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The Nobel Women's Initiative convened a [conference](#) in April 2015 in the Hague of 120 women, including Nobel peace laureates and frontline activists from the Middle East, Africa and

With Regard to this Monitor

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) around the world face a variety of violations, risks and constraints in carrying out their work, and yet they remain largely invisible and unacknowledged. Many of the violations they face are under-reported, and those that are reported remain unpunished. WHRDs face heightened vulnerability to attacks from non-State actors, particularly their own communities. In instances where they face violations potentially unrelated to their gender, these have gendered consequences. It is of concern that the intimidation and harassment faced by WHRDs is increasingly becoming normalized under a prevailing culture of impunity. In this edition of the Monitor, ISHR seeks to recognize the valuable work of WHRDs and their networks, understand their challenges and underscore their specific protection needs.

Opinion

Defending the Defenders: a Daunting Challenge

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

By Jody Williams, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 and Chair of the Nobel Women's Initiative

Central America. The aim was to deepen the understanding of the risks faced by WHRDs, and to develop strategies to strengthen efforts to defend the women human rights defenders

to discuss how the international community can better protect women human rights defenders across the globe. The following [article](#) was first published on openDemocracy on 24 April 2015.

(The Hague, 24 April 2015) - Geneva, Some of the people most at risk in the world are those who dare to work to promote and defend the human rights of us all. Not surprisingly, because women are always among the most vulnerable in a world that still chooses to treat us as beings with something less than an equal status with men - and because their very act of speaking up and taking action against authority is a threat to the patriarchal status quo - it is women defenders who are most frequently under threat and attack. They need and deserve our support.

Some 120 women who work to protect and promote human rights around the world are meeting in the Netherlands from April 24 to 26, at the 5th biennial [conference](#) convened by the Nobel Women's Initiative. Many of the women coming to the conference are those we have met and worked with through Nobel Women's Initiative delegations to the Thai/Burma border, to Palestine/Israel, to Liberia, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the Tar Sands of Alberta, Canada, and to Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala.

The purpose of these various trips and others, in their essence, is to gather evidence and first-hand stories of the impact of escalating violence against women and their rights, assess the role and response of governments and regional bodies, and evaluate ways of supporting women who are organizing to protect themselves and their communities. We are coming together in the Netherlands to deepen our understanding of the most recent risks for activists, and to strategize about how to strengthen efforts to defend the defenders. It is a daunting challenge.

Human rights activists around the globe tackle a wide range of issues, from defending the right to life and human dignity, to the defence of land rights and the environment, to socio-economic justice and to disarmament and arms control. Human rights defenders promote and defend freedom of speech and association as well as denouncing torture, forced disappearances and extra-judicial executions. And these name only a few of the areas they tackle.

With our rights under attack - either directly or by being eroded over time - women defenders are more vulnerable than ever.

When they stand up to protect and promote human rights in countries all around the world, women defenders are frequently subjected to intimidation and persecution, defamation campaigns, criminalization and illegal arrests. They endure cruel and inhumane treatment, rape, forced disappearance, murder, threats against themselves and their families, robbery and home invasion and destruction.

Once women human rights defenders speak on behalf of others, nothing in their own lives is sacred any more - including the security of their family members.

Unfortunately, and not surprisingly, despite the high rhetoric and resolutions of the UN, governments and high-profile/powerful individuals alike - both about human rights and defending the defenders - that rhetoric rarely trickles down to meaningful action for people working on the front lines where rights are most under attack, and impunity for the violators, despite some inroads, seems virtually inviolable.

Women everywhere are tired of hearing governments offer up new reports or new commissions or special positions created to “study” violence against women and come up with recommendations to address the problem. Women in Mexico, for example, reported that the government simulates compliance with international treaties and norms on preventing and addressing violence against women rather than make real changes.

International treaties and norms, domestic laws and new reports and recommendations are worth less than the paper they are written on if they are not enforced and implemented.

And it can be worse than that. Governments are more than willing to turn a blind eye to human rights violations if defending our rights gets in the way of either “national interest” or economic interests. In the competing arenas of government policies, economic power and money, and the human and civil rights of people around the world, our rights are almost always the first to go. And often as the erosion of human rights escalates, so does the rhetoric about their importance and/or the importance of “balancing” human rights with threats against “security.”

Defending human rights can be life threatening for anyone taking the risk, but women fighting to defend their land and way of life in the face of huge economic interests - such as extraction industries and oil and gas interests - are increasingly vulnerable. In mid-April, Global Witness released a new report, “[How Many More?](#)”, indicating that at least 116 environmental activists were murdered in 2014, almost double the number of journalists killed in the same period, and that indigenous communities are the hardest hit.

While the report does not indicate how many of those 116 activists were women, it is safe to say that many were. Another report on climate justice and women’s rights notes that while there is a lot of money for work on climate and the environment, [little of it goes to support women](#). At the same time the report states that women environmental activists are very vulnerable because they tend to work at the grassroots community level and the threats against them are mostly undocumented.

Widespread violence against women and women human rights defenders is a top priority not only for humanitarian reasons, but because it represents a serious violation of human rights, and clearly demonstrates governments’ non-compliance with two fundamental obligations: to guarantee the safety and rights of their citizens and to eliminate discrimination.

Too many women human rights defenders have suffered this violence, and countless numbers who have refused to remain silent have lost their lives as a result. When governments fail to protect, we carry the collective responsibility to fight for human rights and justice. Women human rights defenders are under attack and international support and solidarity is crucial in defending the defenders, and also in pushing governments to demonstrate the political will needed to bring about real change in people’s lives.

We must build enough public awareness and pressure to force governments to do what they should be doing anyway - and that is protecting and promoting equality and the human rights of us all.

Women Human Rights Defender Profiles

(Geneva, 1 June 2015) - Women human rights defenders from around the world speak to ISHR of the motivations behind their work, the challenges they face in undertaking human rights activities and their needs for better recognition and protection. Each woman defender further highlighted that their work at the national level is further strengthened to the strategic engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, particularly for the implementation of international human rights law concerning the rights of women.

Ahlem Belhadj: Feminist activist from Tunisia

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

Ahlem Belhadj talks to ISHR about her experiences as a women human rights defender in Tunisia; a country that was commended by the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 26 May 2015 for its recent progress in terms of respect for democratic voices and civil society.

Ahlem Belhadj has been working for the promotion and protection of women's rights in Tunisia, fighting for sexual parity and social equality, for three decades. She participated in her first march in celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March 1983, and was an active and prominent human rights defender throughout the Jasmine Revolution in 2011.

Ahlem joined a [high-level side event](#) during the 28th session of the Human Rights Council to explore strategies to ensure better protection of WHRDs at the national level.

In talking about her past, Ahlem openly described the additional struggles she faced as a result of her husband, Brik Zoghلامي, being imprisoned and then being prohibited from practicing law in Tunisia on his release.

'This was challenging for me. I had to continue to work and raise our children. I was also targeted because of my work – and criticised by conservatives who perceived me as anti-Muslim. I have been called a liar, prostitute, and an enemy of democracy.'

Ahlem is a member and former president of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD). ATFD is dedicated to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, the transformation of patriarchal attitudes, the defence of women's acquired rights, and the participation of women in all aspects of political and civil rights.

Ahlem acknowledged that there have been successes in terms of women's rights in Tunisia recently. In doing so, she referred to the introduction of the charter of the Constitution guaranteeing equality between genders, and the removal of reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

However, Ahlem explained to ISHR that notwithstanding these developments, ATFD and its members continue to face significant opposition to their activities in Tunisia.

'Our meetings are interrupted by officials and we suffer moral attacks, including being called prostitutes.'

She also expressed continuing concern for the rights of women in Tunisia, explaining that there is still a long way to go.

'While there has been positive development recently in Tunisia, there has not been any change in the law and women still face discrimination. I am concerned that this discrimination will continue if conservative opinions remain in power.'

In speaking of the United Nations, Ahlem acknowledges the important role that its mechanisms play in guaranteeing equality for women.

