

Director's Update - December 2014

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Dear friends,

30 years ago this week, ISHR's visionary founder, Adrien Claude-Zoller, identified the need to support human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations - from the families of the disappeared in Latin America to survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia - to seek justice and accountability at the UN.

He established the International Service for Human Rights on 17 December 1984 to meet this pressing need.

Putting aside our hindsight bias

In the field of psychology there is a phenomenon known as 'hindsight bias'. It refers to our tendency, after an event has occurred, to regard that event as predictable or even inevitable.



We all know, however, that progress in the field of human rights is never inevitable. It takes courage and commitment, coordination and collaboration, and good planning and an element of good luck.

So, I'd ask you to join me in putting aside your hindsight bias for a moment to ask 'but for'. But for Adrien's vision 30 years ago, and the dedication and tenacity of many hundreds of ISHR staff, trainees, Board members and interns since, what now seemingly inevitable human rights advances may not have been achieved?

30 years of human rights impact

But for the perseverance of ISHR, and our powerful partnership with Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists, we may not today have a [Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#) or a Convention on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances.

But for the masterful coordination of civil society engagement with the [Vienna World Conference](#) by ISHR and its then Deputy Director Mark Thomson back in 1993, the post of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights may never have been created.



But for the establishment of [ISHR's intensive training program](#), many thousands of human rights defenders - from UN experts like Maina Kiai and [Sheila Keetharuth](#), to NGO leaders like [Lucia Nader](#) and [Hassan Shire Sheikh](#) - may not have become the influential change agents they are today.

But for the advocacy of ISHR and NGO partners such as both the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project and the West African Human Rights defenders Network, the [African Commission](#) may never have mandated a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

But for the individual support and systemic advocacy undertaken by ISHR's New York office, dozens of human rights [NGOs like ARC International](#) may never have been granted UN consultative status, and many victims would have been denied a voice on the international stage.

But for the personal commitment of former ISHR Director Chris Sidoti, and other experts like Michael O'Flaherty and John Fisher, the [Yogyakarta Principles](#) on sexual orientation and gender identity would not have been developed and it is unlikely that the Human Rights Council would have subsequently adopted a resolution on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights.

And but for the persistence of ISHR and the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, combined with the leadership of Norway, the General Assembly would never have adopted a [resolution on women human rights defenders](#), providing a roadmap for the realisation of women's rights at the national level.

Join the growing network of support for human rights defenders and human rights change

So please join me in thanking and acknowledging all those ISHR [staff](#), [Board members](#) and volunteers, together with our human rights defender networks, NGO colleagues, diplomatic partners and [financial supporters](#), but for whom the world would not have enjoyed much of the human rights progress that it has.

And please consider joining me in making a [donation to ISHR's 30th anniversary fundraising appeal](#). Human rights progress is never inevitable, but without the commitment and contributions of people like you it is impossible.

Thank you for standing with us and the brave human rights defenders with whom we work.

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