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## **UN Human Rights Council: ARTICLE 19 and CIHRS Call on States to Protect Mandate of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression**

**The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Frank La Rue, has come under extraordinary attack while presenting his first annual report to the eleventh session of the Human Rights Committee in Geneva on 2 June 2009. ARTICLE 19 and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) condemn these attacks and express our support for the work of the Special Rapporteur.**

ARTICLE 19 and CIHRS express our deep concern about the comments of certain states during the interactive dialogue on the first annual report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr Frank La Rue, which was presented on 2 June. We are alarmed by the nature of the responses of Egypt (on behalf of the African Group), United Arab Emirates (on behalf of the Arab Group), Pakistan (on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference), and individual delegations such as Algeria, Egypt, Malaysia, Sudan and Yemen to the Rapporteur's report.

These states attacked the Special Rapporteur and his report on the grounds that the content of the report deviates from the Special Rapporteur's mandate and violates the Code of Conduct for special procedure mandate-holders. In particular, these states opposed the Special Rapporteur's conclusion that the concept of "defamation of religions does not accord with international standards on freedom of expression," as well as his reference to a joint declaration of the holders of similar mandates of other regional human rights bodies which expresses the same conclusion.

Many of these states concluded their statements on the report of the Special Rapporteur by threatening to have Mr La Rue stripped of his position as a Special Rapporteur, unless he conforms to their interpretation of his mandate. We view this attack on the Special Rapporteur by these states as an attempt to intimidate the mandate-holder from exercising his independence and his own right to freedom of expression. We also view it as part of a larger attempt to use the Code of Conduct of Special Procedures to erode the independence of all Special Procedures mandate holders at the Human Rights Council.

ARTICLE 19 and CIHRS support the opinion expressed by many delegations reminding Human Rights Council member states that, under the Code of Conduct for Special Procedures Mandate-Holders, Special Rapporteurs must be independent in

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carrying out their mandate. Such independence must include the freedom to comment upon the subject of resolutions previously adopted by UN human rights bodies which, in their view, are contrary to established principles of international human rights law.

We strongly urge Human Rights Council member states to support the work of the Special Rapporteur, Frank La Rue, and the independence of Special Procedures mechanisms more generally.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.
- CIHRS is an independent, regional NGO based in Cairo, Egypt, with offices in Paris and Geneva. CIHRS attempts to analyse and address the legal and cultural challenges to implementing universal human rights standards throughout the Arab region.