

2008



International Service for Human Rights  
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# ANNUAL REPORT 2008

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## *INTRODUCTION*

### *An overview of the year's developments and challenges*

After the restructuring carried out in the previous year, 2008 constituted a year of consolidation of ISHR's institution and activities. The new structure indeed delivered on its promises to strengthen the ability of the organisation to address new challenges identified in the human rights protection system and to increase ISHR's integrated response across the different newly created programmes.

As the Human Rights Council (the Council) finalised its institutional structure, the human rights defenders' needs for information, strategic advice, capacity building and coordination marked a sharp increase. While ISHR was best placed to respond to such demands in terms of expertise, it also constituted a challenge with regard to resources. In particular, the newly created Universal Periodic Review (UPR) whose first sessions took place during the year, prompted a lot of interest from human rights defenders and NGOs and resulted in a clear need for specific information tools to enable them to use this mechanism in an effective way. To respond to such needs, ISHR developed a new publication, the *UPR Monitor*, which contains analytical information on both the functioning of this mechanism and the substantive aspects of the examination of countries. This publication is the last addition to the *Human Rights Monitor* series. During the year, ISHR also continued to produce the *Daily Updates*, but internal discussions during the year highlighted the enormous workload involved and reassessed their strategic value. As a result of this critical re-evaluation, it was decided to revise the format in 2009 with a view to making the reporting more focused and manageable.

At the same time, ISHR continued to systematically report on the examination of countries by the treaty monitoring bodies – a task that became even more intensive after the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women moved to Geneva. Internal strategic discussions took place during the year with a view to readjusting the approach to treaty monitoring work and the format of ISHR publications. As a result, a new format will be used from 2009. A *Simple Guide to the Treaty Bodies* was published during the year.

The New York Office (NYO) continued its work on relevant human rights aspects of the General Assembly, supporting a number of initiatives, including those that led to the landmark joint statement by a number of states on sexual orientation and gender identity in December 2008. It also worked on issues related to the NGO Committee, engaged with the Peacebuilding Commission and strategised with a number of NGOs to ensure a transparent process for the nomination of the new High Commissioner for Human Rights. The NYO undertook a number of other activities, including a parallel event featuring the new UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders.

In 2008, ISHR published its annual issue of the *Human Rights Monitor*, the organisation's flagship publication that covers all major human rights-related developments at the UN in Geneva and New York.

Similarly to previous years, ISHR's monitoring and reporting role depended heavily on the assistance of very dedicated interns. However, as their collaboration is often short-term due to ISHR's lack of specific funding to support them, the quick turnover and need for repeated induction programmes created an undesirable additional workload.

With respect to advocacy at the Council, activities in this area were mainly focused on the practical implementation of the UPR and the review of special procedures, which were particularly challenged by governments and required specific support from NGOs with specific institutional expertise on the Council. In addition, ISHR continued its active engagement with the Human Rights Council, notably by

maintaining its concrete support for the work of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, the OHCHR, and the discussion on the reform of the treaty bodies.

During 2008, ISHR continued to hold training sessions in English, French and Chinese for human rights defenders from all continents. These training sessions, conducted by ISHR qualified staff and relevant experts from outside, enjoy a lot of credibility and are highly valued by participants. Internal discussions took place during the year to explore ways to strengthen the impact and formulation of follow-up strategies to the training courses, against the background of the completion of the institution-building process of the Human Rights Council and the UPR in particular. These discussions aimed at increasing the interconnections between ISHR activities in Geneva and on the ground.

At the regional level, ISHR strengthened its substantive engagement with civil society organisations, regional human rights defenders' networks (notably in West Africa) and the regional protection mechanisms, while deepening its interaction with relevant national human rights institutions. In particular, ISHR has been very active at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and its pre-session NGO Forum, promoting discussions on and with the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders of the ACHPR, disseminating key information products and advice on international human rights standards for human rights defenders and supporting the participation of sub-regional networks of human rights activists. In 2008, ISHR also continued its engagement with human rights defenders from Asia and made substantive contributions to the work of the Asia Pacific Forum for National Human Rights Institutions (the APF), advancing the human rights defenders agenda. With respect to other regions, ISHR was also active in relation to the European Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and worked to strengthen their implementation, as well as with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to support the work of human rights defenders and regional mechanisms for their protection.

Regarding the Middle East and North Africa, ISHR has developed an initial strategy for the region and established contacts with a number of organisations in the region with a view to determine their needs. While engaging with some NGOs in the region, ISHR has at the same time tried to identify ways to fund its strategy.

At the national level, ISHR shared its expertise with local partners, for instance during trainings for members of the National Commission of Human Rights of Togo, and substantially contributed to the preparation of local NGOs to the joint missions of the Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders of the UN and ACHPR respectively. ISHR's important role, at the intersection between international and regional mechanisms, was particularly highlighted in this context. Capacity-building activities in the Great Lakes and concrete support for local NGOs to prepare for the examination of their country under the UPR mechanism were also carried out.

During 2008, ISHR also continued its work on thematic issues, and was in particular active within the International Women Human Rights Defenders Campaign, substantially contributing to cross-regional consultations on that theme.

Building on its long-standing experience of and expertise in the issue of human rights defenders, ISHR researched and finalised during the year a series of briefing papers on specific international rights and standards that are crucial for their work, such as the right to freedom of assembly and expression, the right to access information, funding and international bodies. These briefing papers, that constitute both a useful tool for human rights activists and resource material for ISHR training courses, will be launched in 2009.

In relation to the international and regional programme, and more specifically the capacity-building activities on the ground, the requests from participants for support for the implementation of the national

strategies they have developed as a result of the trainings constitute important challenges for a small NGO such as ISHR.

At the institutional level, ISHR witnessed changes at the senior management level, as in May 2008, a new Director, Ms Isabelle Scherer, succeeded to Mr Chris Sidoti who had left the organisation in December 2007. In March, the Deputy Director, Mr Musa Gassama, also resigned and was not replaced.

After several years of rapid institutional expansion, the new Director decided not only to freeze the growth that had led to a considerable increase in budget and staff, but also to take measures to consolidate ISHR's financial basis. Steps were taken to reduce expenses, which resulted among others in the non-replacement of the Deputy Director and of staff with fixed-termed contracts. These cautionary measures took on added significance after the outbreak of the global financial crises in the fall, and as a result of both the internal decisions and the changing financial environment, ISHR's budget for 2009 was substantially reduced. While the reduction in staff meant fewer human resources, in-depth strategic discussions at the internal level identified ways to minimise their impact on activities by devising new, resources-saving methodologies and approaches.

### *ISHR Strategic and Action Plan*

In 2008, ISHR was in the third year of implementation of its *Strategic and Action Plan for 2006-2009*. The Plan sets six strategic priorities for the four years:

1. Contribute to the empowerment of human rights defenders and promote the development, use and effectiveness of international, regional and national mechanisms for their protection.
2. Promote the use and effectiveness of international human rights law and mechanisms, including the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights or its successor and the Special Procedures and human rights treaties bodies, and an understanding of how these mechanisms influence the realisation of human rights.
3. Promote the use and effectiveness of regional human rights law and mechanisms and the cross-fertilisation of experiences across international and regional human rights systems.
4. Collaborate with national human rights institutions in strengthening and building their capacity, especially in effectively protecting human rights defenders, and in enhancing their use by human rights defenders and their links with international and regional human rights mechanisms.
5. Facilitate strategic collaboration among human rights non-government organisations and their participation in international and regional mechanisms.
6. Carry out advocacy and develop policy on issues that affect human rights protection systems and the work of human rights defenders where there is an identified need and our participation adds value.

