

## [Côte d'Ivoire: New law will strengthen protection of human rights defenders](#)

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A new law enacted in Côte d'Ivoire will strengthen the protection of human rights defenders and should inspire other African States to develop similar legislation, the Côte d'Ivoire Coalition of Human Rights Defenders, the West African Human Rights Defenders Network and the International Service for Human Rights said today.



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(Abidjan, Lomé, Geneva) – A new law enacted in Côte d'Ivoire will strengthen the protection of human rights defenders and should inspire other African States to develop similar legislation, the Côte d'Ivoire Coalition of Human Rights Defenders, the West African Human Rights Defenders Network and the International Service for Human Rights said today.

The Law on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Defenders was adopted by the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire on 11 June. It is the first time an African State has enacted a law with the specific purpose of protecting human rights defenders and comes at a time when many other African States are developing laws and policies which restrict rather than enable their work.

'The adoption of this landmark law is a recognition of the vital role played by human rights defenders in Côte d'Ivoire's national reconstruction,' said Marthe Pedan, Coordinator of the Côte d'Ivoire Coalition of Human Rights Defenders.

'The enactment of this law also reflects the good faith efforts being made by authorities to implement their international human rights commitments,' Mrs Pedan said.

In 2012, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights recommended that the country adopt such legislation, while the UN Human Rights Council, of which Côte d'Ivoire is a member, has called on States to enact specific laws to support human rights defenders and protect them from intimidation and reprisals. [ISHR called on Côte d'Ivoire to enact and implement a law on human rights defenders](#) in the context of its recent Universal Periodic Review in April 2014.

'15 years on from the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Côte d'Ivoire is the first African country – and one of only few in the world – to adopt specific legislation to enact it at the national

level,' said Clement Voulé of the International Service for Human Rights.

'We hope that the example set by Côte d'Ivoire serves as an example to other African States, inspiring them to pass laws which support and enable the work of defenders and to rescind laws and policies which restrict or hinder their work,' Mr Voulé said.

The new law enshrines the right of human rights defenders to freedom of expression, the right to form associations and non-government organisations, the right to access resources, the right to submit information to international bodies, and the right to be protected from reprisals. The law also codifies the obligations of the State in this regard, including the obligation to protect human rights defenders, their families and their homes from attacks, and to investigate and punish attacks where they occur. The law also recognises the particular threats faced by, and protection needs of, women human rights defenders.

'This law recognises that human rights defenders – the work of whom is crucial to expose human rights violations, promote accountability, and uphold the rule of law – often face threats and risks because of this work,' said Diallo Gadiry, Coordinator of the West African Human Rights Defenders Network.

'The law also recognises that human rights defenders need a safe and enabling environment in which to undertake this vital work,' Mr Gadiry said.

While welcoming the adoption of the Law on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Defenders, the three organisations emphasised that it must now be implemented fully and promptly and, in this regard, called on the President of Côte d'Ivoire to issue a decree for its immediate implementation. The organisations also called on the international community to support Côte d'Ivoire in implementing the law.

A briefing paper on the situation of human rights defenders in Côte d'Ivoire, and the steps and measures necessary to support their work, is available [here](#). ISHR is also working on a project to develop a [model law on human rights defenders](#) to guide States in their implementation of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders at the national level.

**Note: This article is also [available in French](#).**

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