

[Women Defenders | 'We've Had Enough!' A Call for More Action, Less Rhetoric](#)

28.11.2018

ISHR | INTERNATIONAL SERVICE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

International
Women
Human
Rights
Defenders
Day



"We demand respect, holistic security and safety, and our right to defend human rights without fear. Our legitimate voices should no longer be silenced and ignored."

In the 20 years since the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted, women human rights defenders have been [resilient and resolute](#) in combatting authoritarianism, while defending their land and territories, to ensure access to health services, to live free and equal in dignity and rights.

Yet, women human rights defenders face a climate of increasing repression, violence and impunity at the hands of State and non-State actors, despite broad commitments by governments to the UN to uphold human rights standards.

In July 2018, women human rights defenders from 17 countries - from Brazil to Cambodia to Togo to USA - gathered at the UN Headquarters in New York. They demanded:

"We don't want another anniversary... marked by violence, criminalization and the murder of women human rights defenders. We don't want more speeches that are soft on the governments and private interests that are devastating our land, territories, and bodies. We demand respect, holistic security and safety, and our right to defend human rights without fear. Our legitimate voices should no longer be silenced and ignored." (Read: [We've Had Enough: Call to Action for Protection of WHRDs and their Communities](#))

Yet today, on International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, at least a dozen Saudi women human rights defenders continue to be detained, without a charge, since May 2018 for demanding an end to the male guardianship system that renders women legal minors. The activists have been banned from accessing lawyers, and many have been unable to speak to worried family and friends. Recent reports indicates the use of torture and sexual violence against some of the detained activists.

WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN SAUDI ARABIA FACE HARASSMENT, ARRESTS AND VIOLENCE EVERY DAY



BECAUSE THEY ARE WOMEN,
AND BECAUSE THEY MAY
STEP OUTSIDE TRADITIONAL
GENDER NORMS TO
PUBLICLY ADVOCATE FOR EQUALITY.

“The case of the Saudi women human rights defenders is emblematic of the ongoing and sinister global trend of silencing, often violently, individuals and groups who challenge patriarchal norms and structures. And sadly, the impunity the Saudi government faces is equally - shamefully - emblematic” said Salma El Hosseiny, ISHR’s Human Rights Council advocate.

“The systematic violence and exclusion faced by women human rights defenders is carried out by governments as well as corporate interests, fundamentalist groups and other private actors who increasingly wield power over public institutions. How can they be so terrified that women can be the agents of not only their own change, but of societal transformation towards justice and equality?” said Pooja Patel, Programme Director at ISHR.

To support women human rights defenders:

States must ensure a safe and enabling environment in which women human rights defenders can do their legitimate work. This includes by investigating all allegations of attacks against women human rights defenders by State and non-State actors.

The **United Nations** must reaffirm its commitment to the recognition and protection of women human rights defenders, including by ensuring that they have access to and are able to engage in multilateral processes and decisions. This engagement with the UN should be free from any reprisals.

Human rights movements and the international human rights community should be strengthened by addressing the discrimination against women human rights defenders within our own struggles, and to recognise the collective power of women human rights defenders and feminist perspectives.

ISHR