

[#HRC34 | The vital importance of renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders](#)

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The role of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders is to monitor and report on human rights violations and to advise and assist in promoting and protecting rights.

During the 34th session of the Human Rights Council, States will consider the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Michel Forst, pursuant to a resolution being negotiated and led by Norway. The Special Rapporteur's activities have been vital in supporting and protecting defenders and therefore it is imperative that States with a genuine commitment to human rights, sustainable development and the rule of law reflect such commitments through strong and unconditional support for the renewal of Mr Forst's mandate.

ISHR has collected several testimonies that underscore the key role that the mandate has played in providing visibility to the situation of human rights defenders. ISHR welcomes the remarks made by the following key opinion makers highlighting the undeniable importance of the Special Rapporteur and calling on member States to strongly support the renewal of the expert's mandate.

Human rights and international human rights institutions are coming under increasing threats from the surge of popular movements that espouse nationalism, racism, sexism, exclusion and discrimination, that repudiate fundamental human rights norms. More and more governments are restricting civil society space and crushing the work of human rights defenders. In these troubling times, the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders is crucial, not only to ward off attacks on the human rights movement but also to support brave human rights defenders all over the world.

Navi Pillay

Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Countless women, men and indeed children work in all regions of the world to promote and protect human rights. They often do so at great personal risk and cost. But human rights defenders need more than our admiration. They need our active support and protection. We can and must continue to raise awareness and understanding of international law and standards applicable to the enjoyment of the rights of human rights defenders. And crucially, at a time when threats, intimidation and concerted attacks against human rights defenders persist, we urgently require renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders.

Patricia O'Brien

Ambassador of Ireland to the UN at Geneva

Human rights are currently under severe attack, and those standing up against injustice are being increasingly intimidated and even killed for speaking up. The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders is key in ensuring that these attacks are effectively addressed by, among other measures, implementing protection

mechanisms for human rights defenders at risk to allow them to continue their work without fear of reprisals. At this 34th Session of the Council, States have again expressed their support for this mandate. The Council must now unite in renewing the mandate and publicly condemn attacks against human rights defenders in all their forms everywhere.

Guadalupe Marengo

Head of Global Human Rights Defenders Programme, Amnesty International

The role of human rights defenders is important and that is to ensure that human rights are well protected and shielded. The work of human rights defenders is critical and irreplaceable. Regrettably, in some circumstances, they are continuing to be exposed to serious restrictions and threats of violence. Therefore, all actors should do their utmost to ensure the provision of the best possible protection framework for human rights defenders. In this context, the work of the Special Rapporteur and his recommendations are a critical tool which plays a role in assisting States to address remaining challenges. Georgia remains a strong supporter of the Special Rapporteur's work and its mandate.

Shalva Tsiskarashvili

Ambassador of Georgia to the UN at Geneva

At a time when there is a regression in the protection and promotion of human rights worldwide, it is now more important than ever to have a specific mandate that focuses on those who put themselves at risk every day to fight for rights. If governments are serious about fighting extremism and radicalisation, the best way to do this is by supporting human rights defenders and civil society; not by using violence and/or supporting dictators and absolute monarchies.

Maryam Al-Khawaja

Co-director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights

In today's world, with old and new tensions, where nationalism, xenophobia and attacks on anything or anyone different are threatening to seriously erode decades of gains in awareness and respect for the human rights of all, the work of thousands of human rights defenders is ever so important and also dangerous. Renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders is an imperative to continue constructing the norms, standards and best practices that only a person with solid and wide experience can provide. Building institutions at the national level to ensure the safety and independence of human rights defenders and opening the ground for enabling them to work on the issues of today such as migration, are important priorities laid out for a second mandate by the Special Rapporteur.

Marta Maurás

Ambassador of Chile to the UN at Geneva

The nature of the mandate has allowed the Special Rapporteur to act upon the current global context and the situations faced due to corporate activities by environmental defenders, journalists and whistleblowers. The current visit of Michel Forst to Mexico, in a situation where corruption, impunity and criminalisation of human rights defenders prevails, promotes and reinforces recognition on the role of human rights defenders by the National Human Rights Institution, state actors, business actors, and investors; it also motivates the inclusion of a clause regarding respect to their work in the upcoming National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, and meaningful participation of defenders.

Ivette González

Project on Organizing, Development, Education and Research (PODER) in Mexico

Defending the human rights of others at the risk of being targeted and even prosecuted is a noble action that deserves respect of all who value human dignity.

