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Opinion

ISHR AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A RESPONSIVE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

By Chris Sidoti

In early August 2014 an outspoken journalist and human rights advocate in the Maldives disappeared. It took the international human rights system two months to respond clearly and officially. He has still not been found. His disappearance is undoubtedly a reprisal for his human rights advocacy.

In early September the five Commissioners of the Maldives Human Rights Commission were dragged before the country’s Supreme Court

charged with treason because they had made a report to the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review, in which they had quoted from a report by a UN Special Rapporteur. It took the international human rights system a month to respond. The charges are clearly reprisals for the Commission’s engagement with the international human rights system itself. Even so, the system took a month to ensure a comprehensive formal reaction.

Why should human rights defenders look to the international human rights system, the United Nations, to support them in their work? If the UN is this dysfunctional, has the work of the International Service for Human Rights over the past 30 years been an abject failure?

I believe not, for the following reason.

Thirty years ago, there were few human rights defenders working internationally and barely the basics of an international human rights system. There were only four core human rights treaties and the oldest treaty monitoring committee had been working for less than 15 years. The first Special Procedures had been working for less than five years and there were only a couple of them. There was no UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and no Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, the basis for international human rights work for the past 20 years.

ISHR was there from the beginning of the international human rights system, encouraging more people to act for human rights, supporting human rights defenders and advocating for an effective international system. Its founding father, Adrien-Claude Zoller, was a visionary with will and determination who saw what was needed and acted upon it.

Over the years ISHR has achieved much, not alone but in coalition with countless others. It has contributed to the enormous public activism for human rights that is now evident in, and on behalf of, every country on Earth. It has raised its voice constantly in support of human rights defenders, even achieving an international instrument that proclaims their rights - the Declaration on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders - and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur with key responsibilities for overseeing the implementation of the Declaration. It has contributed to the building of an international human rights system – inter-governmental bodies like the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies, Special Procedures and others – and ensured that human rights defenders have direct access to it at all points. In fact it has achieved what Mr Zoller set out to achieve and more.

ISHR has always worked on the front line where individual human rights defenders and their organisations meet the UN. It has encouraged and ensured that engagement, in the firm belief that each has much to offer to the other. However experience has demonstrated time and again - in cases such as the two from the Maldives - that human rights defenders do far more to benefit the UN than the UN does in return. Simply put, the UN needs human rights defenders far more than defenders need the UN. ISHR has worked hard to make the crucial contribution by defenders possible and it has succeeded. However, there remains much work to be done before the UN is able to respond effectively, as it ought to.

ISHR was established to be the defender of defenders. It has been so for thirty years and I am sure it will continue to be just that.

Chris Sidoti is an international human rights expert and was Australian Human Rights Commissioner 1995-2000 and Foundation Director of the Australian Human Rights Commission 1987-92. He is also Vice-Chair of ISHR and was its Director from 2003 to 2007.

ANATOMY OF SUCCESS. THE RESOLUTION THAT ALMOST WASN'T

By John Fisher, ARC International

It is ironic to think that one of the most successful initiatives at the 27th session of the Human Rights Council almost never happened.

When the Council adopted the first UN resolution on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity, presented by South Africa in June 2011, it seemed that a turning point had been reached in the international protection of LGBTI persons from violence and discrimination.

Most thematic resolutions are annual, some are biennial, but as June 2012, 2013 and 2014 each came and went with no signs of a follow-up initiative, progress seemed stalled, and many began to question when – and even whether – the Council would again take up its responsibility to address human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

These questions became particularly acute when the June 2014 session ended on a sour note, with the adoption by a 22-20 vote of the Council's first ever no-action motion on a thematic issue, designed to block the Council from even considering previously-agreed language on the diversity of family forms. As a result, many feared a return to the dysfunctional days of the former Commission

on Human Rights, when bloc politics and procedural manoeuvres frequently undermined consideration of substantive human rights issues.

And yet, the recent session ended with the successful adoption of a resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity, by an absolute majority of the Council, with the support of States from all regions, and a substantial increase in the margin of success.