'We engage in the United Nations mechanisms that are available to us, but I think that everyday tools need to be established so that women human rights defenders in Tunisia feel protected by, and they are able to access, the mechanisms of the United Nations. We also need to ensure that these mechanisms are available for any person who legitimately works to protect the rights of women. Attacks on women human rights defenders in Tunisia by the government are still often met with impunity.'

Ahlem places a critical importance on solidarity in bringing about change.

'Solidarity is the key ingredient. Solidarity brings results. It is important to work together to create visibility. This in turn will assist with accessing UN mechanisms. As a network we can work together.'

Alejandra Burgos: Woman defender working on sexual and reproductive rights in El Salvador

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

Alejandra Burgos is Coordinator of the [Salvadoran Network of Women Human Rights Defenders](#), which aims to articulate efforts for the protection of women defenders and the promotion of women's rights. She is based in San Salvador, El Salvador.

Alejandra was in Geneva to carry out advocacy ahead of El Salvador's UPR and to participate in a high profile [Side Event](#) on the protection of women defenders alongside the 28th session of the UN Human Rights Council. She took some time out to speak to ISHR about her work and the obstacles facing human rights defenders in her country, particularly those working in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

'One of our main demands is that the government recognise the legitimacy of our struggle.'

Alejandra highlighted that human rights defence in El Salvador is criminalised, so what is needed is to move to the other extreme in which laws and policies recognise and protect human rights defenders.

According to Alejandra, another issue is the lack of information available to defenders.

'Human rights defenders in El Salvador also need more information regarding the mechanisms which exist to protect their human rights, and at the same time those mechanisms must be strengthened. For example, we have a national human rights institution, but it has very few resources and a limited mandate: it must be strengthened.'

The women defenders network has identified that the risks facing women defenders are exacerbated when those women also work on issues which imply particularly high levels of risk. For example WHRDs working on issues of land and territory face ever more grave threats.

Alejandra also told ISHR that the rise in organised crime related to drug trafficking has implied changes to the reality of everybody in El Salvador, including human rights defenders.

'It affects everything. People don't even feel safe at home, for example, and are starting to employ more armed guards. The struggle for land has intensified too, with communities coming head to head with drug gangs who want to control territory. Human rights defenders in some regions have to negotiate with gangs simply to be able to do their work. More and more people are displaced or migrate due to insecurity.'

The impact of this context upon human rights defenders becomes even more complicated when the authorities automatically blame crimes on gangs before an investigation is carried out.

'It becomes very difficult to show that an attack on an activist was a consequence of their human rights defence and not simply a criminal attack. This becomes even more complicate when you bear in mind the fact that those who want to attack human rights defenders often employ gang members to carry out attacks disguised as casual crimes. What's more, before an investigation has taken place, the authorities often come out to say 'we believe this victim was linked to organised crime.'

Alejandra identifies the regional Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Panama, as an important ally, whilst representatives of the Organisation of American States have also visited and shown support for the work of defenders.

'When these international mechanisms visit or speak out, they help us to open doors which are usually closed to us and suddenly we can sit down with different people in the government and have a different kind of conversation.'

Alejandra notes that there have been some positive changes in El Salvador, such as an increase in the number of women in public spaces and positions of power, whilst there are also increasingly more girls going to school and a strengthening of legislation for women's rights.

'These advances are the fruit of the struggles and activism of many women. But now the State needs to take the next steps to consolidate these changes and push on to the next level. Many of the institutions which have been created don't work or aren't properly funded and supported.'

In Geneva, Alejandra was speaking to key contacts about the demands she has of her own government, as well as international actors.

'We want a protocol for attention and protection for women human rights defenders. This in itself would provide us with recognition and increase our legitimacy. El Salvador is a member of the Human Rights Council now and we hope we can have more impact in demanding the respect of human rights within the country. We want the government's work at home to be coherent with its international statement of intent. Meanwhile internationally, the UN and the Inter American Commission for Human Rights could carry out a scientific and objective study of the laws in the continent which criminalise the work of WHRDs.'

Alejandra Burgos can be contacted at liaburgos1310@gmail.com. Follow her on Twitter: [@liaburgos1310](https://twitter.com/liaburgos1310)

Mary Akrami: woman defender from Afghanistan

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

Mary Akrami is the Executive Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Center (AWSDC) and the Chair of the Board for the Afghan Women's Network (AWN). In 2002, AWSDC established the first shelter for women at risk in Afghanistan. Mary was first prompted to start this shelter because she was shocked seeing women sleeping in the street at night. She was fearful for their wellbeing. Her resolve to act was heightened when we read a news story of a woman who had been arrested, and upon her release, was rejected by her family. Since then, there have been more than 25 shelters established across the country.

'My organisation and I opened the door for others to establish safehouses.'

In order to establish safe houses and a referral system, Mary has worked with both the police and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Although the government of Afghanistan has been known to shift back and forth in its support of the safe houses, Mary acknowledges that involving the government has been the best approach to her work and has been a means to hold government to account.

'It is my responsibility as a human, as a woman, to do this work.'

In 2008, Mary was arrested because of her work running a women's shelter. Although she was released from jail only four hours later, the arrest had great personal consequences. At the time, Mary was engaged to be married, but because of her future in-laws outrage over her arrest, the engagement was cancelled. While running a women's shelter has greatly affected her personal life, Mary is still proud of the work that she is doing. At the moment, more than 2,000 women across Afghanistan are benefiting directly from the safe houses.

'We are the first organisation to offer protection, but we receive no protection ourselves.'

Mary has stressed the need for a mechanism that guarantees the protection of women human rights defenders in Afghanistan. Mary's life has been threatened as a result of her work, and without a protection mechanism to rely on, she was forced to use her personal connections in civil society, government and the police force in order to ensure her safety. She recognizes that this, however, is not the case for all defenders, and those without these crucial personal connections are in even more danger.

Mary emphasized the need for core funding for women's organisations in Afghanistan. The safe houses currently receive enough funding to keep them running, but the same cannot be said for the organisations that set up the safe houses or carry out advocacy to address the underlying causes of the need for safe houses. The lack of funding also means that these organisations cannot afford the security equipment that is required to ensure the safety of women defenders while they are doing their work.

In August 2009, the Government of Afghanistan the Law of Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW law). Although the EVAW law was a big steps towards the realization of gender equality and the protection of women's rights in Afghanistan, the law is currently under threat. Mary has expressed her concern over the lack of implementation of the law.

'It is so important for women to be at the heart of political debate and participation, their role is crucial in political decision-making including in the peace negotiation processes.'

Pierre Fritznel: defender of women's human rights from Haiti

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

Pierre Fritznel is the Executive Director of Combite pour la Paix et le Développement, an NGO in Haiti focusing on combatting violence against women and ensuring the participation of women in reconstruction efforts. He spoke with ISHR while in New York in March 2015 to attend the Commission on the Status of Women

'The risks we encounter in our work are many, especially in a town like Cité Soleil that is deemed to be very dangerous, it is obvious that members of the organization will quite often face threats and intimidation on the part of both State authorities as well as civil armed groups.'

Pierre recalls on 8 March 2012, his organization commemorated International Women's Day with the camp for internally displaced women, Parc Jean Marie Vincent, which was disrupted by supporters of the government. The government at the time had advocated for the relocation of families from a program that was to give 500 USD to each family. The IDPs complained of this program by proposing instead that the government build villages or community housing for the internally displaced.

'While no national protective mechanisms exist in Haiti for human rights defenders facing risks and threats, we do not hesitate to inform UN agencies such as MINUSTAH through its human rights section and the foreign diplomatic presences in the country.'

Pierre believes that human rights defenders need a global platform or international structure to bring them together for solidarity and common learning. Such a strategy would strengthen the protection of human rights defenders.

'Perhaps this generation human rights defenders may not enjoy the necessary changes that are the result of their work - as is the case of our colleagues who are no longer here: René Cassaint from France, Jean Claude Bajeux from Haiti and Floribert Chebeya from Congo. However, if we continue to fight together by building bridges to adopt global strategies, future generations can expect real change.'

