

Human Rights Council 25th session

ADOPTION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR) OF CHINA

19 March 2014 – check against delivery

Mr President,

Among the recommendations accepted today is one to *ensure that human rights defenders can exercise their legitimate activities, including participation in international mechanisms, without being subjected to reprisals.*¹

Describing this as 'already implemented' is manifestly untrue.

A flagrant case of 'deadly reprisal' is that of Chinese human rights defender Cao Shunli. She was arrested as she attempted to board her plane to Geneva to attend the Human Rights Council's September session. While in prison, Ms Cao was denied proper medical attention, and died last week as a result.

Cao Shunli died for her attempt to cooperate with the UPR, for her unwavering dedication to the human rights struggle in her country. She paid with her life for her conviction that the United Nations' top human rights body would offer civil society some of the space that human rights defenders are denied at home in China.

On 14 September, Chinese Public Security officials arrested Cao Shunli as she attempted to board a plane to travel to Geneva, to attend the Council's September session. Her crime: demanding full civil society participation in the UPR process.

Several human rights defenders have since been either disappeared or detained, simply for showing their support for Cao Shunli.

Ms Cao was transferred from prison to hospital in a critical condition on 20 February 2014 after being denied access to proper medical care in prison. Authorities refused repeated requests (by family and lawyers) for bail on medical grounds. Sadly, she has passed away last Friday.

Mr President,

Cao Shunli's death is a direct result of China's denial of her basic civil and political rights, together with a denial of access to adequate health care in violation of China's obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention Against Torture.

As a Council member, China must uphold the highest human rights standards and fully cooperate with it. Cao Shunli's detention, ill-treatment and ultimately her death is manifestly incompatible with these obligations.

Mr President, we will use our remaining speaking time to observe a moment of silence to remember Cao Shunli, and I invite all those present to stand with us for human rights defenders everywhere who have lost their lives in their struggle.

(...) Thank you.

¹ [in paragraph 186.62] by Switzerland.