How did this become possible? What factors contributed to this positive outcome, and what are the lessons to be learned?

Power of a positive vision

Every initiative needs clear, committed leadership. At initial meetings, States from diverse regions were concerned that the resolution might not succeed. Understandably, no State wants to risk political capital for an initiative that might fail.

Yet no initiative can come to fruition in an atmosphere of ambiguity. A time comes when it is better to try, even with the risk of losing, than to lose by default because we were unwilling to try.

There is a saying: “whether you believe you’ll succeed, or whether you believe you’ll fail, you’ll be right.” The fact that the voting outcome surpassed even our best expectations makes one wonder: how many other positive initiatives never see the light of day because of fear of failure?

Strong but constructive leadership

Once Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay as lead States decided to bring a resolution, they gave it their all. The resolution process was marked by dedicated outreach, tenacity and conviction.

At the same time, the lead sponsors were determined to ensure a constructive process. All points of view were heard during informals, and conversations were held with all stakeholders, including those who had concerns. The lead sponsors opted for a clean process, eschewing procedural tactics to block the seven hostile amendments that were presented, instead allowing these to be debated on their merits.

NGOs were requested not to cheer or clap when the resolution was adopted, recognizing that – emotional though this milestone was for many of us - it is important not to divide the Council into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, but to instead acknowledge that the increased base of support reflects an ongoing dialogue with States from all regions. In that light, the resolution is not an end in itself but an important step in that continuing process.

The limits of negative campaigning

Conversely, the constructive approach of the lead sponsors stood in marked contrast to the negative pressure and inflexibility of a small number of States. A barrage of hostile amendments designed to strip the resolution of all substance were defeated each in turn, there was little appetite amongst Council members to revive the much reviled no-action motion, and the most hostile States were reduced to relying upon their own inflexibility to claim that the resolution should not proceed for lack of consensus.

Engaging the debate: from polarization towards consensus

All too often, ‘lack of consensus’ or ‘polarization’ is invoked as a reason not to advance an initiative at the UN.

Consensus is a worthy goal, but it is a process that often begins with polarization, moves forward through dialogue and results in increased understanding. It is precisely through engaging the debate and addressing sensitive issues that different points of view can be considered and common ground identified.

It is easy for the Council to address issues on which everyone agrees. The test of the Council’s effectiveness is its capacity to address the issues on which there is disagreement, with a view to protecting all persons from human rights violations in accordance with its mandate.

Building relationships: thinking outside the blocs

The effectiveness of an approach based on cross-regional outreach and dialogue can be seen in the increased constructive engagement by States from all regions.

In the end, the resolution was adopted with support by all States from the Latin American region, from the Western group, and by all States from the Eastern European group except Russia. There was increased support by States from the Asian region, and only 7 of the 13 Member States from the African region voted against the resolution, compared with 10 in 2011. A number of States commended the process and expressed willingness to maintain the dialogue, even if they were not yet ready to commit their support.

This highlights the importance of maintaining relationships, addressing concerns and advancing discussion on an ongoing basis. As one Ambassador from a country with concerns told us when the session was starting: “we’re only approached when our vote is wanted”, encouraging us to host briefings and maintain dialogue, not just during Council sessions, but intersessionally when the pressure is off.

Civil society collaborations

Last, but by no means least, the successful outcome highlights the importance of strong civil society collaborations - with States, with the Council, and with each other. The last year and beyond has witnessed substantial engagement by civil society, working through our own diverse perspectives to articulate clear expectations for the UN human rights system, engaging with States to make these expectations known, bridging the divide between Geneva and capitals, and putting a human face on the challenges we experience.

As one of the lead diplomats wrote to me the day after the vote:

“Your faces yesterday made me feel that my job, that sometimes I have the impression is too abstract, has a real impact on real people. This is the kind of thing that reinforces my commitment to human rights.”

Many factors came together leading into the September session to transform an initiative that had almost stalled into a positive outcome that actually succeeded in building bridges across diverse perspectives and laying the groundwork for further follow-up. It provides hope for what can be accomplished with leadership, conviction, a collaborative approach and a shared commitment to putting human rights first.

