that they would follow up on what they considered a serious breach of the rules and principles set out by Member States. Unfortunately, the Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch misled EU delegates about the practice, so it continued at least until the Irish delegation reported it to the Bureau of the Council in 2016. I believe the Bureau ordered that the practice should stop, but OHCHR has refused to confirm this. As recently as last month, I reported evidence that the Human Rights Council Branch continues to conceal requests made by the Chinese delegation from colleagues responsible for monitoring reprisals within OHCHR.

I had anticipated that senior managers would act on my reports, stop the transmission of names and establish clear policies to prevent recurrence and protect human rights defenders from reprisals for cooperation with UN human rights mechanisms. Instead, I have been subjected to unrelenting retaliation by those I have reported. Your predecessor has refused all of my requests to meet since July 2015, when I reported the practice to him, and for six months, OHCHR has simply ignored recommendations made by the UN Ethics Office in my case.

My case is not difficult to solve, and I continue to believe that the mediation recommended by the Ethics Office would be in the best interests of all. I ask merely for confirmation that OHCHR has indeed stopped transmitting names to the Chinese delegation; the issuance of a correction to the false and defamatory press release OHCHR issued about the practice and me personally; and that I be placed in the position I would have been in without the reprisals against me, including assignment to a mutually agreeable post away from the direct supervision of those whose conduct I reported. It is surely in all of our interests that I can concentrate on contributing to the important work of the Office rather than constantly having to defend myself against its attacks.

I look forward to hearing from you, and to meeting you soon.



Emma Reilly

Copy to:
Executive Office of the Secretary General
Assistant Secretary General for Human Resources