To pursue these strategic priorities the Plan identifies five activity areas:

- Information
- Education and training
- Human rights defenders
- Internships
- Liaison, coordination and advocacy

Each year, ISHR formulates an annual Activity Plan that more specifically implements the *Strategic and Action Plan 2006-2009*. This Annual Report for 2008 should be read in conjunction with the *Strategic and Action Plan 2006-2009* and the *Activity Plan 2008*. It describes the specific activities of the third year of implementation of the four-year Plan by activity and administrative area. It also sets out, for each activity area, some of the lessons we have learned in implementing the Plan.

## A. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROGRAMME

### GENEVA OFFICE

#### I. Monitoring and reporting

##### *Challenges over the year*

In 2007, we noted the heavy load that increased reporting on the Human Rights Council (the Council) had placed on the team. In 2008, the demands for information, strategic advice, capacity building, coordination and support from human rights defenders and NGOs on how to engage with the international human rights system have continued to grow and have placed considerable demands on ISHR. In particular, the establishment of the universal periodic review (UPR) mechanism has created renewed and broader interest in the UN human rights system from NGOs and human rights defenders that may not have previously engaged with the system. At the same time, defenders and other stakeholders have continued to express a lot of interest and demand for analytical information on the Council and how NGOs can engage with it. We met these demands by continuously adapting and improving our working methods, and the format of the reports. However, publishing our Analytical Overviews quickly after each session continued to be a major challenge.

The inauguration of the UPR and its three annual sessions added new challenges and demands. ISHR has therefore created a new publication, the *UPR Monitor*, which reports on the examination of countries under this new mechanism and provides an analysis of the mechanism's functioning and development. ISHR has also adapted its training courses to include a significant component on how to use the UPR.

The volume of reporting related to the treaty bodies also continued to place considerable demands on us. The recruitment of an additional staff member significantly reinforced the team's capacity to meet these demands. The move of the Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women to Geneva also created considerably more work for the programme, as CEDAW examines more countries per year than other Committees. During the year we undertook an in-depth examination of the objective, format, and added-value of our publications in this area resulting in a new model that will be used from 2009.

ISHR continues to rely heavily on interns for our monitoring and reporting work to meet the demands for timely information on UN meetings. While their contribution to our work is invaluable the internship programme also presents some challenges. In particular, the lack of funding available to remunerate the interns means that they are often only able to stay for a couple of months. This resulted in significant time spent on inductions and trainings for interns. These challenges are further discussed below.

##### *Human Rights Monitor*

The *Human Rights Monitor* is ISHR's flagship publication, published in hard copy at the beginning of each year to provide an overview of the previous year's developments in the international human rights system. ISHR published the 2007 *Human Rights Monitor* in hardcopy in March 2008. The more detailed reports on each of the sessions, produced in electronic format over the year, were published on an ongoing basis on our website.

The Monitor provided an overview of all the developments of the core UN human rights mechanisms in 2007 including the conclusion of the institution-building process of the new Human Rights Council, the treaty-monitoring bodies, the General Assembly, and the Security Council. It also analysed major developments in international human rights law, including the adoption of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and the publication of the *Yogyakarta Principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity*. The Monitor further consolidated the move away from narrative reporting and toward critical analysis of key developments.

The printed edition and the CD-Rom were distributed by post in May 2008, but also during sessions of the Council, and at our training courses and other activities at the international, regional and national levels. The figures below give a better idea of who and where the recipients of the Monitor were last year:

2,016 subscribers received the HRM by post, of which:

- 1,515 (75%) are destined to Africa, Asia, South America and other countries of the Global South
- 501 (25%) are destined to Europe, North America, Australia and other countries of the Global North

The nature of organisations is the following:

- NGOs, activists, human rights defenders: 65%
- Ministries, government agencies: 21%
- Universities, libraries, legal and study centres: 8%
- UN: 3%
- NHRIs: 2%
- Other: 1%

The *2007 Human Rights Monitor* was **translated into French** at the end of May 2008. The chapters in French were proofread internally and published gradually on the website between July and August 2008. In the context of a training course run by one of our partners, selected chapters of the *Human Rights Monitor* were also translated into Arabic.

ISHR is committed to making its key publications available in languages other than English. While we were able to find funding for the translation of the *Human Rights Monitor* into French, securing funding for translation continues to present a key challenge. We have identified producing the *2008 Human Rights Monitor* in French as a key objective for 2009.

### *Human Rights Monitor series*

In addition to the annual print edition of the *Human Rights Monitor*, ISHR also produced a large number of reports on each of the meetings of the key international human rights bodies that are published on our website and distributed to subscribers by email.

In 2006, ISHR created the Human Rights Monitor series. Under this banner we produced the *Council Monitor*, which reports on all discussions and developments related to the Human Rights Council, the *Treaty Body Monitor*, containing reports on each State examined by the seven treaty bodies, and the *New York Monitor*, which reports on human rights-related developments in the General Assembly, the Security Council and other New York-based bodies. In 2008, in addition to constantly refining our existing publications, we added a new publication, the *UPR Monitor*, covering the newly established universal periodic review (UPR) mechanism.

Under the *Council Monitor* series, we continued to provide ***Council Alerts*** before each session of the Council to the mailing list and on the website, highlighting the issues to be discussed at the forthcoming session.

ISHR also continued to publish ***Daily Updates*** at each meeting of the Council. This amounted to 35 reports during the year, covering the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> sessions of the Council in March, June and September 2008. Although we continued to receive extremely positive feedback on the substance of these reports, a shortage of staff and the change in our working processes made us change the frequency of these reports, which are now more appropriately called the ***Council Updates***. The voluntary e-mail distribution list for the *Council Monitor* reports continued to grow steadily during the year and had reached 1,200 subscribers by year-end.

After each session of the Human Rights Council, we produced comprehensive ***Analytical Overviews***. We also reported on the three special sessions of the Council held in 2008, namely those on the occupied Palestinian territories (January), the world food crisis (May) and the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (November).

Under the *UPR Monitor*, we reported on all of the 48 countries examined during the year. We also produced two ***Analytical Overviews*** of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> sessions.

As part of the ***Treaty Body Monitor***, ISHR's Geneva Office monitored and reported on the sessions of the Committee against Torture, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on Migrant Workers. The New York Office took charge of the monitoring and reporting related to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. We produced nearly 70 reports on country examinations and several other reports on the discussions of working methods within the treaty bodies.

ISHR also monitored and reported on the work of the annual meeting of the special procedures in June 2008, and the Inter-Committee Meeting and the meeting of chairpersons of the treaty bodies, in June and December 2008. It also monitored the Working Group on an optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions in March 2008.

### *Other information resources*

In addition to the above-mentioned reports, ISHR also produced in 2008:

***Reports in Short*** - summaries of all the substantive reports, especially the reports of the special procedures, to be considered by the Human Rights Council. This is an electronic publication that was published on ISHR's website for the 7<sup>th</sup> session of the Council in March. We have discontinued this publication due to the significantly increased quality of summaries provided by official UN reports of the special procedures' reports.

***Info-Pack*** - this publication provides up-to-date contact details and other practical information on the UN and regional human rights mechanisms. The *Info-Pack* also provides practical information on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), including its field presences, and details of national human rights institutions and human rights NGOs worldwide. It was updated on a bi-annual basis, published on ISHR's website, and distributed in a hard copy form to training course participants. The *Info-Pack* is produced in English and French.

