

## [States failing in duty to prevent intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders](#)

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(Geneva, 9 September 2013) – States are failing in their duty to protect human rights defenders from acts of intimidation and reprisal, according to a [major new report](#) to be launched tomorrow by the International Service for Human Rights.

The report focuses on reprisals against human rights defenders in retaliation for their efforts to promote human rights, expose and ensure accountability for violations, and obtain redress and justice for victims at the United Nations.

'Human rights defenders from all regions of the world continue to face intimidation, harassment, attacks and reprisals for their work to promote and protect human rights at the UN,' said ISHR Legal Counsel Madeleine Sinclair.

'Reprisals range from State-sponsored smear campaigns, to the de-registration or closure of NGOs, to arbitrary arrest and detention, to torture, ill-treatment and even death.'

The report calls on States to enact national laws and policies that protect human rights defenders, provide people with a right of unhindered access to UN human rights bodies, and prohibit all forms of intimidation or reprisal against people for their work to promote human rights or ensure accountability for violations at the international level.

'Our research demonstrates that only a small minority of countries have enacted laws which are clearly directed at protecting human rights defenders and prohibiting and penalising reprisals,' said Ms Sinclair.

'Such laws would not only contribute to reducing reprisals, but also to building an enabling environment in which human rights and their defenders are recognised as essential contributors to peace, security and development.'

The report will be launched at an [event to be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva](#) where the UN Human Rights Council is holding its 24th session. Event speakers include UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Flavia Pansieri, Bahraini human rights activist Maryam Al-Khawaja, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission chief Professor Michael O'Flaherty, and ISHR Legal Counsel Madeleine Sinclair.

In addition to discussing the role of States in addressing reprisals, the panel will also discuss the responsibilities of the United Nations itself in this regard.

'It is incumbent on the UN to protect those who courageously contribute to its work,' Ms Sinclair said.

'ISHR calls on the Human Rights Council – the UN's peak human rights body – to show leadership in this regard by authorising the appointment of a high-level, UN-wide focal point to coordinate the international response to reprisals and intervene in alleged cases. Working together, the Council and high-level focal point could play a critical role in ensuring that States properly investigate cases of reprisals, prosecute and punish perpetrators, and provide appropriate remedies to victims.'

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