

## Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting Vienna, 21-22 November 2019

SESSION III  
22 November 2019 14:30 – 16:30

### **Role of Independent Assembly Monitoring in Facilitating the Right to freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

#### ***Intervention of the Catalan National Assembly (Civil Society Organization)***

Thank you, Mr. Moderator,

My name is Jordi Vilanova, and I speak on behalf of the Catalan National Assembly, a grass-roots organization defending the right to self-determination of the Catalan people.

The right to assemble peacefully lies at the core of functioning democratic systems, and is closely related to other cornerstones of democracy and pluralism, such as freedom of expression and freedom of association. In this regard, I would like to talk about the role Independent Assembly Monitoring has played in protecting the Right to freedom of Peaceful Assembly during the last two years in Catalonia.

The NGO *WeAreDefenders* operates a Network of Observers of Human Rights Violations comprising 117 Human Rights organizations. The Network was created in Barcelona at the end of September 2017 to monitor human rights violations occurring in the streets during the mobilizations to commemorate the October 1, 2017 referendum, be they rallies, demonstrations or popular actions of civil disobedience.

The observers have specific training in Human Rights observation and various protocols of action, and perform their monitoring tasks wearing visible identifications. Observers gathered information (data, witness testimonials and photographic evidence). Once systematized by a multidisciplinary support team, this information has led to the publication of a report on the violation of civil and political rights, as well as legal and psychological follow-ups of specific cases.

During the October 1st, 2017 independence referendum, a total of 132 people were attended by the network of Human Rights Observers, including an active telephone: 94 people who were direct victims of police aggression, and 38 people who were direct witnesses of other aggressions. That same day, the psychosocial team attended a total of 35 people: 18 people who were direct victims of police aggression and 17 people who were direct witnesses of other aggressions.

In the framework of the protests that followed the sentences against Catalan civil and political leader in October 2019, the NGO *WeAreDefenders* recorded 122 cases of police violence during the first 10 days of protests: 15 head injuries produced by blows by batons, 20 by impacts by foam-tipped plastic bullets, 8 due to rubber bullets and the rest suffering multiple bruising (at least 5 inflicted blows as punishment). Four people have lost an eye due to the indiscriminate use of rubber bullets, which have in fact been forbidden as weapons for the Catalan regional police since 2013. Some of the concerns are for police abuse that goes beyond simple control of demonstration, including the so-called “carousel technique,” consisting of police vans being driven at high speed to disperse protesters.

In the same vein, the Observatory of the Penal System and Human Rights (OSPDH) of Catalonia detected disproportionate police behaviour, showing particular cruelty by the Spanish national police: brutal detentions and brutal treatment inside police vehicles, especially in the early hours. Brutal beatings of detainees, especially men, but also women, in Barcelona.

Another monitoring organization is *Alerta Solidària* (Solidarity Alert), an NGO formed by some 50 lawyers, which has also been providing legal support for detainees. This organization is currently representing several demonstrators detained by the police, and has publicly expressed concern for them. They have noticed a significant number of petitions for pre-trial imprisonment for protestors involved in demonstrations between the 14th and the 22nd of October: 134 adults and 15 minors were detained, of whom 31 adults and 1 minor remain in custody in pre-trial imprisonment. People detained were subject to measures of coercion, physical and psychological mistreatment and unjust practices during their detention. Interrogations have been unusually long, with some starting at 11pm and ending at 6am, and all the detainees were kept in custody for around 30 hours before any notification was made to any official institution or to the Barcelona Bar Association, not having had any legal representation or anyone being aware that they were detained during that time.

The work of these and other Independent Assembly Monitoring initiatives has been essential in reporting and making information available.

Thank you Mr Moderator.