And that's good not just for the issue, it's good for the Council and for all those who care about human rights.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MUST CONTINUE TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

By Regina Maria Cordeiro Dunlop, Permanent Representative of Brazil, Marta Maurás, Permanent Representative of Chile, Juan José Quintana, Permanent Representative of Colombia and Laura Dupuy, Permanent Representative of Uruguay

(Geneva, 31 October 2014) – In 2011 the Human Rights Council adopted for the first time ever a resolution by any international body on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity.[1] As instructed, the Office of the High Commissioner produced a report on the subject in November 2011 which was submitted for consideration by States and other stakeholders.[2] Three years later, based on increasing evidence of violence and stigma, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay felt that it was high time for the Council to take up the subject again and proposed a new resolution, building on that of 2011, focusing on the production of a fresh report on the subject by the OHCHR to gather best practices and show the way for progress.

Several rounds of open and all-encompassing consultations were conducted by the core group. Very early in the process it became clear that several misperceptions were at play. Concerted efforts were made to dispel them and ensure that the text was oriented at the promotion and protection of universal human rights and in particular the fight against violence and discrimination due to sexual orientation and gender identity. Our proposal, in a nutshell, was not to create new rights but to promote human rights for all, based on the premise that under existing International Human Rights Law, LGBTI individuals enjoy the same rights –no less and no more– than any other human being. Finally, there was the notion that our initiative could polarize the Human Rights Council while we maintained that to keep silent on this matter would damage the credibility of the Council itself and would continue the suffering of many around the world.

The consultations revealed that there were concerns for many countries that could be attended to without affecting the essence of the proposal. With a true open and constructive spirit, various changes addressed to meet those concerns were introduced. Agreed language was imported from the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which referred to the universality of human rights, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional specificities. Another change was the inclusion of a reference to “existing international human rights law and standards” designed to dispel doubts concerning alleged attempts to expand the applicable scope of the normative framework. Aware that some States were not ready to embrace periodic reporting on the issue, the original clause which requested regular biennial reports was modified. A positive spin, however, was introduced by stating that the forthcoming report focuses on existing good practices that could be replicated or adapted by other countries and societies.

By this time, a significant number of countries had approached us to voice active support for the draft. We therefore decided to bring together an “enlarged core group” that on the eve of the vote included as many as 25 States from all regions, 12 of which were members of the Council. We were proud to realize that the draft had become an authentically cross-regional initiative demonstrated by the significant diversity of its 52 co-sponsors. In addition, NGOs from all over the world joined in and helped by maintaining a flow of information and analysis alive in the media and with local communities and supporting the initiative in national and international circles.

Res.L27RevI was one of the last to be considered the final afternoon of the 27th session of the Council. Tension was high and the outcome uncertain. The four delegations presenting the initiative took the floor one after the other, in a well-choreographed total of 8 minutes, to introduce the draft Resolution and explain specific aspects of it and the motivations behind our initiative. The seven proposed amendments, clearly aimed at changing the nature of the text, were discussed by supporters and opponents and voted upon one by one. None of them were approved. The unmodified text of the draft Resolution was then voted and adopted by a majority of 25 votes in favour, 14 against and 7 abstentions. Noticeably, the 2011 resolution was approved by 23 votes in favour, 19 against and 3 abstentions.

While there may be many substantive issues related to this issue that undoubtedly will be discussed in the future by the Council, it is clear that a majority of Member States are ready to continue finding ways to protect people who are suffering discrimination, stigma and violence globally because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

What comes next? The Office of the High Commissioner will produce a second report addressing concrete experiences and lessons learned which will be considered by the Council at its 29th session, in June 2015.

We firmly believe that the last operative clause of the Resolution may well turn out to be crucial. It assures that the Council remains seized of the question of fighting against violence and discrimination for reasons of sexual orientation and gender identity thus fulfilling its principal mandate of protecting the human rights of all individuals. We are convinced that, as was stated in the plenary, this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed by all our societies. We are convinced that the Human Rights Council cannot and should not close its eyes to it and will not fail people who continue to suffer from violence and discrimination due to its sexual orientation or gender identity.

