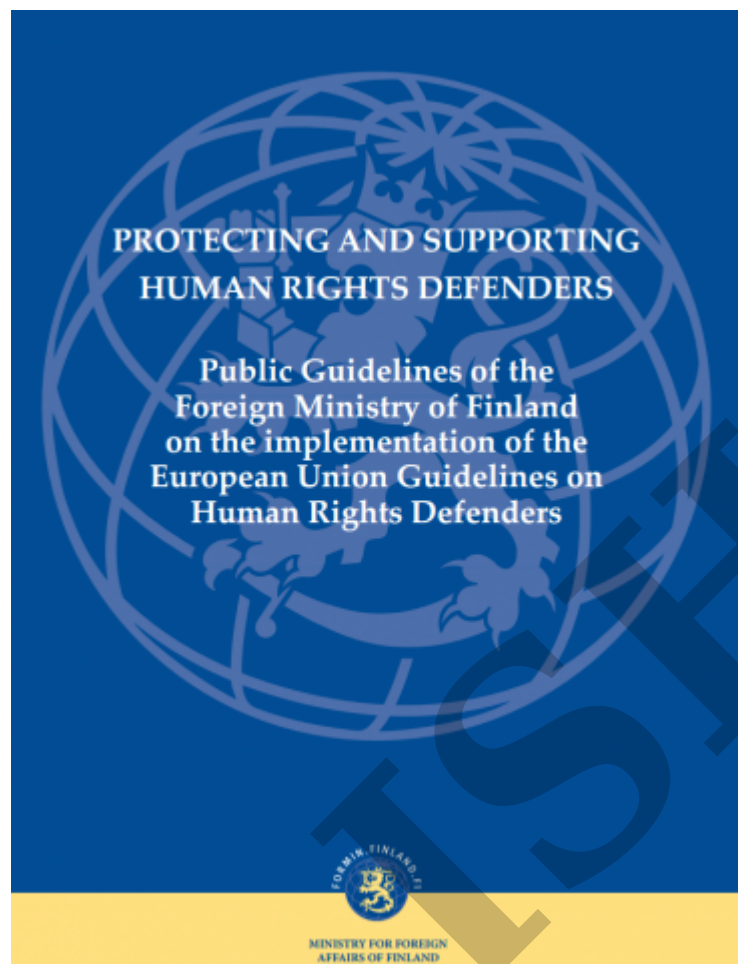


[Finland: New guidelines will strengthen protection of human rights defenders](#)

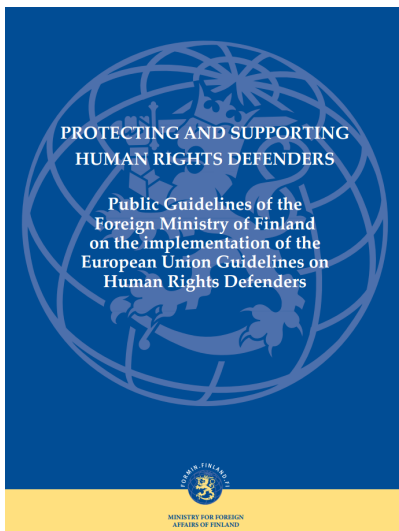
17.02.2015

New guidelines released by the Finland Ministry of Foreign Affairs will contribute positively to protecting and supporting human rights defenders globally, the International Service for Human Rights said today.



(Geneva) - New guidelines released by the Finland Ministry of Foreign Affairs will contribute positively to protecting and supporting human rights defenders globally, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

The [Guidelines](#), released and endorsed by Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Erkki Tuomioja, provide authoritative guidance to Finnish public servants and diplomatic missions as to the steps and measures they should take to support and capacitate human rights defenders and protect those who are vulnerable or at risk. The Guidelines are intended to ensure Finland complies with and effectively implements both the international [Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#) and the [EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders](#).



'The need for EU and other States to take stronger, and more active, principled and consistent action to support human rights defenders - both politically and financially - has been a key theme arising from our recent regional consultations with civil society activists across the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe,' said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

'Those regional consultations have also informed us that there is a strong correlation between a State committing to protect human rights defenders in accordance with specific public guidelines and that State actually being seen by human rights defenders to actively support and defend their vital work,' Mr Lynch said.

'States such as [Norway](#), [Switzerland](#), [Ireland](#), [the Netherlands](#) and now Finland - all of which have published guidelines directing their diplomats and decision-makers to prioritise the protection of human rights defenders and civil society space abroad - have been consistently singled out for praise by human rights and democracy activists with whom we've spoken,' Mr Lynch said.

'By way of contrast, a number of EU and other States that have not developed such guidelines have been criticised for being inconsistent in their support for human rights defenders and for too often prioritising perceived economic or security interests over the protection of fundamental human rights.'

The [Finnish Guidelines](#) recognise the vital role of human rights defenders in preventing conflict, addressing discrimination and inequality, promoting security and the rule of law, and exposing and seeking accountability for violations where they occur. The Guidelines also recognise the significant risks and threats that many defenders face because of this work, particularly women human rights defenders, and those working on LGBTI and minority rights.

Introducing the Guidelines, Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Erkki Tuomioja, said, 'In many countries human rights defenders work at risk to their own safety, and even their lives. They need support and protection. Finland's objective is to bring about an environment in which human rights defenders can act freely and safely. This also helps promote the general improvement of the human rights situation in the host country.'

The Guidelines outline a range of actions for Finnish diplomats and missions to achieve their objective of 'promoting an enabling environment and the capacity of human rights defenders', including:

- consulting closely with human rights defenders on their support and protection needs;
- publicly recognising and promoting the valuable work of human rights defenders and the risks they face, including through regular meetings and events;
- advocating both publicly and privately, and both bilaterally and through multilateral mechanisms such as the UN, in relation to the situation and safety of defenders;
- providing financial support and assistance to national and international human rights NGOs;
- appointing a human rights focal point within diplomatic missions;

- monitoring trials of human rights defenders;
- promoting the invaluable work of defenders through media and social media;
- continuously monitoring and regularly reporting on the situation of human rights defenders, including through field trips and investigations; and
- where necessary and appropriate, assisting to relocate human rights defenders within their own country or to another country to ensure their security.

'ISHR congratulates Finland on its leadership on the protection of human rights defenders and urges other States to demonstrate similar commitment through the development and active implementation of specific national guidelines,' Mr Lynch said.

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