

[First-ever Council panel on women human rights defenders](#)

25.06.2012

You can view a webcast of the panel discussion below.

[ISHR presented statement](#) during the panel. Watch from 2:23:36 to 2:26:03 to view it being presented to the Council.

Human rights experts and State representatives will come together on Tuesday 26 June in the first-ever United Nations Human Rights Council [panel discussion](#) on the protection of women human rights defenders.

The panel will take place as part of the Council's annual day of discussion on women's human rights, and recommendations will be made to States on establishing and strengthening national programmes to protect women human rights defenders, based on the gender-specific nature of many of the violations women defenders face, and their specific protection needs.

The panel will include the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Margaret Sekaggya; Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez; Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition representative, Sunila Abeysekera; with an opening statement by the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kyung-wha Kang. It will be moderated by the President of the Human Rights Council, Laura Dupuy Lasserre.

The UN and regional human rights systems have previously highlighted women defenders for particular attention. Ms Sekaggya's 2010 [report](#) to the Human Rights Council focused on the situation of women human rights defenders. Mr Jesús Orozco Henríquez's office at the Inter-American Commission has also acknowledged this group of defenders in its [Second Report](#) on Human Rights Defenders in the America, launched this year. Meanwhile, the [Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition](#) has been working since its formation in 2005 to press for effective responses to the issues faced by those working on women's and sexual rights, including activists defending the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

ISHR's representative on the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, Eleanor Openshaw, says the panel is an important piece in a much broader Human Rights Council commitment to integrating a gender perspective in the work of the UN.

'In 2007, the Council adopted a [resolution](#) that encourages all parts of the UN human rights system to integrate a gender perspective in their work, including through the annual day of discussion on women's rights.

'Gender integration requires documenting and analysing the gender-specific nature of the violations women human rights defenders face. It also involves questioning how different people experience violations differently, how this affects their ability to claim and defend rights, and, therefore, how this should inform responses to those violations.

'The direct engagement of women defenders with human rights processes and access to UN bodies is key to answering these questions. The focused panel on women human rights defenders tomorrow should therefore make an important contribution to raising awareness about the specific challenges women defenders face and their specific needs for protection. '

Any discussion on the protection of women defenders and their engagement with the UN must include a focus on the problem of reprisals, adds Ms Openshaw.

'Reprisals against the legitimate engagement of women defenders with the Human Rights Council and other UN human rights mechanisms is simply one expression of far broader, but often under-reported, threats and intimidation faced by human rights defenders,' she says.

'This panel is an essential opportunity to explore the extent of this problem for women defenders, and to look at ways the Council can improve its response.'

The panel on women human rights defenders is one of two that will take place as part of the Council's day of discussion on women's human rights, which started on Monday 25 June. The second panel will explore remedies and reparations for women who have been subjected to violence.

ISHHR