

UN Rights Chief Hits Russia on Murders

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GENEVA — The United Nations' human rights chief criticized Russia on Monday for failing to bring to justice the killers of journalists and rights campaigners.

UN officials said Navi Pillay's strong remarks, in which she also rapped Azerbaijan and Belarus, marked a ratcheting up of her determination to point to alleged abuses wherever they occurred.

"In Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation, little progress has been achieved to bring to justice the perpetrators of murders and attacks against [rights] defenders which occurred during the past few years," Pillay said in a speech to the 47-nation UN Human Rights Council, which includes many of the countries she named.

Civil society groups have been hit by laws and other measures restricting their action in many states, including Belarus, she said.

There was no immediate reaction from any of the countries named, but diplomats said they were likely to respond later. Several have suggested in the past that she is overstepping her mandate with strictures against them.

Pillay delivered her speech at the opening of the three-week fall session of the four-year-old body, created to replace a 60-year-old rights commission that had become bogged down in political wrangling and was widely seen as ineffective.

But the Human Rights Council itself, where a bloc of developing countries allied with Russia, China and Cuba enjoys a built-in majority, has increasingly attracted the same criticism.

That bloc has largely fended off strong criticism of countries like Iran and Sudan — and any real discussion of the rights situation in Russia, China and Cuba — while focusing much of its fire on Israel for its treatment of Palestinians.

Two reports on Israeli actions ordered by the council are due to be delivered during the current session.

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