Pierre also recommended that a Convention on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders be developed, signed and ratified by all United Nations member States, while likewise ensuring that regional bodies protect human rights.

'Today many human rights defenders are imprisoned, killed and harassed because of their work. UN Special Procedures should also be informed on how to deal with cases when the families of human rights defenders are targeted as a result of their work.'

Pierre highlights that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action constituted a major advance in the rights of women around the world. In Haiti, for example, since 1986 there are efforts in changing some of the laws in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action program, however the Haitian population is not informed of this Declaration to ensure its full implementation. Pierre views that the right to information of the population is thus violated. Many of these laws open the door to new concerns, such as discrimination between rural and urban women, misallocation of resources, etc.

Pierre believes that a new approach is needed for the implementation of international obligations, particularly in countries that are poor and suffer from corruption and misappropriation of funds. Greater South-South cooperation with genuine intentions is a step in the right direction.

‘Women’s rights will be respected in poor countries the day that States and other national and international actors work better together to change the perceptions of a society that place barriers on ensuring the equal rights of women.’

CSW: Civil Society Calls States to Account on Failure to Name or Engage with Women Human Rights Defenders

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

(New York, 29 May 2015) - This year’s Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), marked the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPA). Both the content of the session’s outcome document and the process that led to its drafting had drawn criticism from women’s rights and sexual rights groups.

Each 5-year anniversary of the BDPA is marked by a Political Declaration. This year, the text was adopted on the first day of the session with little opportunity for input by civil society during its negotiation.¹ This process was criticized widely by women’s rights and sexual rights groups.

A group [of human rights organisations concerned with the rights of LGBTI people](#) called for ‘accountability and transparency in negotiations’ and demanded ‘to be recognized in these negotiations that directly impact our communities and lives.’ They contrasted the level of discussion on sexual orientation, for example, at this year’s session with the open and extensive discussion twenty years previously in Beijing, as well as currently in other UN fora, suggesting that CSW was stepping back from gains hard fought in other arenas.

The [Coalition for African Lesbians](#) raised their alarm at the way space for ‘genuine inclusion, engagement, resistance and expression of women’s rights, including women human rights defenders and others from civil society concerned with the human rights of women, has been shrinking in recent years at the Commission on the Status of Women’.

In the Political Declaration, States acknowledge that ‘progress has been slow and uneven, that major gaps remain and that obstacles, including, inter alia, structural barriers, persist in the implementation of the [12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action](#).’ The exclusion of civil society from discussions with States during CSW is all the more inexplicable given that [CSW working methods](#) focus upon ‘ways and means to accelerate the implementation of commitments in the context of current challenges’, an issue that civil society is very well placed to assist States in assessing.

Whilst the Political Declaration welcomes ‘the contributions made by civil society, including non-governmental organisations and women’s and community-based organisations to the implementation of the Platform for Action’ and pledges to continue promoting ‘a safe and enabling environment for civil society’ there are no references to women human rights defenders in the text.

‘Only 15 months ago, all UN member States committed to a range of measures to protect women human rights defenders in the General Assembly resolution on the Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders’ said Ms Patel, Manager of ISHR’s Women Human Rights Defenders Programme. ‘It

¹ CSW Agreed Conclusions are otherwise adopted at the end of the session, allowing for some informal engagement with civil society in its definition.

is incredibly disappointing that the Political Declaration fails to include even a reference to WHRDs. Nevertheless, civil society will continue to work diligently to hold for the implementation of their commitments and obligations under international human rights law,’

‘The General Assembly resolution includes references to the importance of public acknowledgement of WHRDs as key to their protection. Inexplicably, States fail to do so when an opportunity is missed on a global platform, said Ms Patel. ‘Inter-governmental human rights processes must aim to move the respect of human rights forward – or at the very least hold the line.’

Nearly [1000 women’s rights groups](#) added their voices to criticism of the content of the Political Declaration. They outlined what they consider minimum commitments in a Declaration.

Although the Political Declaration contains many gaps, there has been some progress made through its adoption. For the first time, language referring to a “safe and enabling environment” has been included in a CSW declaration or outcome document, echoing agreed language from other key UN documents regarding States’ obligations toward the protection of human rights defenders.

Finally, this year’s CSW was taking place as the post 2015 agenda is taking shape. States acknowledge the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to achieving ‘the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals’.² The lack of engagement with women human rights defenders during CSW and ahead of finalizing their outcome document, adds to concerns about civil society engagement during post 2015 negotiations

The Political Declaration of CSW’s 59th Session ends with a commitment to ‘strive for the full realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women by 2030.’ ‘States should recognize that their best partners in such an endeavour are women defenders, and that part of enabling their work is to acknowledge this engagement and safeguard it’ stressed Ms Patel.

Human Rights Council: Ensure explicit recognition and genuine participation of WHRDs

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

(Geneva, 2 June 2015) - The Human Rights Council must ensure that women human rights defenders are explicitly recognized in its upcoming agenda during its 29th session, said the International Service for Human Rights.

The Council will adopt a resolution on combatting all forms of violence and discrimination against women at the close of the 29th session, which includes a focus on domestic violence against women.

‘Women defenders supporting victims of domestic violence in documenting and reporting cases as well as in access to justice of victims often themselves face threats, intimidation and harassment as a result of their work’ said Ms Pooja Patel, Programme Manager on WHRDs.

‘At the very least, the Council must recognize the role that WHRDs play towards accountability for human rights abuses’ added Ms Patel.

Resolution 68/181 adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly in 2013 expresses particular concern *‘about systemic and structural discrimination and violence faced by women human rights defenders*

² CSW Political Declaration, OP7

of all ages’ and it ‘calls upon States to take all measures necessary to ensure their protection and to integrate a gender perspective into their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights’.

‘Women defenders are also integral in ensuring domestic implementation of international human rights standards on addressing violence and discrimination against women’, highlighted Ms Patel.

ISHR also highlighted the importance of ensuring inclusive and genuine participation of WHRDs in the process of deliberating Human Rights Council outcomes, particularly those initiatives concerning the rights of women.

‘It is deeply regretful that many women human rights defenders engaging with the Commission on the Status of Women in March this year expressed their concerns at the lack of inclusion on the part of States’ said Ms Patel.

‘Public acknowledgement of WHRDs and their work in intergovernmental spaces serves to better ensure their protection’, she added.

WHRD International Coalition Celebrates 10 Years

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

By Sarah Marland, Coordinator of the WHRD International Coalition

(Chiang Mai, 29 May 2015) - Before the campaign on Women Human Rights Defenders in 2005, there was little understanding of who women human rights defenders are and the unique risks they face. Through that campaign, national and international recognition of women human rights defenders and their work has increased markedly. In 2008, building on their success, organisations driving the campaign became a formal coalition for the protection of women human rights defenders.

Establishing the [Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition \(WHRDIC\)](#) increased coordination and maximised opportunities for organisations to complement each other’s work. It generated new perspectives and analyses and also attracted funding to support initiatives for the protection of women human rights defenders. The added value of the coalition was in bringing together organisations from different movements – women’s rights, human rights and sexual rights – to work for the protection of women human rights defenders. These principles remain central to the coalition’s purpose although there has been a shift from recognition of WHRDs to implementation of the gains of the last decade.

The growth of fundamentalisms, militarism and conflict, globalisation, crises of democracy, patriarchy and heteronormativity across the world put women human rights defenders at increased risk. The alarming escalation in violence against WHRDs and violations of their rights in recent years demonstrates the urgent need for better analysis on issues affecting WHRDs, the importance of strengthening protection mechanisms and support networks for WHRDs across the globe and strengthening of global movements to sustain women defenders. With this in mind, the WHRDIC has developed a three year strategic plan that aims to address the specific needs of women human rights defenders and their movements.

The first goal is to build and advance the knowledge base about WHRDs through analyses, documentation, research, and training to enable policy and law makers at the international and

regional levels to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of WHRDs, ensure greater recognition and validation of WHRDs work and to work towards better mechanisms for their protection. As a global network, the WHRDIC is in a unique position to do broad documentation of violations against WHRDs and identify trends both regionally and globally. In 2015 we will produce research on the impact of extractive industries on WHRDs and will develop other research projects in the following years. The WHRDIC will also publish tools to support the documentation of WHRDs work of and violations perpetrated against them through a gender lens.