More importantly, it was demonstrated that beyond our differences, the Council can open spaces, hold a constructive dialogue and build bridges that allow us to attain more equal and inclusive societies.

[1] A/HRC/RES/17/19 Resolution on Human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity

[2] A/HRC/19/41 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on Discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity

Human Rights Defender Profiles

ADRIEN-CLAUDE ZOLLER

Founder of the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Born and educated in Geneva, ISHR founder Adrien Zoller's lifelong commitment to non-governmental and human rights work began as a hobby. Adrien spoke to ISHR about what drove him towards his human rights vocation, and about ISHR's founding and profound impact to the global human rights movement.

My path into human rights

I was born in Geneva and after finishing my degrees in Law and International Relations, I went to Holland to study and work as a management consultant in July 1971. At that time my non-governmental work was a hobby, but it gradually became a full-time job.

I created the Ecumenical Research Exchange Centre in 1974, the focus being studies for the anti-apartheid campaigns in Europe. I then returned to Geneva and got involved with Pax Christi, along with the [World Council of Churches](#) and several Catholic organisations, before creating ISHR in 1984.

A passion for the issue of enforced disappearances

My early career was strongly focused on Central and South America, which is where two key events took place that influenced my human rights focus. The first was the disappearance of students in Buenos Aires during the World Cup in 1978 and the personal meeting I had with 'The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo'.

The second was whilst I was working as a coordinator of Catholic organisations on Central America: the arrest and subsequent assassination of my driver in El Salvador. I was also arrested during the incident, however I was released, probably only because I was Swiss.

These two experiences changed my life and drove my concern for the issue of enforced disappearances.

The origins of ISHR

From the very beginning ISHR tried to empower coalitions and facilitate networks. It has always been a matter of being 'at the service of'.

We focused on filling the gap between what was needed in Geneva and what services existing NGOs were currently providing. In 1984, we therefore established ourselves with a network type structure. We started with only a small secretariat based at my home and then moving to a joint secretariat with Pax Christi and OMCT at 37 rue de Vermont in the middle of 1985. There was a need in Geneva to both help those human rights defenders coming from the regions and also to help denounce the violations being perpetrated against them.

As a small coalition we worked on human rights across many different countries, including El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Colombia, Timor-Leste and Sri Lanka, and on enforced disappearances. Our aim was to obtain resolutions on human rights abuses in these countries in both the [UN Human Rights Commission](#) and its [Sub-Commission](#).

Until 1987 we didn't do any fundraising and were not well known by potential donors. An established internship programme was therefore essential to ISHR's survival. We also created a visitors programme, with the aim of providing free accommodation to human rights defenders visiting Geneva. We welcomed them free of charge to attend both the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) and UN meetings. This evolved to us providing them with information, advice, and orientation.

By 1985, ISHR had been successful in obtaining numerous resolutions through lobbying, targeting mainly the Commission and Sub-Commission on Human Rights. If we failed at the Commission, we would go to the Sub-Commission. We began to focus on summary executions as well as enforced disappearances. We also organised alternative meetings with the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Our interns helped participants prepare their speeches to the UN.

ISHR revives the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights

Come 1986 and a financial crisis hit the UN, leading to the Secretary General making proposals to cut expenses. The new UN chief at the time therefore suggested cancelling the Sub-Commission on Human Rights, which would have implied cancelling the Working Group on Indigenous People.

ISHR could see this would have a very negative impact on human rights progress and therefore considered whether we could organise an alternative session of the Sub-Commission if funds were available.

With extremely fortuitous timing, a man by the name of [Peter Davies](#) came to Geneva and approached me with the proposal that ISHR do just that. He had obtained grants for 100,000 dollars to create an alternative meeting of the Sub-Commission on Human Rights. So we mobilised quickly and within two weeks ISHR had recruited 18 people for three months. We organised an expert meeting of the Sub-Commission, paying for the members' travel to Geneva. The meeting was held at the ILO.

