

[#HRC34 | Council overwhelmingly welcomes report of Special Rapporteur on defenders](#)

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The Special Rapporteur on defenders, Michel Forst, presented his report during the 34th session on 2 March 2017. The Special Rapporteur expressed alarm over the steadily growing threats against defenders, and called for action. 'Today, it is no longer a matter of recognising the dramatic nature of the situation experienced by many defenders. This reality has been observed, denounced and relayed by many actors. There is an urgent need and duty imposed on us to act,' he asserted.

During the dialogue, ISHR delivered a [statement](#) sharing the concern about the widespread and systematic crackdown on defenders in many parts of the world, which threatens democracy and development.

This session, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur will be considered for renewal, with Norway leading a resolution. ISHR's statement urged States with a genuine commitment to human rights, sustainable development and the rule of law to strongly support the renewal of the mandate.

ISHR welcomes the statements made by several delegations during the dialogue, including Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Liechtenstein, Latvia, Mexico, Norway, Peru, Switzerland, Uruguay, among others, expressing unconditional support for the renewal of the mandate and highlighting its importance.

However, it is regrettable that despite most States' support for the Special Rapporteur, a minority of States disparaged the mandate. Russia, Cuba and Syria dismissed the effectiveness of the mandate, claiming that overlap with other mandates makes the Special Rapporteur redundant. China asserted that the definition of defenders was unclear. Likewise, Azerbaijan rejected the [Special Rapporteur's country report](#) as 'biased and one-sided' and Hungary, while welcoming the Special Rapporteur's work to combat reprisals, expressed disappointment that the [remarks of the government](#) were not given more weight in the [Hungary mission-report](#).

Raising visibility of defenders

The Special Rapporteur noted the importance of raising the visibility of defenders, as 'the rise of intolerance towards defenders is partly due to the fact that ordinary people are often unfamiliar with their rights and the role of those who defend and protect them.' Slovenia and Spain, among others, concurred with the Special Rapporteur on the importance of raising visibility for those who are most vulnerable or exposed to multiple forms of risk or discrimination.

ISHR's statement raised concern over the global trend of attacks against defenders working in the field of business and human rights.

'The proposed report of the Special Rapporteur on the role of business in both attacking - but also potentially helping to protect -defenders, is timely,' ISHR Human Rights Council Advocacy Director Michael Ineichen said.

Likewise, ISHR noted worsening legal and other restrictions against defenders advocating for the rights of migrants and refugees, including in Europe, the United States and Australia.

'We welcome the Special Rapporteur's vigorous effort and attention to the situation of these groups of defenders. We urge States to cooperate with his mandate by incentivising business to play a positive role on the protection of defenders and to incorporate a defenders' angle to ongoing discussions on migrants' rights throughout the UN system,' Mr Ineichen said.

Moving towards implementation

The Special Rapporteur called for better implementation of his recommendations on the ground, and stressed that he would push for more substantive responses to communications. Several States also expressed concern at the lack of compliance and response to the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur, with France calling on 'all States to show the political will to put an end to this situation.'

'We welcome the commitment of the Special Rapporteur to a strengthened focus on implementation and we look forward to working with the mandate to develop tools and a methodology to measure and monitor implementation of human rights defender-related resolutions and recommendations at the national level,' Mr Ineichen said.

In particular, ISHR would welcome the opportunity to work with the Special Rapporteur and supportive States to establish a Global Network of National Human Rights Defender Focal Points. This network would aim at promoting implementation of the Defenders Declaration and other relevant standards at the national level as well as cooperation, and share lessons learned through the Global Network.

Civil society calls for consensus renewal of the mandate

In a [letter](#) to [member States of the Human Rights Council](#), a global coalition of leading civil society organisations has called for the consensus renewal of the mandate of the UN expert on human rights defenders.

Read more about the letter [here](#).

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