The second goal is to coordinate timely responses and systematic interventions for WHRDs at risk. The WHRDIC facilitates coordination with other groups and organisations who are also responding and in the coming years will implement systems to track and learn from effectiveness of Coalition and member organisations' urgent responses especially the value add of joint responses. The WHRDIC will also support member organisations to include a stronger gender and contextual analysis when they respond to WHRDs at risk help to provide more effective and appropriate responses. We can mobilise when a defender is at risk and use the resources of all the agencies to try to ensure their safety.

Integrating our broad analysis and work with individual defenders, the third goal is to influence policy frameworks and institutions at the global and regional level to advance the provision of adequate support and protection for WHRDs. Through our member organisations we will work to influence States and international institutions to take steps to implement resolutions related to WHRDs and better strategies and policies for prevention and protection of WHRDs. The WHRDIC will ensure that WHRDs and their issues are visible and represented at pertinent international and regional fora and take steps to include WHRDs in language in UN documents.

Finally, the WHRDIC aims to strengthen the sustainability of WHRDs as individuals, as well as their organisations and movements. In the absence of substantive protection from the UN, regional bodies and national governments, it is the networks of women human rights defenders themselves that provide protection. These networks have become vital in both raising international awareness and drawing attention to issues, but also for the women themselves for recognition and validity of their work and solidarity with global movements.

In the decade since the consultation in Sri Lanka that kick-started the WHRD campaign, the WHRDIC has had many successes. It has increased recognition of women human rights defenders and their work. Through the Coalition, WHRDs around the world find solidarity, support, collaboration and the sharing of information and resources. Organisations supported by the Coalition have adopted the WHRD framework, and networks of women human rights defenders have been created in a number of countries and regions. Analysis provided by WHRDIC has contributed to some landmark international reports and in 2013 UN General Assembly adopted the [resolution](#), 'Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders'. In the next ten years, the WHRDIC will strive to make more of these remarkable gains so that women human rights defenders around the world are recognised, supported and protected.

The Need for Protection Networks for Women Human Rights Defenders

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

By Marusia López Cruz and Cristina Hardaga Fernández, JASS – Just Associates - Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders

(Mexico City, 1 June 2015) - The Resolution on the Protection of Women Human Rights Defenders,³ the first of its kind and adopted on 18 December 2013 by the United Nations General Assembly, calls upon States (and society as a whole) to recognize the contribution of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in building peace, justice and equality. It also states that many women engaged in promoting and defending human rights face threats and harassment as a result of those activities. These are determined by a context of systematic violence and structural discrimination against women, which is expressed - among other things - in a lack of access to justice, through persistent impunity for violations against WHRDs and the lack of recognition – in different places and situations – of the legitimate role and contribution of women in the protection of human rights.⁴

In Mesoamerica, the obstacles WHRDs face are volatile and vary depending upon the situation. Nevertheless exclusion, discrimination and gender inequality are constant. High levels of violence against women, unproportioned domestic and care workloads, plus a cultural environment that ‘punishes’ those who challenge gender standards and stereotypes, are just some of the factors that generate adverse conditions for WHRDs, inhibiting women’s political and social participation, as well as creating additional risks.

In this framework, it is common that women defending human rights are questioned by their families and poorly appreciated or respected by their governments, authorities, communities, and even by their own organizations. As a consequence, when they face an unsafe situation, they usually don’t have a solid network for their support and protection. As a response to this condition, the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative (IMD)⁵ has centered its work since 2010 on building and promoting protective networks for WHRDs. IMD understands that a woman human rights defender is any woman who, individually or in association with others, seeks to transform any situation of inequality, injustice and violence, actively exercising her right to participation and freedom of expression.

³ UN Resolution 68/181 ‘Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders’.

⁴ UN Resolution 68/181 ‘Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders’. Pages 2 and 3.

⁵ IM-Defensoras was founded by a political alliance between JASS Mesoamerica, Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad, Oaxaca (México), Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala, (UDEFEQUA), La Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local (El Salvador), AWID-Association for Women’s Rights in Development, and the Central American Women’s Fund(FCAM). For further information, please contact imdefensoras@gmail.com. Our most recent publications include (in Spanish): IM-Defensoras Report for the IACHR, Diagnosis on the Situation of the Protection of WHRDs 2014 and Violence Against Women 2012.

<http://es.scribd.com/doc/214940590/Informe-de-la-IM-Defensoras-ante-CIDH-27-03-2014-Diagnóstico-2012>

<http://es.scribd.com/doc/166580906/DIAGNOSTICO-2012-VIOLENCIA-CONTRA-DEFENSORAS-DE-DERECOS-HUMANOS-EN-MESOAMERICA-IM-DEFENSORAS>

<http://es.scribd.com/doc/223570458/TRAVESIAS-PARA-PENSAR-Y-ACTUAR-EXPERIENCIAS-DE-AUTOUIDADO-DE-DEFENSORAS-DE-DERECOS-HUMANOS-EN-MESOAMERICA>

For us, building and promoting WHRDs networks is important for their potential to create safe spaces for women to discuss and analyse situations of violence (both because of their work and gender), to generate the conditions to express fears, guilt, needs and uncertainties without fear of being identified or questioned, as well as to recognise and strengthen their empowerment. Because of the focus on the situation and needs of women human rights defenders, these networks can be adapted to build specific protection and support measures for women defenders to cope with risk and prevent it. Network protection schemes generally allow faster reactions to emergencies and optimise existing resources; furthermore, they offer women defenders at risk a wide range of experience, capacities and protection strategies developed by the various members of the network. Finally, through these networks defenders can amplify their colleagues complaints of reported aggressions and generate information on the situation to guide policies for the State's protection from a gender perspective.

IMD is now made up of national networks focused on the protection of women human rights defenders in Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Together, they are linked to more than 690 women working for human rights in many different areas and themes. These networks pull together the experiences, knowledge and resources of a wide range of organisations and women, regardless of their self-definition, workplace or hierarchy within their organizations and movements. These networks also denounce and document attacks faced by WHRDs, regardless of the origin or the actors involved in such violence; they support specific cases of women defenders at risk in coordination with a wide range of organisations specialised in protection issues both nationally and internationally; and they develop protection skills from a gender perspective.

Support networks do not replace the obligation upon governmental authorities to ensure a safe environment for people to exercise their right to defend human rights. However, they can contribute to State action: following up and ensuring legislative and administrative provisions to facilitate, rather than criminalise, the work of women human rights defenders; developing measures to modify social and cultural patterns that underlie violence against women; promoting the establishment of institutional mechanisms and protective measures to integrate a gender perspective, and ensuring due diligence to bring to justice and prevent violations and abuses against defenders' rights, among other things.⁶ They also allow WHRDs to amplify their voices and provide greater visibility and recognition to their work, whilst networks contribute in a logic of active citizen participation, to put on the public agenda needs, risks and situations faced by women defenders and create a space for solidarity, support and guidance to protect their life and integrity.

Networks save and strengthen the collective power of women who work for a better world.

WHRDS from Asia Highlight Key Concerns Regarding Challenges Faced when Carrying out Human Rights Activities

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

By Saartje Baes, Human Rights Defenders Programme Officer at Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development

(Bangkok, 29 May 2015) - Women human rights defenders in Asia had the opportunity to highlight the particular challenges they face in carrying out their human rights activities in a dialogue with the

⁶ UN Resolution 68/181 'Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders'. Pages 3, 4, 6.

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. The participants raised concerns related to harassment, threats and attacks that WHRDs in Asia are confronted with, which challenge discriminatory cultural, religious or social norms. As WHRDs, they face human rights violations because of their work as human rights defenders, and also have to deal with risks that are gender-specific.

In December 2014, human rights defenders from 22 countries in Asia participated in the [6th Asian Regional Human Rights Defenders Forum](#) in the Philippines. This Forum is organised biennially by the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA). The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Michel Forst, joined the event, making this his first visit to Asia since his appointment six months earlier.

