Mr. President,
Madam Special Rapporteur,

The International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and its focus on the main elements of a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders.

The report is a stark reminder of the situations in which many human rights defenders live and work, and of their courageous dedication to human rights in spite of often challenging circumstances.

As the Special Rapporteur stresses in her report, every State has the responsibility to protect human rights defenders from violations, threats and intimidations and to ensure that defenders enjoy a safe and enabling environment. This is a responsibility that the Human Rights Council clearly shares.

The report highlights the vital role played by strong, independent and effective national human rights institutions (NHRIs) as one of the elements of a safe and conducive environment for defenders.

As the Rapporteur states NHRIs are uniquely placed to advise States about compliance with international norms and standards. They have a key role in the protection of human rights defenders. They can disseminate the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and other information about protection programmes for defenders.

At the same time, the Rapporteur notes with concern that NHRIs, their members and staff have on numerous occasions themselves been subject to threats or human rights violations, which can seriously undermine their independence, efficiency, credibility and therefore their impact on the ground.
In line with the Rapporteur, the Human Rights Council and General Assembly in their 2013 resolutions on NHRIs\(^1\) have stated unequivocally that NHRIs should not face any forms of reprisals nor acts of intimidation as a result of their mandated activities.

The ICC therefore strongly supports the Special Rapporteur’s call on States to:

1. Provide NHRIs with broad and solid mandates, and ensure that they are adequately resourced to be able to operate independently and to be credible and effective; and

2. Publicly acknowledge and support the role of NHRIs, including in providing protection to defenders and fighting impunity.

Finally, as the Rapporteur’s terms come to an end, the ICC wishes to thank Madam Sekagya for her cooperation with the ICC and NHRIs throughout her mandate. The ICC welcomes the recommendations she has continuously directed to national human rights institutions and will support its member institutions in implementing them.

Thank you

\(^1\) HRC resolution 23/17 and GA resolution A/RES/68/171.