In 2008, we published our *Simple Guide to the Treaty Bodies* with basic and practical information on what they are and how NGOs and human rights defenders can use them. We had also intended to produce a Simple Guide to the special procedures in 2008. However, due to lack of human resources, we decided to postpone this activity to a later date.

### *Lessons learned*

The increase in ISHR's reporting on the developments in the international human rights system in 2008 required considerable strategic planning to make the best use of limited human resources. ISHR also carried out several evaluations and needs assessments to better determine and adapt the type of products needed by present and potential users regarding information on the UN human rights system. These evaluations have confirmed that ISHR's reports meet the needs of its target audience. They have also identified a very clear need among defenders for a strategic guide to the UN human rights system, its mechanisms and procedures, and for timely and practical information about upcoming events and how NGOs and human rights defenders can get involved. ISHR's audience also continues to request information by theme or country. Our audience also regularly requests translations into languages other than English, particularly French.

At the same time, ISHR has conducted a series of in-depth internal discussions, focusing on ways to make its publications more useful to its audience and to streamline the production of information. During 2008 ISHR improved its publications, including by strengthening their analytical content and quality and making them more concise while maintaining essential information. While many changes have been implemented, the process of refining our publications is an ongoing one and is set to continue throughout 2009.

## **II. Training and capacity building in Geneva**

### *Challenges over the year*

In 2008, we continued to organise training courses in English, French and Chinese which we staggered over the year due to the experiences and lessons learned in 2007.

The main challenge concerning the training courses was to adapt to the serious reduction in staff dedicated to our training courses as a result of the organisational restructure of 2007. While engaging more ISHR staff in our training sessions was certainly enriching in substantive terms, it was also challenging in terms of coordinating a larger number of involved staff members. At the same time, the timing of trainings remains a challenge. While we wish to conduct trainings alongside relevant meetings, we also need to ensure that staff members have adequate time before and after each training to prepare, evaluate and follow-up. With many other activities also taking place during meetings of relevant human rights bodies, staff within the programme often face many competing demands.

ISHR continued to face challenges in relation to securing funding on time for its training courses in Geneva. This meant that we were only able to guarantee scholarships for participants quite late in the process and as a consequence some visas were denied and the cost of airfares increased substantially. However, the funding level for the training courses increased significantly in 2008.

ISHR also faced challenges in ensuring effective follow-up to the training courses, in particular in relation to the Chinese course due to the language gap between participants and ISHR staff, and due to the co-organised nature of the course. We will develop a comprehensive follow-up strategy for our training and

capacity-building activities in 2009. The aim will be to better connect our activities in and outside Geneva and to maximise the impact of our work.

While wishing to respond as best possible to needs and demands for more ad-hoc tailored training courses, we faced challenges in meeting such demands. The absence of predictability and planning and lack of human resources were the main obstacles.

### Training courses

The annual **Advanced Geneva Training Course in English** took place from 6 to 28 March 2008 in parallel to the 7<sup>th</sup> session of the Council. The course aimed to build the capacity of both organisations and individuals and was attended by 30 participants from 25 countries. ISHR sought candidates who represent organisations committed to apply the information and skills acquired during the course in their home country. One of our main follow-up activities throughout the year is the monitoring of the implementation of the action projects designed by the participants during the training. Many of them include the organisation of a ‘cascade training’ to empower and build the capacity of other members of their network or national coalition.

The annual **Advanced Geneva Training Course in French** was held from 8 to 26 September, in parallel with the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Council. It had 20 participants from 12 different countries, primarily francophone Africa. Among other things, the course allowed participants to put the newly acquired skills and knowledge into practice, for instance by submitting a letter to the President of the Council, and by developing individual action projects as follow-up activities to the training in Geneva.

Finally, in November we organised our annual **Treaty Body Training Course** for 18 human rights defenders from all regions. The course focused specifically on opportunities provided by the UN treaty bodies and the newly created UPR mechanism. It served also as a useful opportunity to further develop the use of ‘action projects’ to allow participants to apply the lessons learned.

Although not directly related to our activities in 2008, it is noteworthy that as a result of the Treaty Body Training Course in 2007, a participant from Burundi was involved in the preparation of an NGO submission for the UPR of Burundi. With the facilitation of ISHR, she also attended the UPR session and together with her colleagues met several diplomats to raise issues of concern. Another participant to the same course was recently elected as a member of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Both these success stories have confirmed the real impact of our training courses.

In September, in collaboration with the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CRD), the **Geneva Training Course for Chinese** human rights defenders was organised for the second time in parallel to the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Council. This training course aimed at enhancing the capacity of 16 defenders from China to engage with the UN human rights system. One of the main challenges in organising this course was the small number of Chinese-speaking human rights experts on the international system in Geneva. However, the course was successfully conducted with simultaneous interpretation of most of the presentations.

### *Lessons learned*

During the year we carried out extensive evaluations of the training courses in Geneva and continued to adapt the courses to the needs of participants. Many participants have expressed concern about the length

of the Advanced Geneva Training Course (three weeks). As a result, ISHR will organise two-week courses in 2009, while continuing to focus their content on practical training relevant to participants.

The training programmes have continued to improve through the use of participatory approaches and adult learning principles and techniques, in considerable part through the work and support of ISHR's training specialist. The participants have identified a need to build more on the practical dimension of ISHR courses. These practical parts are the key characteristics of our training courses and involve allocating time and assistance to participants with regard to networking, lobbying and advocacy. However, it continues to be a challenge to balance the density of the programme with the participants' needs, while maintaining the quality and content of the training courses.

ISHR has also identified the need to strengthen the follow-up to its training courses in Geneva. While significant improvements have been made in relation to coordination with ISHR's Regional Programme, primarily in bringing partners to our trainings and planning follow-up at the national and regional level, there is a need to develop a more comprehensive follow-up strategy.

### **III. Liaison, coordination and advocacy**

#### *Challenges over the year*

Changes in ISHR's senior management in the first half of the year, coupled with a significant amount of time spent reviewing many of our activities and working methods in the second half led to a reduction in our advocacy work.

However, and despite the formal end of the Council's institution-building work in 2007, some important institutional issues were debated both inside and outside of the Council, and ISHR continued to play an active role in these discussions, particularly by facilitating collaboration and some joint actions among a group of interested NGOs working in Geneva.

The start of the UPR and the review of special procedures mandates continued to be the main focus of our advocacy. Both areas had been disputed during the institution-building text. In this context, it was not surprising that it was those areas where the institutional arrangements were most critically challenged and thus required most attention by human rights advocates.

Despite the lower level of advocacy, the Council still absorbed most of the human resources of the team. There was therefore limited time and opportunities to focus on other priorities, such as human rights and sexual orientation and gender identity, and the reform of the treaty bodies. Nevertheless, ISHR supported a number of NGO statements on human rights and sexual orientation and gender identity and raised concerns about these issues in relevant meetings with OHCHR and governments.

In 2008, we had also set out to develop a comprehensive advocacy strategy for the entire organisation. While we developed a strategy for our work in Geneva, a comprehensive strategy was not drafted. Not having such a strategy has proved to be an obstacle to more strategic and effective advocacy efforts, and therefore the development of such a strategy is now an institutional priority for 2009.

#### *Participation in the Human Rights Council and related meetings*

ISHR continued to be very actively engaged in the meetings of the Council. We also engaged actively in the review of individual special procedures mandates, in particular on the review of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders. In this context, we developed an advocacy tool (in English

and French) for defenders wanting to engage in and influence the discussions. We also organised a parallel event in consultation with a large group of NGOs and human rights defenders on the achievements of the mandate and its future key challenges. In the last phase of the negotiations we provided comments on the resolution renewing the mandate to key States.

