UN General Assembly: Human rights resolutions pass with increased support

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ISHR also works and advocates to the General Assembly which is the main deliberative organ of the United Nations. ISHR particularly focuses on the Third Committee (Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian) which addresses most agenda items relevant to human rights defenders, including women's rights, children’s rights, indigenous peoples' rights, and the elimination of racism.

(New York) - The plenary session of the UN General Assembly has adopted a number of key human rights resolutions with an increased margin of support.

'At the end of a difficult year for human rights it is pleasing that the UN General Assembly has marked progress by adopting a number of important resolutions - including in relation to the human rights situations in North Korea and Syria and on such thematic issues as the protection of journalists and the prevention of violence against women - by record margins,' said Michelle Evans, Director of Advocacy at ISHR's New York office.

'ISHR is particularly pleased that the General Assembly adopted the report of the Human Rights Council by a significant margin of 125 votes to 2, with 56 abstentions. This vindicates the important and timely resolutions adopted by the Council's September session on the protection of civil society space and the elimination of violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity,' Ms Evans said.

The General Assembly increased the vote in favour of a resolution on the prevention and investigation of extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions by 11, with 122 States recorded as voting in favour of the resolution and none against. The resolution had been the focus of an attempt at Third Committee stage to weaken or delete language recognising that certain groups are at particular risk of extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions.

'This is an important signal by an increasing majority of States that the arbitrary killing of individuals is unacceptable, and that States must pay specific attention to preventing and investigating extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary execution of those at particular risk,’ Ms Evans said.

The resolution on the moratorium against the death penalty also received increased support at the General Assembly stage, with 117 in favour to 114 in favour at the Third Committee. This recorded vote marks a
significant increase in favour on a similar resolution adopted two years ago (which passed with 111 votes).

The country resolutions on the human rights situations in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Iran, and Syria were all voted on, as they were at the Third Committee stage, and in all cases the majority vote was increased. In the resolution on the DPRK, the General Assembly encourages the Security Council to consider referring the situation in the country to the International Criminal Court. The resolution adopted by the plenary passed by 5 more votes than that adopted by the subsidiary Third Committee in November.

The resolution on the human rights situation in Iran saw an increase of 5 votes, with 85 voting in favour. Iran claimed the resolution to be 'political, prejudicial and unbalanced'. The vote on the human rights situation in Syria recorded 5 more votes than in the Third Committee, with 127 in favour, 13 against and 48 abstentions.

A draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar was deferred until its budget implications have been considered by the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly.

A Third Committee report on the ‘Advancement of Women’ was passed by consensus. It contained resolutions on eliminating violence against women, and one on the elimination of female genital mutilation. Other human rights resolutions passed by consensus by the General Assembly included a resolution on the safety of journalists and the need to combat impunity for attacks against them, together with a resolution on the right to privacy put forward by Brazil and Germany.

Finally, the report of the Human Rights Council was taken to a vote but was approved by 125 to 2. Belarus and Israel voted against the General Assembly taking formal note of the Human Rights Council report, while 56 States abstained. This was a positive outcome, with fears that adoption of the report might face delays or deferrals, as occurred in regard to the Council report to the 68th session of the General Assembly, proved unfounded.

*Photo: The General Assembly meets to discuss the report of the UN Human Rights Council - UN Photo / Loey Felipe*