Janis Karklins

Ambassador of Latvia to the UN at Geneva

At the cusp of an uncertain era for human rights, it is those on the ground who defend rights that face the worst consequences. Without international support and recognition, many risk outright annihilation. Asian human rights defenders, even in the most vibrant democracies, face restrictions and are left at the mercy of geopolitical and economic dynamics. If the UN Human Rights Council is to be relevant, it is imperative that it supports people who legitimately stand for human rights. At this historic juncture, renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders should be a foregone conclusion and not a matter of

contention.

R. Iniyang Ilango

United Nations Advocacy Programme Manager, FORUM-ASIA

Human rights defenders are inherent actors in free, vibrant and stable societies. Journalists, lawyers, trade union activists and other human rights defenders should be able to conduct their work safely without fear, harassment or retaliation. I highly value the work of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders to address the specific risks women human rights defenders may encounter when taking an active role in society.

Rauno Merisaari

Ambassador for Human Rights and Democracy of Finland

Human rights defenders assist states in service delivery activities, offer innovative solutions to complex political, social and economic challenges, help resolve conflicts, support the inclusion of diverse and otherwise excluded voices in decision making, and foster accountability over the use of public resources. The Special Rapporteur's mandate exists to ensure that these defenders are supported and protected by the international community.

Mandeep Tiwana

Head of Policy and Research - CIVICUS

Having a mandate for a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders is essential to remind the UN and the international community of defenders on the ground who are risking their lives to achieve peace and democracy. It is also a way to tackle the important role of women human rights defenders, who are most of the times forgotten. Trying to protect human rights without empowering those who defend them in their communities will always make this process fall short of its goals.

Mozn Hassan

Nazra for Feminist Studies

Unfortunately, Australia is not immune from the global crackdown on civil society. There is a clear and worrying trend of new laws and practices that curtail protest rights, silence critics and threaten press freedom. The Special Rapporteur's work provides critical support and guidance to our efforts to protect basic democratic freedoms in Australia. Michel Forst's visit last year galvanised those efforts and brought together a broad range of Australian human rights defenders to highlight the growing constraints on our work.

Emily Howie

Director of Advocacy and Research - Human Rights Law Centre, Australia

Since the mandate's inception seventeen years ago, the Special Rapporteur has helped strengthen the visibility and protection of human rights defenders, in particular those at high risk as they defend women's rights, LGBTI rights, land and environmental rights. Mandate holders have documented violations against defenders in the context of counter terrorism, economic development, and armed conflict; they have consistently reminded states and non-state actors (including corporations) of their responsibilities to respect defenders and highlighted good practices in enabling and protecting them. In an increasingly hostile environment for human rights, the role of the Special Rapporteur in promoting and protecting human rights defenders is more critical than ever.

James Savage

Program Officer for an Enabling Environment for Human Rights Defenders - Fund for Global Human Rights

The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders is not only an important mandate to bring attention to the situation of activists worldwide, it also gives legitimacy and support to those working on the ground, suffering from restricted civic space across the African continent.

Hassan Shire Sheikh

Executive Director of DefendDefenders, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

Through consultations, in loco and academic visits, the Special Rapporteur has had direct, first-hand contact with human rights defenders around the world, strengthening our local work and bringing our voices to the international arena, strongly advocating for our right to defend human rights, free from stigmatisation and

reprisals. The Special Rapporteur's academic visit to Venezuela in 2015 set the framework for a renewed commitment by Venezuelan human rights defenders and organisations.

Feliciano Reyna

Venezuelan human rights defender - President of CIVILIS Human Rights

In today's world, defending human rights is a dangerous work. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders is fundamental to confront human rights violations with national and international mechanisms, to fight against impunity and to guarantee that victims obtain adequate reparation. Human rights defenders deserve international protection and all the support of the UN Human Rights Council.

Fabián Salvioli

Former President of the UN Human Rights Committee

The special mandate for the Human Rights Defenders plays a key contribution in promoting and protecting human rights. It creates a space where the rights of the defenders are promoted and protected. It will be difficult to realise human rights without ensuring the promotion and protection of those who promote and protect rights. The renewal of the mandate is not only important to the human rights defenders but to realisation of human rights for all.

Hiram Kabarita

Kenyan human rights defender

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders since its creation in 2000 has helped to shape discusses on the roles, contributions and status of human rights defenders the world over. The Special Rapporteur has made it possible for us to recognise and appreciate the invaluable contribution of human rights defenders to the enjoyment and expression of human rights. It has also provided a veritable platform for advocacy to support the work of human rights defenders. It is therefore imperative that the mandate be renewed to support our continued enjoyment of human rights, especially by women.

Mrs Bose Ironsi

Executive Director of Women's Rights and Health Project, Nigeria