During the March session of the Council, we made a joint statement during the panel discussion on intercultural dialogue on human rights, and a statement on the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders. At the June session, we joined two statements, one on the role and contribution of NGOs in the UPR process and one on the annual report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Finally, during the September session, ISHR joined a statement addressing the incoming High Commissioner in her dialogue with the Council. We also spoke on the first session of the Advisory Committee, and the use of regular Council sessions to follow-up on the recommendations emanating from the UPR mechanism.

In addition, we were closely involved in discussions related to the Council through meetings with key diplomats from missions in Geneva, the President of the Council, and the Council secretariat in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Furthermore, ISHR organised a number of strategic discussions in relation to the Council and its mechanisms and procedures with key NGO partners both from Geneva and outside.

ISHR also continued to facilitate access and provide support and advice to experienced human rights defenders in attending the Council sessions.

The focus of the advocacy was on issues related to the institutional functioning of the Council and its mechanisms. However, these human rights defenders also engaged in advocacy on their own thematic and country-specific priorities, including statements and parallel events.

ISHR was also an active participant in HRC-Net, a network of human rights NGOs interested in improving the record of the Council in protecting and promoting human rights. We attended the HRC-Net conference at Greentree, New York, in September, which aimed at further developing an action plan for the network.

### *Advocacy and policy development*

The main focus of ISHR's advocacy during 2008 was on the Council and its functioning, as described above. There was therefore little time and limited opportunities for advocacy on our other priorities. However, ISHR continued to support and engage in advocacy on human rights and sexual orientation and gender identity.

In relation to the reform of treaty bodies, we participated actively in the Inter-Committee Meeting of treaty bodies together with a coalition of NGOs. This was the result of an NGO consultation held in 2008 on how to enhance and harmonise NGO participation in the work of the treaty bodies. Therefore, the main focus of our advocacy around the treaty bodies was on the harmonisation of working methods of the different treaty bodies, as well as on opportunities for NGO engagement in general. Together with the coalition, we made joint and individual submissions to the Inter-Committee Meeting in June and December. Despite this renewed engagement, there was still limited focus on the reform of the treaty bodies over the year, and we expect that this advocacy priority will receive more focus in 2009 as the discussions on this topic gains momentum.

## *Lessons learned*

The main lesson learned in 2008 relating to our advocacy work is that we need to develop clearer strategies and policies before engaging in advocacy. This was already the main conclusion drawn from our work in 2007 which was further confirmed in 2008. In 2009, we will therefore develop a comprehensive advocacy strategy, which will bring together our priorities for advocacy not only in Geneva, but also in New York and at important forums such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

## **NEW YORK OFFICE**

### *Highlights*

The lack of transparency and genuine consultation with the NGO community by the Secretary General (S-G) office during the search and recruitment for the new High Commissioner for Human Rights was a major challenge confronting us earlier this year. In response, we worked with other NGOs and media advocacy organisations to advocate for an improved selection process, including by coordinating and participating in joint NGO meetings with the Office of the S-G.

One of the key achievements this year by the General Assembly was the adoption of the optional protocol to ICESCR and the presentation of the first joint statement by governments on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). The adoption of Programme 19 (OHCHR's proposed strategic framework for 2010-2011) without regressive amendments was also a welcome development. During the latter part of 2008, the NYO worked closely with partner international human rights organisations, providing advice and information, and/or assisting with coordination and advocacy on these topics.

## **IV. Information**

The NYO contributed analytical reports for ISHR's flagship publications, the *Human Rights Monitor*, on the developments and outcomes related to human rights at the General Assembly and the Security Council. The NYO also provided more in-depth information on specific issues addressed by these bodies, and timely updates on key human rights developments in other bodies, including the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, via the *New York Monitor*.

For the *Treaty Body Monitor*, the NYO monitored and reported on the summer session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the March session of the Human Rights Committee. In addition to our regular country-focused reporting, we reported of the Committees' working methods, a key area of interest to ISHR and its constituents given the linkages to general treaty body reform issues in general, and also because of an increasing focus by experts on reviewing and articulating the roles of the treaty body in light of the Council's new UPR process. All content was published by the NYO on ISHR's website.

Although it did not produce a report on the 2008 session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the NYO engaged with a number of NGOs during the meeting, including partner NGOs following the gender equality architecture reform process, and the Women Human Rights Defenders Network.

During the last year, 19 interns assisted the NYO in its information work.

## *Challenges over the year*

One of the challenges in preparing for the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the GA was to refine our relevant information products. As a result of internal discussions, we developed a streamlined and more analytical reporting format and structure for these products, which include alerts, news updates, and longer analytical reports on key issues.

## **V. Liaison and advocacy**

The NYO maintained an active presence as part of the international NGO community in developing strategic initiatives and responses to strengthen the human rights protection system, including participation in and contribution to various initiatives through dialogue and advocacy. We also continued to offer strategic advice to activists on navigating the UN system. In particular, the NYO:

- Developed a discussion paper on advocacy and monitoring opportunities in the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs (March/April)
- Developed a NGO 'model pledge' for States seeking election to the upcoming Council elections to take place in New York in May 2008 (April/May)
- Presented a paper on the relationship between the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee of the GA at an expert seminar (May)
- As part of an NGO coalition, advocated for an improved selection process for the new High Commissioner for Human Rights and participated in a series of related meetings with the Office of the S-G (Jan-Dec)
- Coordinated a joint letter from international human rights NGOs to the Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee to encourage the Committee to adopt a General Recommendation on Article 2 of the Convention that would explicitly recognise sexual orientation and gender identity as forms of unlawful discrimination (July)
- Participated in a strategy discussions with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) groups on strengthening their engagement with the international human rights system; and provided strategic advice about General Assembly practice and procedure on the landmark joint government statement on sexual orientation and gender identity at the General Assembly (Aug-Dec)
- Lobbied target States to participate in informal negotiations regarding Programme 19 in partnership with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, in an effort to promote and bolster the independence of OHCHR (Sept-Dec)
- Organised, with Human Rights First and the Mission of Norway, a parallel event to the General Assembly featuring the new Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Ms Margaret Sekaggya
- Participated in meetings with Ambassadors of States on the Security Council through the NGO Working Group on the Council (Jan-Dec)
- Contributed to a range of NGO strategic and information-sharing discussions on issues such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), adoption of the optional protocol to ICESCR, and the NGO response to the Global Food Crisis
- Participated in developments in the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), primarily through a PBC-focused NGO group; and interviewed missions and NGOs to prepare an internal evaluation paper on the PBC (Jan-Dec)

### *Key challenges and successes*

One of the overall challenges for the ISHR is to strengthen the impact of the organisation's advocacy work, including in relation to the protection mechanisms for human rights defenders. In 2009, the NYO will contribute to developing a comprehensive and integrated advocacy strategy for ISHR's activities at the regional and international levels, both in Geneva and New York.

**Programme 19:** At the beginning of the General Assembly, several States and NGOs had major concerns that regressive amendments to Programme 19 that were proposed by several States would be adopted. ISHR and other NGOs undertook advocacy designed to neutralise these amendments through meetings with a number of UN missions from Latin America, Africa, and the EU. Ultimately these amendments were all defeated and the strategic framework adopted by the General Assembly was supported by OHCHR (Sept-Dec).

**Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI):** ISHR supported LGBT organisations to bring out the smooth adoption of a landmark General Assembly statement by governments on SOGI (July – Dec). This was a time-consuming undertaking, but very appreciated by the organisations, and helped reaffirm existing cooperative relations with them.

Regarding **economic, social and cultural rights**, the NYO shared information about key developments during the General Assembly session (Sept-Dec), in particular on the right to food (General Assembly resolution and interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur) and the optional protocol to ICESCR. This information was provided as the session progressed.

**Peacebuilding Commission:** One result of ISHR's internal discussion on the PBC was to produce an annual report on the PBC and human rights. This process had to be postponed to 2010 for budget reasons and staff reductions in 2009 due to maternity leave of staff, and will be subject to funding availability.

## B. REGIONAL AND NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROGRAMME

### VI. Africa

#### *Activities at the regional level*

Since 2002 ISHR has increased its activities in Africa to respond to the challenges faced by human rights defenders in that continent. This engagement has been further developed in recent years, with a focus on strengthening civil society and the capacities of regional networks as well as enhancing protection mechanisms and engaging national human rights institutions in the protection of human rights defenders.

To promote work on defenders' issues, ISHR has participated for many years in the biannual sessions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and in the NGO Forum that precedes it. The Forum is a space where African defenders network and share information and experiences. Our work at this level aims to strengthen networks and promote the discussion of specific issues affecting defenders.

#### *Participation in the sessions of the African Commission*

In May and November 2008, ISHR participated in the **43rd and 44th sessions of the African Commission** and the NGO Forum prior to each of the two sessions. ISHR supported the participation of representatives of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRDN), the West African Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN), the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network and other defenders.

During the NGO Forum preceding each of the two sessions, ISHR participated in thematic discussions, facilitated debates on the protection of defenders and organised workshops with the Special Rapporteur of the African Commission on human rights defenders. ISHR also participated in the drafting of specific recommendations concerning the protection of defenders working on issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity, the protection of defenders during election periods, as well as freedom of expression and the protection of journalists reporting on human rights issues.

Additionally, ISHR also organised a number of parallel events and meetings during the sessions, including an event organised in collaboration with FIDH to give an opportunity to the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights defenders to discuss with NGOs and human rights defenders some of the pressing issues affecting defenders in the region. ISHR also organised a parallel event on the right to freedom of association and a workshop to reflect on achievements and challenges regarding the implementation of the United Nations *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders* ten years after its adoption.

#### *Support to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders*

Throughout the year, ISHR supported the work of the **Special Rapporteur of the African Commission on human rights defenders** in a number of ways. ISHR supported the production of the bi-annual *Rapporteur's Newsletter*, a bulletin on the mandate on human rights defenders. The bulletin aims to improve the mandate's outreach, give more visibility to human rights defenders' issues, and make the mandate more accessible to defenders on the continent. ISHR provided technical assistance to the African

Commission on the design, development and production of the bulletin. ISHR also submitted papers on the international legal framework governing the right to freedom of association and on the opportunities and challenges for human rights defenders to engage with the Peacebuilding Commission.

We also supported the participation of the Special Rapporteur in a consultation with human rights defenders in the Mano River Union region, as well as in the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. The visit of the Rapporteur to Geneva provided her with an opportunity to meet her counterpart at the UN level, the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, and other relevant UN mandate holders, and to strengthen collaboration with them.

#### *Activities at the sub-regional level*

From 18 to 24 August, ISHR in collaboration with the West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN) organised a **training for the national focal points of the WAHRDN** in Lome, Togo. The objective of this training was to assist the network and its focal points to plan their work on the protection of defenders in West Africa more strategically and to effectively use regional and international mechanisms for the protection of defenders. The workshop concluded with the adoption of national and regional action plans, which integrated the use of national, regional and international mechanisms into the national strategies. The training brought together 25 defenders from Togo, in addition to international NGOs who attended the workshop as speakers or observers such as Amnesty International, the Democracy Coalition Project and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defender Project.

#### *Activities at the national level*

Within the framework of its follow-up work in Togo, ISHR organised several activities in the country in 2008. From 15 to 17 July, ISHR, in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Togo, organised **training for members of the National Commission of Human Rights of Togo (CNDHT)** and its staff. The objectives of this training were to enhance the CNDHT's capacity to access and effectively use the international and regional human rights systems, to familiarise it with the use of international and regional mechanisms for the protection of defenders, and to enable it to effectively contribute to the joint country visit of the UN and ACHPR's Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders. The training was conducted with the assistance of OHCHR's country office in Togo and the staff of the CNDHT. Participants included commissioners, CNDHT staff, four NGOS, parliamentary representatives and a representative from the Ministry of Human Rights.

The main outcomes of this training were the identification of the training needs of the CNDHT, discussion on the draft mandate of the focal point on human rights defenders within the CNDHT, and the active involvement of the CNDHT during the joint country visit of the Special Rapporteurs to Togo. In their recommendations to ISHR, commissioners requested assistance for training and capacity building. There was particular interest in strengthening the focal point on human rights defenders, through capacity building and technical support.

This training was followed by a **workshop to help NGOs prepare for the visit of the UN and ACHPR Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders**, scheduled from 31 July to 4 August. This meeting was organised in collaboration with the Togolese Coalition of Human Rights Defenders from 18 to 19 July in order to assist NGOs in preparing for the visit. The outcome of this meeting was the adoption of an action plan to be implemented before, during, and after the visit of the rapporteurs. This action plan included issuing a report on the situation of defenders in Togo before the visit and the organisation of meetings between the rapporteurs and defenders in Lomé and other parts of the country, including by bringing human rights defenders from the provinces to meet with them. ISHR provided resources for the

implementation of the action plan, which was carried out by the Togolese Coalition. The visit was well-organised and civil society participated actively in the visit, as stated by the special rapporteurs in their final press release.

In line with its follow-up activities in the Great Lakes region, ISHR supported its partners in Burundi to participate and contribute to the examination of their country's human rights record at the Human Rights Council under the new UPR mechanism. This support consisted in information provided to NGOs about the UPR mechanism and NGO participation, bringing one person to Geneva to lobby states to take up human rights issues during the review and facilitating contact with diplomatic missions and NGO partners in Geneva. Several of the issues raised by our partners in their lobbying were taken up by States during the review.

In July, the Justice, Peace and Democracy Association (AJPD) invited ISHR to participate in a human rights defenders dialogue in Angola.

## VII. Asia Pacific

### *Activities at the regional level*

ISHR's activities in the Asia Pacific region are directed towards promoting practical knowledge about international and national mechanisms for the protection of defenders, exploring the role of national human rights institutions as protection mechanisms for defenders, and promoting collaboration between national institutions and other human rights defenders. As no regional human rights system exists in the Asia Pacific, the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) provides the most appropriate structure, bringing together all the national institutions in the region in order to discuss human rights issues from a regional perspective and with a regional approach. Our activities in Asia were therefore centered on and around this forum.

In 2008, ISHR continued to support NGO participation and input in the **13<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the APF**, by organising and facilitating the annual NGO Forum. The NGO Forum has allowed discussion of many different issues such as the situation of defenders and women defenders in the region and developments within the UN system, in particular the UPR. The forum has always provided the opportunity for strategic planning and coordination among NGOs regarding their contributions to the annual meetings of the APF and has prompted discussions on the effective use of international mechanisms by locally based human rights defenders. This year, ISHR concluded that the practices for NGO engagement at the APF have evolved to a great extent and that the current space for NGOs is very satisfactory. Our strategy can now shift to maintaining the current space for NGOs to interact and engage with the APF, and to focus on improving NGO coordination and collaboration to optimise their role within the APF.