Protection mechanisms

WHRDs in Asia work in a context where no regional protection mechanisms are in place, while supporting mechanisms are minimal. In this, Asia is lagging behind other regions.

The lack of recognition most of the WHRDs in Asia receive from both their governments and societies is a major factor in the lack of specific policies or mechanisms that are put in place for WHRDs. Meanwhile, those policies or mechanisms put in place for the protection of women do not take into account the particular status of women as WHRDs, in contrast to being victims, and the specific needs that come along with that. This exacerbates the vulnerable position WHRDs in Asia find themselves in. WHRDs have been denied protection or have been offered inadequate protective measures, leaving them to fend for themselves.

Non-State actors

WHRDs increasingly face threats from non-State actors, with authorities either being complicit or failing to take action. In recent years, WHRDs in Asia have been on the receiving end of increasing online intimidation, threats and harassment, facing backlash for their online advocacy. Examples shared by participants were those of doctored photos of WHRDs circulated via social media to discredit or shame them. Another example involved an entire blog dedicated to discrediting an LGBTI organisation and defaming LGBTI activists.

Other non-State actors, such as religious groups, were named as specifically attacking the morality of WHRDs by portraying them as 'loose' or 'bad women'. As the meeting took place in Manila, the influence of the Catholic Church was specifically mentioned. WHRDs shared that there is no one to turn to when the Church turns against them because of their work on particular issues, such as on reproductive rights.

Family and private life

One participant discussed the difficulties of addressing issues in the private sphere. For example, women working with victims of domestic abuse often find it difficult to ensure protection from the husband of the victim. Similar difficulties arise when the perpetrator is family of the WHRD.

Others raised the issue of being pressurised by their husband or family to discontinue their work. Such pressure may also come from extended family and community networks. Few male human

rights defenders will face such pressure. In many instances, this has led WHRDs to leave their human rights work.

Asian WHRDs at risk

For the Asian region, women defending land, natural resources or indigenous women, were named as particularly at risk. More so, since they are often in remote areas, it is difficult for them to get access to justice.

WHRDs working on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as sexual and reproductive rights, are often not recognized for their work as human rights defenders. This not only means that they are excluded from consultation or funding opportunities, but it also limits the protection they should receive from protection or support schemes aimed at human rights defenders. While the LGBTI movement appears to be growing in some countries, one WHRD shared that the relative invisibility of LGBTI activists was one of the most disheartening aspects of her work.

Similarly, while Asia has a high migrant and refugee population, migrant and refugee WHRDs are often not on the radar. Consequently, they are not included in national protection or support schemes, while they are also faced with unsympathetic sentiments from nationals.

Recommendations

In their recommendations, the WHRDs called on Asian governments, as well as national, regional and international institutions, to publicly recognise the role of WHRDs as well as the gender-based discrimination they face. Governments should ensure effective protection of WHRDs, which needs to go beyond mere physical protection and be in line with their specific needs and realities. Too often, 'everyday' harassment is dismissed until a WHRD's civil or political rights are curtailed.

WHRDs urged media to cover news on WHRDs as their stories are underrepresented in coverage. Visibility and education are widely recognised tools to mitigate threats. Participants further pointed out that civil society organisations should address the lack of 'intersectionality' in their work. Many organisations merely focus on their own specific area of expertise, while collaboration across issues would likely be beneficial for all. At times this might even mean that victims or human rights defenders that are currently not being supported by anyone would be included. For example, there are no organisations focusing specifically on LGBTI who are also migrant workers or LGBTI people with disabilities. There is a need for a mechanism to monitor and document cases of violations against LGBTI activists, in particular to determine when incidents start becoming a pattern.

Lastly, the participants identified supporting networks as a particularly efficient means to confront the critical situation in the region. These networks should include victims, to facilitate the transformation from victim to WHRD. As one of the participants put it: "We refuse to keep silent. Threats will not disappear with silence."

Middle East & North Africa WHRD Coalition - a Glimpse of Hope

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

By Amal Elmohandes, Director of the Women Human Rights Defenders Programme at Nazra for Feminist Studies

(Cairo, 29 May 2015) - Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have identified a clear necessity for establishing a regional coalition to address the problems and challenges that patriarchal societies impose on WHRDs' activism, in addition to the dramatic political and societal changes that have taken place. In particular, in the context of what is referred to as the “Arab Spring”, an increase in systematic abusive application of security and legal procedures against WHRDs have exacerbated risks for WHRDs in countries that experienced the “Arab Spring” directly, as well as in those that haven't.

[Nazra for Feminist Studies](#) and the [WHRD International Coalition](#) both raised their concerns over the particularly dire situation of WHRDs in Egypt. Cases highlighted in their statements reflect a trend pervasive throughout the MENA region.

As such, the regional coalition seeks to enhance protection measures for WHRDs, including by enhancing documentation and monitoring of violations perpetrated against WHRDs in the MENA region. The regional coalition also aims to design solidarity mechanisms with WHRDs as well as building awareness and sensitization of the work of WHRDs and their role with the view to spread the culture of respect of and support for WHRDs.

Several organizations, feminists and WHRDs met in Cairo on 17-20 June 2013, based on an invitation from Nazra for Feminist Studies, to kick-start a series of discussions related to building such a regional coalition. A steering committee was formed, which proceeded to crystallize the ideas and develop the solid base for the regional coalition including drafting the code of conduct, regulations, objectives and membership criteria. It also established that the coalition's first General Assembly would be held on 23-26 February 2015.

To ensure an equal sense of ownership and responsibility amongst all members of the regional coalition, the coordination role was handed to a feminist group based in Lebanon, [Sawt AlNiswa](#)⁷, while an Executive Committee and several subcommittees were formed comprising of organisation with equitable geographical representation.

The MENA region is one that continues to suffer from deeply rooted patriarchal norms, fundamentalism and the severe political shifts and crises that only increase the violations faced by WHRDs in this region. It is deeply concerning that soon after the launch of the coalition on 8 March 2015, direct threats and violations were experienced by Executive Committee members. For instance, Egyptian lawyer and feminist Azza Soliman, who witnessed the killing of WHRD Shaimaa

⁷ Sawt AlNiswa is a network and a community of feminist writers, activists and artists working towards changing their realities by building a space that critically reflects on the social, political and intellectual experiences of women living in the Arab region.

ElSabbagh and was declared a defendant in the case related to the dispersal of an assembly to commemorate the 4th anniversary of the Egyptian January 25th Revolution. While she was acquitted on 23 May 2015, the General Prosecutor decided to appeal the verdict and the next court session is scheduled for 13 June 2015. Moreover, the airstrikes and war in Yemen resulted in the death of 2 WHRDs, as documented by a member of the coalition's Executive Committee, who also lost her younger brother to sniper shots.

Subsequently, the regional coalition has been very busy. It has worked on campaigns for Azza Soliman (Egypt) and Sandra Kodouda (Sudan), in addition to publishing a position paper on the situation of WHRDs in Yemen. Moreover, a [Facebook page](#) for the coalition has been created, and a website will be launched this year. Upcoming projects include the design of a preliminary protocol for the Emergency and Urgent Responses Committee, to map networks and groups that provide services related to the execution of the concerned committee's objectives, with reference to the Urgent Responses Document issued by [AWID](#), in addition to working on fundraising to sustain the coalition, and conducting workshops on documentation and digital security.

The WHRD MENA Coalition will be a platform that represents the voices of WHRDs from the region, shed light on the violations experienced by them, and act as an arena in which they can enhance necessary skills to network widely with WHRDs, from the MENA region or others, and skills necessary to continue their important work in defending rights in a region that presents a number of threats, challenges and barriers to their work.

African WHRDs call for stronger protection mechanisms

Este artículo también se encuentra en español [aquí](#).

Women human rights defenders from several African countries highlighted the need for strengthened legal frameworks to protect their rights and ensure an enabling and safe environment for them to conduct their work.

