

[Human rights defenders and lawyers in China: Assessing UPR progress](#)

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Given the recent trend of harassing, detaining, trying and convicting human rights defenders - whether in court or through confessions on official media - it may come as a surprise that in 2013, China committed to making improvements in these areas.

Every four years the UN Human Rights Council reviews the track record of each nation in a process known as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). On 22 October 2013, the People's Republic of China underwent its second UPR. China accepted only a handful of the 252 recommendations it received about the need to protect human rights defenders and lawyers.

Next month will mark the mid-point of China's second cycle of the UPR, and provides an opportunity for governments and civil society to assess progress on implementation of the accepted recommendations and to highlight areas for continued effort. ISHR has prepared a report examining what steps have been taken to implement those recommendations.

ISHR's Asia Programme Manager and Human Rights Advocate and author of the report, Sarah M Brooks, said the Government of China needed to start living up to the promises it makes at the UN.

'Once again, China talks the talk in the international arena. They accepted concrete, meaningful recommendations from a range of governments that, if put into practice, would have been key steps toward improving the situation for civil society and human rights activists in the country. Walking the walk on human rights is another matter. We have seen regress, not progress, on all fronts. Instead of cooperating with the UN mechanisms, China has sought to delegitimise them. And instead of supporting lawyers and human rights defenders to help meet their commitments, China has actively targeted these individuals,' said Ms Brooks.

The report highlights what China has done, over the period January 2014 to May 2016, in relation to UPR recommendations that specifically call on China to:

- Protect defenders' legitimate work and their freedom from reprisal (Switzerland)
- Create an 'enabling environment' for civil society (Ireland)
- Ensure that attacks against defenders, including journalists and media workers, are investigated (Poland)
- Respect due process and improve conditions for lawyers' work (Cape Verde, Finland, Hungary)
- Guarantee the rights of criminal suspects and others detained, with or without charge (Canada, Timor Leste)

'It is hard to fathom to degree to which rhetoric and reality diverge when looking through these recommendations. The missed opportunities have meant, for many, real threats against their livelihoods and lives,' said Ms Brooks.

[Download the report here.](#)

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