Additionally, in 2006 and 2007, ISHR coordinated with a number of NGOs from the Asia Pacific to make a **submission to the Advisory Council of Jurists (ACJ)** of the APF.<sup>1</sup> The submission called for the ACJ to consider the topic of human rights defenders in its annual reference (an opinion issued by this body on issues related to human rights and national institutions). While the APF did not take up this proposal in full, it included a focus on human rights defenders in its 2007 reference relating to corporate social responsibility. In 2008, ISHR and its partner organisations prepared a detailed submission to the ACJ on the impact of the activities of corporations on defenders. Many of our recommendations were reflected in the preliminary conclusions of the ACJ and will also be reflected in their final submission to the APF.

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<sup>1</sup> The Advisory Council of Jurists, which advises the APF on the interpretation and application of international human rights law, has considered a number of human rights issues and presents practical recommendations to APF members on how to better protect and promote human rights in their own countries.

Additionally, following ISHR's participation in the 2008 annual meeting, the APF Forum Councillors agreed to consider 'integrating the issue of human rights defenders into reference topics made to the Advisory Council of Jurists'. This represents a key positive development as it indicates that the issue of human rights defenders is likely to become a standard item for consideration by the APF. Lastly, ISHR's meeting with the ACJ at the 2008 session has also set a precedent for NGOs to use this new space to raise specific issues directly with the ACJ.

### *Activities at the sub-regional level*

In 2006, the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions contracted ISHR to develop two training manuals on national human rights institutions and the international human rights system, and on national human rights institutions and human rights defenders respectively. In 2008, the APF requested ISHR to conduct a revision of the manual on national human rights institutions to take into account the developments that have since occurred in the UN system, and to conduct a second **training on national human rights institutions and human rights defenders for national human rights institutions in West Asia**. The training was hosted by the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar and included representatives from the national commissions of Afghanistan, Jordan, Egypt, Iran, as well as representatives of the government of Bahrain, Iraq and Qatar and representatives of civil society organisations of Qatar. This training took place in Doha, Qatar from 22 to 26 June 2008.

## **VIII. Europe**

ISHR's work in Europe focused on strengthening the work of the Council of Europe (CoE) on human rights defenders and, at the European Union level, on contributing to the implementation of the EU Guidelines on human rights defenders, including by involving EU missions in our activities.

ISHR viewed the adoption of the **European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders** as an important step towards the protection of defenders and the promotion of their work internationally as well as nationally. We have included the use of the Guidelines as an important part of our training courses and consultations. The discussion involved the content and strategic use of the Guidelines, the problems encountered in their implementation, and its conclusions and commitments in this regard.

For the last two years, ISHR has participated in the meetings of the Council of Europe (CoE) regarding measures that it could take to improve the protection of human rights defenders and to support their activities. In 2008, ISHR participated in a roundtable on the situation of human rights defenders organised by the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe. The conference examined the obstacles to the work of defenders in the region and their protection needs, in addition to examining how the mandate of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe could be used to support and protect human rights defenders and their work.

## **IX. Latin America and the Caribbean**

ISHR attended the General Assembly of the **Organisation of American States** (OAS) from 31 May to 3 June 2008, Medellin, Colombia in order to explore future opportunities for participation and for raising the issue of human rights defenders in the Americas at this forum. Additionally, we explored opportunities for contributing to the reform of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and examined possibilities for developing partnerships with NGOs and individuals with whom ISHR could link up to carry out activities in Latin America.

ISHR, as part of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Americas, made a joint statement regarding the situation of defenders in the region at the General Assembly of the OAS. Additionally, ISHR discussed opportunities for providing input into the reform of the rules of procedure of the IACHR and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights with interested organisations.

In October, ISHR participated in the 133rd session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. During this session, ISHR, in collaboration with this body and Human Rights First, organised a side event with the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Ms Margaret Sekaggya. The main objective of the event was to reflect on the implementation of the UN *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders* on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of this instrument. ISHR also participated in a meeting between human rights defenders, IACHR's Defenders Unit, and the UN Special Rapporteur to discuss violations and trends affecting defenders in the region.

In addition, ISHR took part in discussions on the reform of the Inter-American system within the International NGO Coalition for Human Rights in the Americas and the Inter-American Commission. Some of the issues discussed included: the participation of civil society in the reform process; the role of the Commission before the Inter-American Court; the creation of a victim's fund within the system; and the future of the precautionary measures within the system.

In November, ISHR in collaboration with OHCHR participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> training course on the United Nations and the Inter-American Human Rights systems. The training took place in Brazil and was organized by the Institute for Development and Human Rights (Brazil). It brought together representatives from civil society organisations, members of the judiciary, representatives of the public prosecutors office, and academics from different regions in Brazil. The training focused on UN human rights mechanisms, including human rights defender mechanisms, the treaty bodies, the UPR and the special procedures. The main objective was to train participants in how to access and effectively use those mechanisms.

## **X. Middle East and North Africa**

ISHR engaged with a number of human rights NGOs in the region. Human rights defenders from the region attended its training courses in Geneva. In July, ISHR took part in a one-week training session in Cairo organized by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies attended by participants from across the Middle East and North Africa. ISHR speakers gave training on the UN human rights system.

During the year, ISHR developed an initial strategy for the region and established contacts with a number of organisations in the region with a view to determine their needs. However, as ISHR does not currently have in-house language capacity, the implementation of a full-fledged programme for the region implies the hiring of additional staff which cannot be covered by the current budget. Consequently, during the year, ISHR approached a number of potential donors to explore their readiness to finance such a programme. At a minimum, ISHR would like to be able to produce some of its key documents and reports in Arabic, and subsequently hire an Arabic-speaking staff member to work with NGOs from the region. While some options were discussed, no funds were obtained by the end of the year. The efforts to obtain funding for the implementation of a long-term strategy for the region will continue in 2009.

## **XI. Women human rights defenders**

As a follow-up to its role in the International Women Human Rights Defenders Campaign in 2005, ISHR conducted a two-part activity in Colombia, consisting of the following components:

- International consultation on women human rights defenders (4-6 June)
- National training for Colombian women human rights defenders (7-9 June)

The **international consultation** brought together women human rights defenders from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe for a three-day consultation in order to develop a practical tool that would assist organisations in documenting violations against women human rights defenders. This tool would serve as a complement to the conceptual framework already established by the Guidebook developed in 2005, *Claiming Rights, Claiming Justice*. The working group agreed on a general outline of the training module, and to follow up on this activity in November 2008 at the annual meeting of the steering committee of the international campaign.

The **national component** for Colombian women human rights defenders was aimed at training them on the use of international and regional mechanisms for defenders and examining other national and international strategies for their protection. Additionally, the activity provided the opportunity for interaction between the participants of the international and national components to share experiences and explore possibilities for strategic collaboration and solidarity actions among them.

In November 2008, ISHR participated in the annual steering committee meeting of the International WHRDs Coalition that was held in Cape Town, South Africa. During this meeting, Coalition members discussed issues related to membership and structure of the Coalition, the 2009 Calendar of Activities, and other substantive issues, including trends that continue to affect women human rights defenders and their work, violations and obstacles faced by WHRDs in communities and families, and the production of a documentation Manual for violations against WHRDS.