In a workshop organized by ISHR on 20 April, participants closely examined recommendations made to States Parties by the ACHPR in a [report released during its 56th session](#) focusing on the situation of WHRDs in Africa.

The African Commission Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Commissioner Reine Alapini Gansou, highlighted that the motivation behind the report came from the needs constantly articulated by WHRDs in the continent. *'African WHRDs are really in dire straits, many can't even travel to attend ACHPR sessions for fear of the threats they may face in their engagement'* said Ms Alapini Gansou.

Ms Alapini Gansou highlighted the interest the study received by States and the UN attending the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2015, when she had the opportunity to present preliminary findings at a high-level event.

'Let's work hard to ensure that we do not forget about this report by finding effective and practical steps for the implementation of its recommendations' stressed Ms Alapini Ganou.

Participants reiterated the recommendation calling for a law on the protection of HRDs, with specific reference to women defenders ensuring their explicit recognition and gender-specific protection.

Furthermore, that such laws are accompanied with a clear articulation by States regarding implementation plans and mechanisms.

'There are also laws that exist that discriminate against women in many African countries, such as inheritance laws. Meanwhile, there are laws that restrict the work of HRDs through their arbitrary application, such as national security laws. These laws all need to be reviewed in line with international human rights standards' said Ms Maxmillienne Ngo Mbe of the Central African Human Rights Defenders Network.

Participants identified the need to strengthen protection mechanisms at the national level, for instance ensuring that national human rights institutions are compliant with the Paris Principles and have HRD focal points who are able to respond to the specific needs of women defenders.

'While the State has the primary responsibility to ensure protection of all citizens in their country, the reality is that the State itself is also the perpetrator. As such, protection mechanisms for HRDs must be independent to be effective' said Ms Djingarey Maiga, a woman defender from Mali. *'Greater solidarity amongst African WHRDs through the creation of protection networks would also go a long way in enabling greater recognition of their work as well as generating peer support'* she added.

The women defenders also committed to interacting with government bodies, local authorities, parliamentarians and other activists to popularize and disseminate the report of the ACHPR focusing on WHRDs.

Key Developments in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

Tie you up, Throw you into Men's Prison, and let them Gang Rape you

Wu Rongrong, one of the Chinese Feminist Five has talked about her suffering during the police interrogation and her detention...[more](#)

Angolan Journalist Rafael Marques de Morais Receives Six-Month Suspended Sentence

Less than a week after celebrating an apparent dismissal of all charges, Rafael Marques de Morais who was sued for libel by a group of generals in connection to his book exposing corruption and human rights violations connected to the diamond trade in Angola, was handed down a six-month suspended sentence...[more](#)

URG Welcomes Advent of New Informal Council Briefings with High Commissioner

The Universal Rights Group welcomes the first informal briefing of the Human Rights Council by the High Commissioner. The briefing, resulting from requests from delegations and NGOs, improves the Council's ability to effectively interact with the High Commissioner...[more](#)

Angola: Fabricated Charges and Continued Detention of Activists a Mockery of Justice

Amnesty International, Lawyers for Human Rights, the Southern Africa Litigation Centre, the International Commission of Jurists and the SADC Lawyers' Association call for the immediate release of two human rights defenders imprisoned in a move to oppress freedom of expression in Angola...[more](#)

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion And Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

On 22 May 2015 the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression published his latest report. The report includes important recommendations on human rights defenders, including that legislation and regulations protecting human rights defenders and journalists should also include provisions enabling access and providing support to use the technologies to secure their communications...[more](#)

Niger: Human Rights Defenders Held Without Charge: Moussa Tchangari and Nouhou Azirka

Two human rights defenders, arrested on 18 and 24 May for after public statements on human rights violations during the state of emergency in the Diffa region in Niger and the poor working conditions of security forces, are being detained without charge in Niamey...[more](#)

Viet Nam: Release Tran Huynh Duy Thuc

Amnesty International, along with 36 national and international NGOs, calls for the release of prisoner of conscience Tran Huynh Duy Thuc who was imprisoned in May 2009 and is serving a 16 year sentence for blogging about political reform and human rights...[more](#)

For Judges Who Defy Turkey's Leaders, Short Road to Jail

In the lead up to the general election in June, the Turkish government's authoritarian tendencies of jailing journalists has extended to judges and prosecutors who issue decisions the government doesn't like. Over the past month, three judges and four prosecutors have been put in pre-trial detention, for discharging their professional duties, rather than on evidence of criminal activity...[more](#)

Turkmenistan: Growing Crackdown on Information Access

Turkmen authorities' have expanded their campaign to remove private satellite dishes from private homes in residential areas in an effort to block access to alternative sources of information, violating the right to access to information and freedom of speech...[more](#)

Myanmar Jails Six Activists who Opposed Copper Mine: Lawyer

Six activists opposed to the controversial Chinese-backed Letpadaung copper mine have been sentenced to over four years in prison. Rights groups are concerned that this move, along with the arrest of dozens of protesters and a crackdown on media freedoms, indicates that reforms are stalling...[more](#)

Peru Declares Emergency in Islay after Mine Protest Deaths

Peru declared a state of emergency in the coastal province of Islay, suspending constitutional rights – including freedom of transit and the right to hold meetings - after two months of protests of the construction of Southern Copper Corp.'s Tia Maria mine claimed a fourth life...[more](#)

Opportunities for NGO Engagement

Human Rights Council

The 29th regular session of the Council Session will be held on 15 June – 3 July in the Palais des Nations. Information and updates will be published [here](#).

The 15th session of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee will be held from [10 August to 14 August](#) in the Palais des Nations. The Advisory Committee functions as a think-tank for the Human Rights Council, focusing mainly on studies and research-based advice as requested by the Human Rights Council. NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC may submit written statements relevant to the work of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee ahead of the relevant session. Information and updated will be published [here](#).

Universal Periodic Review

The following States will be reviewed at the 24th session of the UPR which will be held in Jan/Feb 2016: Namibia, Niger, Mozambique, Estonia, Paraguay, Belgium, Denmark, Palau, Somalia, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Latvia, Sierra Leone, and Singapore. The deadline for NGO submissions is [22 June](#). Guidelines for submissions are found [here](#). Information about the UPR mechanism can be found [here](#).

Special Procedures

The Annual Meeting of special rapporteurs, independent experts and chairpersons of the working groups of the special procedures will be held on [8 to 12 June](#). Consultations with civil society will take place during this period. Information on consultations can be found [here](#).

Treaty Bodies

The 26th session of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture will be held on [15 to 19 June](#) on the 1st Floor of Palais Wilson. Information about the Subcommittee's work and the associated Optional Protocol can be found [here](#).

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women will meet in Geneva from [6 July to 24 July](#) for its 61st session. The Committee will review the reports of the following countries: Bolivia, Croatia, Gambia, Namibia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Spain and Vietnam. The deadline for the submissions of information for both sessions is [12 June](#).

The pre-sessional working group of the 63rd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women will take place from [27 to 31 July](#). It will consider the following State reports: Czech Republic, Haiti, Iceland, Japan, Mongolia, Sweden, United Republic of Tanzania and Vanuatu. The deadline for the submissions of information for both sessions is [12 June](#).

The 114th session of the Human Rights Committee will be held on [29 June to 24 July](#) and will consider the following State reports: Canada, France, Spain, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Crown Dependencies of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, Uzbekistan, Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of). The programme of work and other information is found [here](#). NGO submissions should be made well in advance of the relevant session.

If you are unable to attend relevant treaty body meetings, you can now watch them live online. A group of Geneva-based NGOs, including ISHR, has coordinated to make this possible. The webcasts can be viewed [here](#).

Other

The 27th session of the Meeting of Chairpersons of the Human Rights Treaty Bodies will be held [22 to 26 June](#) on the 1st Floor of Palais Wilson. Informal consultations with NGOs are a standard feature of the meeting. Submissions are also periodically accepted and NGOs are encouraged to contact the Secretariat for further information at: mc.icm@ohchr.org. Information surrounding past and upcoming meetings is published [here](#).

