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### **Written statement\* submitted by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 August 2017]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.17-15274(E)



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## **Written statement<sup>1</sup> submitted by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

### **India: Civil Society Initiatives for UPR III**

In 2015, Working Group on Human Rights in India and UN (WGHR) organised five regional consultations and five national thematic consultations to monitor India's UPR I and II. During July-August 2016, WGHR started work on UPR III and 21 State Consultations were organised in 21 states across India. These consultations witnessed the participation of more than a thousand human rights organisations, activists and experts. These consultations formed a solid foundation for a national consultation on 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> September 2016. 98 delegates from all over India attended it, including representatives of human rights organisations, social activists, human rights lawyers, independent experts, law and social science professors and young human rights professionals working in diverse areas of women's rights, child rights, tribal and dalit rights, minority rights, rights of human rights defenders, right to food, right to health, right to land and housing, right to information activists etc. At every stage of the process, WGHR ensured that the government Ministries, National and State Human Rights institutions were invited to participate in the state and national consultation, however their response was not encouraging.

Based on the inputs of this WGHR National Consultation, different groups pooled in their expertise and jointly prepared a written draft on the area of their expertise. These drafts were then sent to the WGHR Secretariat where they were edited, finalised and then sent to all the participant organisations and individuals for endorsement. The report received an unprecedented number of endorsements from activists and human rights organisations from all over India resulting in endorsements from over a thousand Indian CSOs. The endorsed Joint Stakeholders Report for UPR III was then submitted to the OHCHR. The published report was sent to all the government Ministries, NHRIs as well as NGOs in India.

Post submission, WGHR initiated an extensive advocacy plan for the UPR III. Comprehensive summaries of various thematic issues were prepared by individual member organisations and some groups of experts based on their competencies which were then edited by the WGHR Secretariat. After the final content was approved by the members, 26 factsheets were designed and published. The topics covered in the fact sheets were as follows: right to adequate housing; land rights; right to food; right to health; right to water and sanitation; right to education; impact of trade and investment agreements; militarisation and armed conflict; torture and enforced disappearances; access to justice; death penalty; human rights defenders, freedom of association, assembly and expression; women; sexual orientation and gender identity; children; discrimination based on work and descent ( Rights of Dalits ); tribals; persons with disabilities; refugees and asylum seekers; religious minorities; nomadic, semi nomadic and de notified tribes ( NT-DNTs); the elderly; right to information; human rights education; national human rights institutions; and collaborating with UN mechanisms. The copies of the factsheets were distributed to the EU delegation in India, all the UN organisations, human rights organisations, national and state human rights institutions and the Ministry of External Affairs. They were also published online and became a valuable source of information on India's human rights issues that were available to guide embassies in their recommendations to India in the UPR process.

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<sup>1</sup> This written statement is submitted by in association with Working Group on Human Rights in India and UN associates itself with this submission. Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (WGHR) is a coalition of civil society organisations from India, closely involved with the process of the second and third Universal Periodic Review of India. WGHR is the largest representative group of NGOs working on India's UPR for the last 8 years.

Other advocacy efforts by WGHR included advocacy meetings with 28 EU state representatives on February 17, 2017 facilitated by the office of the EU Delegation in India. On March 17, 2017 an advocacy meeting was held with all the UN missions in India facilitated by the Office of the UN Resident Co-ordinator in India and yet another for a few non EU mission in India jointly hosted by the Swiss Embassy and the Canadian High Commission in India. Further advocacy meetings were requested by WGHR with the Ministry of External Affairs and the National Human Rights Institutions which unfortunately did not materialise before the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, 2017.

The advocacy in India was followed by advocacy in Geneva during the pre-UPR sessions organised by UPR-Info in April 2017. A large team from India comprising the WGHR and other civil society organizations participated in the pre-sessions in Geneva and made their presentations to diplomats and embassies of various countries, apprising them of the human rights issues of India. This was followed by one to one meetings with diplomats of various countries. The WGHR team also met with the Indian embassy and its officials. The advocacy meetings resulted in rich and fruitful discussions on the recommendations of UPR III of India.

On May 4, 2017, India's UPR III took place in UNHRC session in Geneva. WGHR ensured that the event was telecasted live in more than 50 locations across India, with about five thousand people viewing the telecast. In all these places, the local partners of WGHR in the UPR III engagements took the initiative for the telecast. The UNHRC proceedings, at some places facilitated by translators, were seen for the first time in some of the far-flung states of India, watched by the farmers of Haryana, protestors camping at Neduvasal in Tamil Nadu, seen during the curfew in Jammu & Kashmir etc. All the events were organised by local CSOs themselves and WGHR helping them with toolkits and information alone. A live telecast was also held in New Delhi that was inaugurated by Mr. Virendra Dayal, a former Member of the National Human Rights Commission which was attended by more than 200 people from civil society, representatives from various embassies, representatives from various UN organisations and a Joint Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission. WGHR's social media team ensured that India's UPR III session trended among top trends on social media and twitter, leading to extensive nation-wide coverage of the UPR III in the English, Hindi and other vernacular media in India.

The post UPR process is now being coordinated by WGHR in India. The first stage of the process involved a two-day consultation with representatives of NGOs, independent experts strategising on UPR III. The workshop resulted in furthering the collective ownership of the UPR process and campaigns are planned by CSOs all over India including meeting parliamentarians, government Ministries, state consultations in 22 states all aimed at advocating that the Government of India accept all the 250 recommendations made by over 112 countries. WGHR is also co-ordinating various tasks to ensure that we have over 500 screenings of the live telecast of India's response to the UPR III recommendations during the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the UNHRC on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2017.

We thank the Indian government for taking keen interest in the UPR and for accepting the recommendations that they did so far. We look forward to the prospect of collaborating with the government on the implementation process of the UPR III process and hope to be included as partners in the UPR process. We also hope that in the spirit of the UPR, future UPR processes will be more widely consultative and civil society's suggestions and advocacy on the UPR recommendations will be considered in the government report. We also sincerely hope that the Indian government will address all the issues, which may have been overlooked in the earlier UPRs and that it will come out with an inter-ministerial group that will collectively handle the UPR recommendations in this third cycle and also come forward voluntarily with its mid-term report to the HRC after a period of two years.

ENDS.