## **XII. Research**

ISHR has finalised a series of briefing papers on particular rights relevant to the work of human rights defenders, to be published in 2009. The six briefing papers examine the rights to freedom of association, assembly, and expression, access to information, access to funding and access to international bodies, from the perspective of human rights defenders. The briefing papers draw on the *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*, the work of the UN treaty bodies, the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders and other regional human rights mechanisms, in order to identify applicable international standards for the protection of these rights in the context of the challenges that defenders face in carrying out their work around the world. The series seeks to present relevant information in a simple and accessible manner to defenders, and act as a practical tool to support them in their work at the regional and national levels, by assisting in national advocacy, awareness raising efforts, or simply as a training resource. While the primary audience of this paper are human rights defenders, the series is also aimed at national human rights institutions (NHRIs) to assist them in addressing defenders' issues. The briefing paper series will be periodically launched on ISHR's website in 2009, in addition to being widely disseminated and used as resource material in ISHR trainings at the regional and national levels,

### *Other activities*

At the request of a number of institutions and NGO partners, the Regional and National Human Rights Defenders Programme was invited to make a number of presentations and briefings on ISHR's work at the national and regional level. On 27 June, the Programme briefed the indigenous fellowship programme of OHCHR working on minority and indigenous issues on the use of human rights defenders mechanisms. On 1 October, the Programme briefed 20 people from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) sponsored 'African Good Governance Network' on human rights defenders mandates at

the regional and international level and ISHR's engagement with these mandate holders. On 25 November, the Programme was invited to introduce and facilitate a discussion on the mandate on prisons and conditions of detention of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights organised by the Quaker UN Office for permanent missions and Geneva based NGOs to explore the possibility of creating a similar mandate at the UN level.

### *Lessons learned and achievements*

Most of the capacity-building activities carried out in the different regions aim at assisting local human rights partners in identifying effective strategies to protect human rights defenders. The assessment of ISHR's role in supporting them in formulating and developing those strategies has been very positive and constitutes a strong incentive to further improve this activity. However, at the same time, local partners have expressed a strong need for support in the implementation of these strategies as they often lack expertise and resources to do so themselves. While the development of national strategies is a testimony to the impact of ISHR's capacity-building activities, the demands for additional support through follow-up activities constitute a big human and financial challenge for a relatively small organization such as ISHR.

The needs and demands of ISHR partners at the local level often reflect changing political and human rights environments as well as their enhanced awareness and knowledge of international and regional mechanisms and bodies. In this context, ISHR needs to continue to refine its system of needs assessment and post-training evaluation.

Following the evaluations carried out in 2006, ISHR decided to review its training material and to adopt a more participatory and experiential methodology. In 2008, we continued to develop our training skills by increasing the number of practical workshops and exercises in our activities programme, and by working with our training specialist on increasing our internal expertise on training methodologies.

Strategies designed and activities carried out with local partners entail a strong potential for success, as exemplified by the case of Togo where ISHR capacity-building activities for the NHRI have led to the creation of a focal point for human rights defenders. This achievement can serve as a source of inspiration for similar undertakings in other countries where civil society actors have expressed a strong interest in engaging with the relevant NHRIs.

ISHR has often acted as a catalyst for cross-fertilisation of different human rights protection mechanisms. In this respect, the joint visit to Togo of the Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders of the UN and the ACHPR respectively has demonstrated the unique role that ISHR can play in supporting the engagement of local human rights defenders with special procedures and the contribution the organisation can make in combining their respective impact.

Regarding Asia, ISHR's sustained engagement with the Asia-Pacific Forum has led to tangible results in facilitating the access and substantive participation of regional NGOs in this body. As this objective has been reached, ISHR will have to revise its strategic goals and identify new areas for potential and relevant impact on the advancement of the human rights defenders' agenda.

## C. INTERNSHIPS

### *Challenges*

As few interns receive financial assistance from foundations or universities most are self-funded. This affects the length of time the intern can afford to stay at ISHR, the high turn-over of interns and the ability of candidates from developing countries to access these kinds of internship and training. In 2008, we drafted a funding proposal, which seeks funding for ISHR interns, in particular for candidates from developing countries. However, ISHR has still not been able to secure funding to provide even a modest remuneration to our interns.

### *Internship programme*

ISHR continued to provide internships for young human rights graduates who intend to work in the field of human rights. We recruited over 70 interns in 2008, and they participated in our work in Geneva and New York. Internships with ISHR offer unique opportunities for human rights activists to observe and learn about both the UN human rights system and the international human rights non-governmental community.

The principal focus of the internship is to learn about the workings of the international human rights system. Geneva and New York are the hubs of international human rights activity and the focus of much activity by governments, and national, regional and international human rights organisations.

An intern co-ordinator post was established in late 2007 to manage and support ISHR interns and to develop a more structured programme, which aims to widen their professional skills, knowledge and experience and prepare them to work in the human rights field. After careful consultation with interns, ISHR developed a professional development and training programme, which was implemented in 2008.

Under the old structure, interns worked either with the training team, the UN monitoring team, or the Human Rights Defenders Office. In 2008, two new roles were created for interns wishing to gain work experience in communications and finance. The Communications team offers interns to work on various projects including developing and updating ISHR's new website, developing a customer relations management system (database), evaluating ISHR's publications, designing some elements of ISHR's visual identity, editing reports and publications and networking and interacting with stakeholders (mainly NGOs and defenders) during the sessions of the Council and other UN human rights oriented meetings. The finance intern will assist the Finance Officer in her daily tasks as well as carrying out research on specific donors and developing a report on the funding situation in ISHR.

ISHR also resumed work with the Indonesia Australia Legal Development Facility (IALDF), which will fund two interns from Indonesia to participate in a joint internship programme in Geneva for 6 months. ISHR designed a joint internship programme with the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) and will coordinate the programme for 2009.

### *Lessons learned*

The formal and informal written and oral feedback ISHR received from the interns in 2008 has been resoundingly positive. As well as citing an increased level of self-confidence, they believe that the exposure to a variety of UN mechanisms has greatly improved their knowledge of the UN system and its workings and allowed them to develop their analytical thinking as well as their writing, organisation and communication skills. In order to demonstrate the value of the ISHR internship for future career

opportunities and enable interns past and new to share experiences, we have created a new page on our website which lists what former interns have gone on to do after their internship. Indeed, many felt that the skills and knowledge developed at ISHR was a deciding factor for their future employment.

In 2009, ISHR will continue to respond to the feedback to improve the internship programme by offering more practical training on writing reports, stress and time management and freeing up interns to attend sessions of interest to them during the training courses at ISHR.

Although there is a high turnover of interns (up to 50 in one year in Geneva alone), ISHR has also recognised the importance of investing in their stay here, however short, and making them feel as valued as any other permanent staff member. Interns are keen to interact more with permanent ISHR staff and learn from them, so we have set up introductory meetings with permanent staff and a buddy programme where ISHR staff are matched with an incoming intern. The role of interns continued to be critically important to the work of ISHR in 2008. It is therefore important to continually develop the internship programme to make the experience as mutually beneficial as possible.

## D. PROGRAMME SUPPORT

### **XIII. Administration**

During the year, several administrative and financial procedures were revised and new ones were set up, in particular those related to travel, cash advances, and holidays. ISHR continued its programme of management improvement and reform to increase our organisational capacity and effectiveness. The performance appraisal policy and process for all staff were implemented and completed successfully towards the end of the year. ISHR enrolled in two different salary scale surveys that have been conducted among Swiss NGOs. The results should be available during the first quarter of 2009 and will allow us to assess the adequacy of our salary scale.