Requests for Information

Getting down to business – a comparative survey of enabling environments for businesses and associations

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association seeks input, by way of a [questionnaire](#), from civil society for his upcoming report to the UN General Assembly comparing the treatment of businesses and associations with a view to assessing how States facilitate the exercise of the rights of freedom of peaceful assembly and of association for non-State actors.

Responses may be sent by 5 June 2015 to freeassembly@ohchr.org.

UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights

The Working Group can receive information on alleged human rights abuses or violations and intervene directly with States, business enterprises and others on such allegations. The Working Group intends to increase the number of communications it sends to States and business enterprises and for this reason is seeking assistance to raise awareness about the communication procedure.

More information on the communications procedure can be found [here](#).

Consultation - How to create and maintain civil society space? What works?

The High Commissioner for Human Rights is putting together a report of practical recommendations on how to create and maintain the space for civil society to work freely and independently. The High Commissioner is seeking (i) examples of ways to maintain civil society space; (ii) ways to continue working when limitations are imposed; and (iii) useful links, tools, resources, guides. Responses may be sent by [30 June 2015](#) by email: civilsociety@ohchr.org

U.S. National Action Plan: Still Time for Input

President Obama announced that the U.S. would begin drafting a National Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct ("NAP") last September. In the intervening months, U.S. civil society and labor organizations, business groups, and the U.S. government have held four separate meetings to facilitate input and engagement on the process and substance of the NAP. Written submissions can be sent to NAP-RBC@state.gov, and additional background information and an archive of civil society submissions can be found [here](#).

Country Visits By Special Procedures

Italy	Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent , 1 – 5 June 2015
Peru	Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances , 1 – 10 June 2015
China	Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt , 29 June to 6 July 2015
Sri Lanka	Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances , 3 – 12 August 2015
Japan	Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography , 1 – 10 September 2015
Hungary	Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice , 1 – 11 September 2015
Chile	Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association , 21 – 30 September 2015

Find more information on these visits [here](#). To find out how you can support the visits, please contact respective mandate-holders via their email address, as listed in the [directory](#).

Conferences and Events

Human Rights Defenders and the Rule of Law

ISHR and the United Kingdom Mission in Geneva are holding a Panel discussion on 'Human Rights Defenders and the Rule of Law' on 8 June from 16.30 to 18.00 at The Graduate Institute, Maison de la Paix. The Panel will discuss the importance of the rule of law in safeguarding the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly for human rights defenders and activists and the vital role of human rights defenders and international mechanisms in establishing, maintaining and promoting the rule of law. More information can be found [here](#).

High Level Panel on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay are organising a high-level event on 11 June, 10:00-13:00 at Palais des Nations, Room XXVII. The event is focused on good practices by States for the promotion and protection of the rights of LGBTI people. The event will draw from the findings of the High

Commissioner's report on the topic, which is to be presented at the upcoming 29th session of the Human Rights Council.

#ICT4HR: Using information and communication technologies to protect human rights

ISHR is pleased to co-sponsor an event with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to promote human rights. The event will take place on **19 June, from 12.00 - 13.30 in room XXIII, Palais des Nations.**

The event will follow the report by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, to the Human Rights Council's 29th session, on the use of ICTs for the protection of the right to life.

The event is intended to sensitise those working at the Human Rights Council to the potential of this dynamic and growing field, with which official international mechanisms need to engage. It will also offer an opportunity for participants to highlight the challenges presented by new technologies and to consider the limitations of digital human rights work. For information can be found [here](#).

Essex Human Rights Summer School

The Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex will offer its five day [summer school on Human Rights Research Methods](#) from 19 June to 3 July 2015.

New Resources

Resources and NGO Toolkit for Fighting Civil Society Restrictions

The [Defending Civil Society Project](#), a collaboration between the World Movement for Democracy and International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, provides information, tips, tools and strategies on how NGOs can best achieve their goals, and seek reform, in oppressive legal environments. The project also provides updates on NGO laws around the world. It is available in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic.

Assembly and Association Briefing

The latest [Assembly and Association Briefing – Issue 10](#) was released in February by UN special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai. The periodic briefing provides the special rapporteur's insights and findings from his official visits over the December-January 2014 period, and other information associated with his mandate. You can subscribe to the newsletter and find all past issues [here](#).

New Victorian Human Rights Charter Case Collection

Developed in collaboration with the Supreme Court of Victoria (Australia), the Judicial college of Victoria has released a [collection](#) of over 70 key case summaries and factual issues from 2007-2014 that were decided on the basis of the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*. The collection will be updated continually as new cases arise.

Global State of Freedom of Press

Freedom House has released [Freedom of the Press 2015](#), providing key global and regional findings about press freedoms over 2014. Graphs, maps and summaries surrounding the report can be found [here](#).

New Human Rights Council Country Voting Portal

The new [Country Voting History Portal](#) by the Universal Rights Group allows users to access the voting records of all States who have been members of the Human Rights Council. Each country page lists all resolutions which passed during that country's membership term.

E-Bulletin on the 54th Session of the Committee Against Torture

World Organisation Against Torture has published an E-Bulletin in [English](#) and [Arabic](#) on the 54th session of the Committee against Torture which took place from 20 April to 15 May 2015. It summarises the findings and recommendations of the Committee on the latest group of countries under review, follows up on previous recommendations, and looks ahead to next sessions.

Forum-Asia Annual Report 2014

This month FORUM-ASIA released its 2014 [Annual Report](#), and brief papers on its [regional challenges and priorities](#), which introduce an account of the initiatives undertaken in the following areas:

[Freedom of Expression, Assembly & Association](#)

[Human Rights Defenders](#)

[National Human Rights Institutions](#)

[Regional Human Rights Mechanisms](#)

[United Nations Advocacy](#)

Report on Systemic Sexual Violence Perpetrated by Egyptian Security Forces

In a [new report](#), the International Federation for Human Rights has documented widespread and systemic sexual violence and abuse by Egyptian security forces against NGO representatives, human rights defenders and detainees in 2011-2014, particularly women, LGBT persons, students and minors. It also details the political underpinnings for the violence and reasons for continued impunity.

Merits Decisions

MERITS DECISIONS

Q v. Denmark (2001/2010)

Denmark failed to provide sufficient reasons for refusing naturalisation

Summary

In April 2015, the Human Rights Committee was asked to consider whether Denmark had violated its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in its consideration of an individual's application for naturalisation.

The communication was submitted by an Iraqi citizen under the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

Background

The author arrived in Denmark on 15 October 1997 and was granted humanitarian protection. On 30 April 1998, the author obtained a residence permit. On 9 May 2001, his residence permit was given indefinite duration.

On 12 May 2005, the author applied to the Copenhagen police for Danish naturalisation. The Ministry of Refugees, Immigration and Integration Affairs subsequently received the application from the police. On 27 January 2006, the Ministry informed the author that his application had been received and the examination procedure would start within 12 to 16 months. On 25 June 2007, the author was requested to submit details of his Danish language proficiency, any criminal record and any public debts. On 2 July 2007, the author submitted the requested information.

On 4 July 2007, the Ministry informed the author that the documentation that he had submitted regarding his participation in language courses did not satisfy the requirement of language proficiency contained in the Danish Guidelines on Naturalisation, which provided that the applicant should be proficient in the Danish language and have knowledge of Danish society, culture and history. The author then requested to be exempted from the language requirement for medical reasons, pursuant to the Guidelines. On 5 October 2007, the Ministry notified the author that his request for exemption had been rejected and that no proper basis had been found to bring it to the attention of the Parliament's Committee on Naturalisation as the author had failed to demonstrate a severe physical or mental illness.

The author then provided a medical opinion from his psychiatrist and requested a reconsideration of his exemption request. On 3 June 2008, the Ministry informed the author that the Committee on Naturalisation had found no basis to grant the exemption. No explanation was given as to the reasons for the denial.

