

**28th session of the Universal Periodic Review
(6-17 November 2017)**

Review of Gabon

Statement of Ireland

7 November 2017

Thank you, Mr. Vice President

Ireland welcomes the delegation of Gabon and thanks it for its presentation of its third national report.

Ireland commends Gabon for its efforts to advance human rights domestically, and welcomes its ratification of the second optional protocol to the ICCPR on abolition of the death penalty in April 2014. We appreciate the extension of a standing invitation to the special procedures in October 2012, and encourage Gabon to respond to requests from civil society for field visits.

Ireland is concerned at reports of arrests, intimidation and harassment of journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders. In particular, we are deeply concerned at reports of excessive use of force and arrests in response to peaceful protests in the aftermath of the August 2016 general elections. We **recommend** that Gabon facilitate the development, in law and practice, of a safe and enabling environment in which both civil society and human rights defenders can operate free from fear, hindrance and insecurity.

Ireland recalls the fundamental importance of freedom of expression and an independent media. We appreciate the decriminalisation of media offences under the 2016 Communications Code. However, we remain concerned that certain provisions of the Code, in particular Articles 16 and 80, unduly restrict freedom of expression. We **recommend** that Gabon thoroughly review and amend the Communications Code to ensure that it is in line with international best practices and standards on freedom of expression.

Thank you