Following the restructuring that was conducted in 2007, the new positions have been progressively filled out and the full team was in place by 2008. It was decided to conduct an assessment of the efficiency and pertinence of the restructuring in the context of an evaluation of the *Strategic Plan 2006-2009*, scheduled to take place in 2009. During 2008, after the departure of the former Director, Mr Chris Sidoti in December 2007, we recruited a new Director, Ms Isabelle Scherer, who started to work in May 2008. After the departure of Mr Musa Gassama, the Deputy Director, in March 2008, the Board decided during the March Board meeting to keep this position vacant in order to reduce the expenses in 2008.

#### *New York Office*

The NYO continued to take care of all administrative issues in the NYO, including payroll and bill paying; bank reconciliations, monthly tracking and preparing of expense reports; ensuring compliance with US laws and rules for 501 (3) (c) organisations, including preparing for annual audit. The NYO also coordinated and participated in fundraising meetings when the new Director visited the NYO in early June.

### **XIV. Fundraising and finance**

Our fundraising efforts have in the additional financial support of 5 new donors: France, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, Liechtenstein, the United Kingdom, and the Ford Foundation /Lagos Office. However, a few donors have not been in a position to provide their support for 2008, which has resulted in revenue being lower than budgeted (see annual Audited report 2008).

In June 2008, we recruited a new internal controller who assists us in maintaining our financial controls and cash flow projections. He also provides technical expertise to complete monthly and quarterly statements. Our efforts to strengthen our internal financial policies and procedures have continued. Our financial system software has been upgraded with a budget control device. This upgrade allows us to ensure a better control and monitoring of our budgets and expenses per grant and donor.

### **XV. Communication**

#### *Evaluations of ISHR publications*

The evaluations and needs assessments carried out in 2008 allowed ISHR to get a better idea of what our users, readers, and potential readers need in terms of information on the UN human rights system and how they perceive and use ISHR reports. On the one hand, evaluations confirmed that many of our

reports (*Treaty Body Monitor* reports and *Council Monitor* reports) meet the needs of our audience in terms of facilitating their understanding or how their State fulfils its obligations at the international level. Typically, for human rights defenders, the *Treaty Body Monitor*'s analytical reviews of the examination of State reports by the treaty bodies facilitate domestic lobbying and help measure respect for international obligations by a given State. The *Council Monitor* has a similar function as it provides an insider's view of the dynamics, trends and upcoming debates within a body that few of our readers can physically engage with. During our interactions with Commissioners and NGOs at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, they claimed to be very keen to receive reports on the UN human rights system, in particular the UPR, which they see as a potential forum for involvement, advocacy, and cross-fertilisation between regional and international human rights mechanisms. Because the UPR was still a very new mechanism at the time of the evaluations, it was clear that defenders and experts alike were looking for an assessment of the UPR before engaging time and resources. The *UPR Monitor* is typically the kind of information product that can help answer these basic questions. Through its analytical and critical examination of the proceedings, the *UPR Monitor* helps readers evaluate whether they will continue to follow its sessions, or substantially engage with it. In 2008, the *UPR Monitor* reports were established as a stand-alone publication with a discrete distribution list to which interested people were invited to subscribe.

Other key conclusions obtained through questionnaires and the focus group sessions that carried out during ISHR training courses and other events<sup>2</sup> can be summarised as follows:

1. Defenders clearly expressed the need for a strategic guide to the UN human rights system, its mechanisms and procedures, how to engage with the different bodies and mechanisms (namely the Human Rights Council, the special procedures, the complaint mechanisms, the UPR, and the treaty bodies), and what the pros and cons and potential outcomes of engaging with each are.
2. Defenders and activists need information and guidelines on 'how to lobby the system effectively'
3. There is a strong demand for dissemination of timely and basic practical facts and figures on upcoming UN meetings, countries that are soon to be examined under one of the bodies, NGO participation, how to go about accreditation, etc.
4. There is an important and urgent need to translate ISHR publications into French given the geographical zones in which ISHR operates. The criticism that we receive regarding the lack of linguistic diversity is not new. We have been unfortunately unable to gather the necessary funds to translate our documents more systematically. However, French being a priority language for ISHR, we translated the *Info-Pack*, the *Human Rights Monitor*, and some ad hoc *Treaty Body Monitor* and *UPR Monitor* reports in 2008. Other languages such as Arabic and Spanish have been noted as worthy of attention as well, while the question of raising funds for translation remains.
5. Human rights defenders have a strong interest in specific thematic and country issues, i.e. they want to read only the information that is relevant to them and their work and/or country and/or thematic area. This represents a challenge as it would require a personalisation and better targeting of our reports that we do not have the human resources for. We will nonetheless work on distributing more relevant and less numerous reports to our readership thanks to our customer relations management system (or database), which is being created and is due to be completed in 2009.

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<sup>2</sup> These questionnaires and focus group discussions were completed in the context of: at the Advanced Geneva Training Course (March 2008); at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (May 2008); at the French Training Course (September 2008) and at the Treaty Body course in Geneva (November 2008).

Accounting for the above, ISHR is moving and will continue to move away from exhaustive narrative reporting on events. Reporting will in future be more targeted and analytical, and we will continue to move away from unnecessarily technical language. ISHR also recently adopted an ‘alert’ style of reporting for all types of publications, and will consolidate this approach in 2009. We are also aiming to secure funding to develop a User’s Guide to the UN Human Rights Council and the Treaty Bodies, which would cater to point 1) above.

During internal discussions on our treaty body reporting, it was acknowledged that a lot of resources were consumed by reporting in detail on States where there may have been a small audience, and the manner of reporting may not have been the most useful structure for NGOs to improve the implementation of international human rights law by influencing policies at the national level. Improvements could be made by focusing more specifically on the outcomes of examinations rather than the examination itself. The exact format of this reporting has not yet been concluded, but will be implemented for the CEDAW session in January 2009. ISHR will nonetheless continue to summarise all State examinations in the 2009 *Human Rights Monitor*.

### Website launch

The **new ISHR Website was launched** on 5 September 2008 after intense collaboration among ISHR staff. It was the successful result of internal discussions about what information should be available on our website and what would be the optimal way to access the information from a user’s perspective, in terms of presentation, navigation, and functions. The new website now allows us to measure who is visiting our website, what is being downloaded, in what country, etc. Each Programme within ISHR, including the New York Office, has been trained to publish and edit their respective sections of the website to ensure more autonomous and frequent updating, while overall management and further enhancements continue to be guaranteed by more technical staff.

### Information Technology

This year, we recruited a new IT & Web Officer who works on a part time basis (50%). We also continued a systematic programme of hardware replacement and software upgrades to respond to our needs and plan to conduct a comprehensive IT assessment in early 2009.

## **XVI. Governance**

Throughout 2008, ISHR met all the requirements of good organisational governance. We received a clear audit certificate for our accounts. Our Board met twice, in March and October, with the usual high level of attendance by Board members. The Annual General Assembly was held in March in Geneva, well within the six-month period allowed by the Articles of Association. Within the Secretariat itself, we maintained our regular weekly staff meetings and other internal discussions, including staff and interns, core staff and Programme Managers

## *Annex: FUNDING*

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### **Governments:**

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- Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark
- Ireland, Development Cooperation Ireland
- Liechtenstein, Permanent Mission
- Luxembourg, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)
- Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (DDC)
- Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
- United Kingdom, Permanent Mission

### **Private:**

- Action de Carême, Switzerland
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- Asia Pacific Forum
- CORDAID, Netherlands
- CMC AMA
- Diakonisches Werk Stuttgart, Germany
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- Misereor, Germany
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