On 9 September 2009, the author's psychiatrist informed the Ministry about his medical assessment of the author. He indicated that he had been monitoring the author since December 2007 and that the author suffered from a severe chronic mental disorder in the form of paranoid psychosis and depression that had no prospect of improving. As a result, the Ministry examined the case again. However, on 6 November 2009, the author was informed that the letter from his psychiatrist did not contain any new information and that therefore there were no grounds to re-submit his request to the Naturalisation Committee.

On 12 November 2009, the author's psychiatrist wrote to the Ministry requesting a detailed justification for the rejection so that he could integrate this information in the treatment of his patient. He also indicated that from a medical perspective the denial was unfounded as it was well established that the author suffered from the various disorders cited and therefore prima facie satisfied the conditions for exemption from the language requirement. On 8 December 2009, the Ministry replied that there was no basis for bringing the case before the Naturalisation Committee again, that the exemption provision was open to interpretation and that presentation before the Naturalisation Committee did not mean that the exemption would necessarily be granted.

On 15 July 2010, the author filed this communication with the Committee under the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. The author claimed that he was the victim of violations by Denmark of his rights to equality before the law and freedom from discrimination (under article 26 of the Covenant).

The Committee's decision

Regarding the admissibility of the author's claim, the Committee found that the author had sufficiently substantiated his claim for the purposes of articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol and declared the claim to be admissible.

On the merits, the Committee recalled that neither the Covenant nor international law in general spelled out specific criteria for the granting of citizenship through naturalisation and that States were free to decide upon such criteria. However, when adopting and implementing legislation, State parties must respect applicants' rights as enshrined in article 26. The Committee recalled in this respect that article 26 requires reasonable and objective justification and a legitimate aim for distinctions relating to an individual's characteristics, such as their disability.

The Committee noted that the Ministry's letters informing the author of the Naturalisation Committee's decision did not contain any indication of the substantive grounds for refusing his application. The Committee considered that the lack of justification and of transparency regarding the procedure had hindered the author's ability to submit further documentation in support of his request. The Committee noted that the fact that the Naturalisation Committee was part of the Danish legislature did not exempt Denmark from taking measures so that the author was informed, even in brief terms, of the substantive grounds of the Naturalisation Committee's decision. In the absence of such justification, Denmark had failed to demonstrate that its decision had been based on reasonable and objective grounds.

In the light of the above, the Committee concluded that Denmark had violated the author's rights under article 26 of the Covenant.

In accordance with article 2(3)(a) of the Covenant, the Committee observed that Denmark was under an obligation to provide the author with an effective remedy, including compensation and a reconsideration of his request for exemption taking into consideration the Committee's findings. The Committee found that Denmark was also under an obligation to prevent similar violations in the future.

Denmark must now submit its written response within six months of the Committee's decision, including information on the action taken in the light of the Committee's recommendations, and ensure that the Committee's decision is published widely.

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A.H.G. v. Canada (2091/2011)

Canada's deportation of an individual amounted to cruel and inhuman treatment

Summary

In April 2015, the Human Rights Committee was asked to consider whether Canada had violated its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in its decision to deport an individual suffering from paranoid schizophrenia.

The communication was submitted by a Jamaican national under the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

Background

The author is a Jamaican citizen, born on 27 July 1962. The author came to Canada as an immigrant on 27 October 1980. In 1993, he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and subsequently admitted as a patient at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. The author also suffers from diabetes.

Following his release from the Centre in 1995, the author lived independently without incident until 2005. In 2005, the author was found guilty of assault with a weapon, receiving a sentence of one day in jail, in addition to 80 days of pre-sentence custody. In 2006, he was found guilty of failure to appear. In May 2007, he was detained by Canada Border Services Agency and remained on an immigration hold until his subsequent removal to Jamaica.

The Immigration and Refugee Board ordered his deportation as a result of his conviction for assault with a weapon. An appeal against this decision was filed before the Immigration Appeal Division and was dismissed on 31 January 2008. It was noted that the author had committed three assaults in 2005 in a few months and that there was no medical evidence to explain the deterioration of his condition, or to suggest that a change in medication could stabilise his condition such that he would be at less risk of re-offending. The Immigration Appeal Division stressed the seriousness of the offence, and determined that the prospects of rehabilitation were low, while risks to the general public were high. As for the author's family in Canada, the evidence was that the author had contact with one sister in Canada, but had not seen his other brothers and sisters in Canada for years. The author had a son in Canada, but had not seen him in many years and did not know his name. The Immigration Appeals Division determined that there would be no dislocation of the family if the author was removed. Finally, it was found that the author had provided no evidence as to the degree of hardship that he would experience if returned to Jamaica.

On 26 February 2008, the author filed an application for a pre-removal risk assessment, in which he submitted that he would face serious risks to his life and welfare should he be returned to Jamaica. He stressed, in particular, the absence of a family network; the inadequacy of mental health care in Jamaica; his need for on-going support, failure of which would result in further deterioration of his mental condition; and the increased likelihood of violent physical encounters with the Jamaican police. The author's application was rejected on 30 April 2008, as it was determined that the author was neither a Convention refugee, nor a person in need of protection. As a result, the removal order against him became enforceable.

On 3 June 2008, the author's leave to appeal for judicial review was denied by the Federal Court.

On 28 November 2008, the author filed an application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. The application was refused, however, on the basis that the disruption to the author's family in Canada would be minimal, that there was a risk he would return to dangerous behaviour and that appropriate treatment was available in Jamaica. On 22 April 2010, the author's application was rejected.

A psychiatric evaluation dated 28 September 2009 confirmed in the meantime that the author's criminality stemmed from his mental illness.

On 18 July 2011, the Federal Court dismissed the author's application for judicial review of the April 2010 decision. As a result of this decision, the author's removal from Canada was scheduled for 29 August 2011. On 23 August 2011, the author made a request to the Border Services Agency that his removal be deferred, on the basis of a new pre-removal risk application filed on the same date. The

deferral request was denied, however, as a second pre-removal risk application did not prevent removal under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

The author subsequently brought a motion before the Federal Court requesting a stay of execution of the removal order against him.

On 22 August 2011, the author was notified by the Border Services Agency that he would be deported to Jamaica on 29 August 2011.

On 27 August 2011, the author's application for a stay of execution of his removal order was denied.

On 28 August 2011, the author filed this communication with the Committee under the Optional Protocol to the Covenant and made a request for interim measures. The author claimed that he was the victim of violations by Canada of his rights to: (i) life, (ii) freedom from cruel and inhuman treatment, (iii) freedom from arbitrary or unlawful interference with the family, and (iv) protection of the family (under articles 6, 7, 17 and 23 of the Covenant respectively).

On 29 August 2011, the author was deported to Jamaica. Canada received notice from the Committee of the author's request for interim measures shortly after the author's flight to Jamaica had taken off.

The Committee's decision

Regarding the admissibility of the author's claims, the Committee considered that the author had failed to substantiate his allegations under articles 6, 9 and 10 of the Covenant. The Committee accordingly declared this part of the communication inadmissible under article 2 of the Optional Protocol. The Committee found the author's remaining claims under articles 7, 17 and 23 of the Covenant to be admissible.

On the merits, the Committee recalled that the aim of article 7 of the Covenant was to protect both the dignity and the physical and mental integrity of the individual, while also recognising State parties' legitimate interest in protecting the general public. The Committee noted that the author was mentally ill and in need of special protection, that he had lived in Canada for most of his life and that his deportation was the result of criminal offences recognised as being related to his mental illness. Furthermore, the Committee observed that his deportation had effectively resulted in the abrupt withdrawal of available medical and family support upon which he was dependent.

In the light of the above, the Committee concluded that Canada had violated the author's rights under article 7 of the Covenant. Having found a violation of article 7, the Committee decided not to examine separately the author's claims under articles 17 and 23 of the Covenant.

In accordance with article 2(3)(a) of the Covenant, the Committee observed that Canada was under an obligation to provide the author with an effective remedy, including by allowing him to return to Canada and by providing him with adequate compensation. The Committee found that Canada was also under an obligation to prevent similar violations in the future.

Canada must now submit its written response within six months of the Committee's decision, including information on the action taken in the light of the Committee's recommendations, and ensure that the Committee's decision is published widely.

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