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## UN rights expert urges the UK and Sweden to give good example to the world and implement the Assange ruling

GENEVA (15 February 2016) – United Nations human rights expert Alfred de Zayas today called on the Governments of the United Kingdom and Sweden to accept and implement without delay the findings and recommendations of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention\* in the case of Julian Assange.

The UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order recalled that a just and sustainable international order requires that States respect, promote and fulfill their human rights treaty obligations and observe the recommendations of human rights treaty-bodies, working groups and rapporteurs.

“The findings of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention should be accepted and their recommendations implemented in good faith. Especially those States who claim to be at the vanguard of human rights should give good example, even if they do not agree with the conclusions of UN experts,” he said.

“The international order depends on the consistent and uniform application of international law, and is undermined when States pick and choose. The concept of human dignity is holistic. An *à la carte* approach to human rights erodes the credibility of the entire system,” the expert stressed.

The opinion of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that Mr. Assange’s detention was contrary to various provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and called upon the UK and Sweden to ensure his safety and physical integrity, to facilitate the exercise of his right to freedom of movement, and to pay him compensation.

“The international order is strengthened when all States comply not only with binding treaty obligations, but also with the recommendations of UN bodies. Not only ‘hard law’ but also ‘soft law’ commitments and human rights pledges should be given effect.” Mr. de Zayas added. “If a State is truly committed to a philosophy of human rights, it cannot limit the enjoyment of those rights by engaging in narrow pedestrian positivism or invoking technical distinctions or loopholes in an attempt to escape ethical obligations.”

“Whistleblowers are key human rights defenders in the twenty-first century, in which a culture of secrecy, behind-closed-door deals, disinformation, lack of access to information, 1984-like surveillance of individuals, intimidation and self-censorship lead to gross violations of human rights,” highlighted the Independent Expert. “Secrecy and intimidation are irreconcilable with the fundamental right under article 19 ICCPR to receive and impart information and to freedom of expression as emphasized by the former Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression.”

"It is important that countries that regularly engage in naming and shaming of other countries accept United Nations rulings when they themselves are implicated. It is a matter of intellectual honesty. Prompt implementation of the Working Group's Opinion would set an example for the rest of the world," Mr. de Zayas concluded.

**(\*)** See the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's Opinion in the case of Mr. Julian Assange (No. 54/2015): <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Detention/A.HRC.WGAD.2015.docx>

Mr. **Alfred de Zayas** (United States of America) was appointed as the first Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order by the Human Rights Council, effective May 2012. He is currently professor of international law at the Geneva School of Diplomacy. Learn more, log on to: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IntOrder/Pages/IEInternationalorderIndex.aspx>

The Independent Experts are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

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