At a certain moment in the proceedings the 17 members we'd brought together decided that, since they had the majority and they were in Geneva, they should hold a meeting of the Sub-Commission. It was a revolutionary moment for the UN, ISHR and the Sub-Commission. The Sub-Commission was at the forefront of most key UN decisions and a major space to introduce innovative ideas and initiatives. ISHR really was the essential player in making the Sub-Commission happen that year.

ISHR broadens its focus

When we created ISHR our focus was primarily on helping human rights defenders intent on coming to Geneva. At the end of 1987, I became ISHR's first Director and, with André Jacques elected President in 1990, we broadened our work to supporting defenders in the regions and following-up with those who completed our Geneva training course.

Our focus in the 1990s naturally flowed into NGO rights – a priority for two reasons. First, our partners attending Geneva sessions had no UN consultative status; and second, non consultative-status NGOs wouldn't be able to attend the [World Conference on Human Rights](#) if their government forbade it. So we proposed and lobbied for an exception to the General Assembly rules to allow non consultative-status NGOs to attend the Conference. In the case of an objection by a State, there would be a vote in the preparatory meeting. This change meant that Tibet, for example, was able to attend the World Conference, despite opposition by some States.

ISHR was also instrumental in a campaign to enable national level organisations to be granted consultative status with the United Nations, enabling them to participate in and contribute to key international human rights discussions. Until then, only international organisations could be accredited by the UN. ISHR's leadership resulted in the adoption of resolution by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) allowing for national organisations to apply for and be recognised with UN consultative status.

In parallel to these key steps, we were part of the civil society push for an international human rights chief. We really wanted to make the difference and lobbied hard. Finally, a resolution was adopted in March 1994 to create the post of [High Commissioner for Human Rights](#).

The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders

In June 1994, after 17 years of negotiations, the Working Group of the Human Rights Commission agreed to a drafted [Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#). We contributed to large parts of this text, and securing the adoption of this Declaration then became a priority for ISHR.

That day finally came in 1998. At the end of the Working Group session, India, Russia, Egypt, Cuba and Bangladesh blocked the resolution on a funding issue. Some major problems were caused by the Cuban delegation, so we had to target their delegate Miguel Alfonso Martinez. He lost that battle because of cigarettes. At the beginning of the 1990s smoking was discouraged at the UN but Mr Martinez was smoking in the room. I told the President of the Working Group 'If he continues smoking in the meeting, I will also have to smoke'. So Mr Martinez left the room.

In his absence, consensus on the contentious paragraph could more easily be reached. This is how he lost. He was furious at me and the Cubans took revenge at the General Assembly by initially preventing the Declaration from being adopted on 10 December (Human Rights Day). But for us that was not so important; what was important was that we finally had the Declaration that defenders deserved.

The Declaration was of course adopted, and we went on to strongly support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders. ISHR continues to do that today.

SHEILA KEETHARUTH

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea and ISHR training alumni

I have been exposed to ISHR's *avant-garde* work from the mid-90s, when I used to consult *The Human Rights Monitor*, free of charge, at the seat of my national human rights organisation. In that pre-Internet era, it was a precious document, giving an update about the outcome of deliberations at the Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

I have also had professional links with ISHR in my capacity as the Executive Director of the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA). We have worked jointly on projects, such as the publication of [A Human Rights Defenders' Guide to the African Commission](#) which was launched in May 2012.

I also benefited from ISHR training in 2011, which gave me hands-on experience of working with the UN Human Rights Council.

What is the role of national level human rights defenders and civil society in driving human rights change?

Human rights defenders are the first in line in gauging the 'human rights pulse' at the national level. They are able to access information about human rights violations in a timely manner, acting as whistleblowers or giving early warnings. It is through their monitoring, documentation and advocacy

that egregious human rights violations are brought to the attention of the world. Consequently, they can raise awareness and lobby for positive measures to be put in place to address the violations concerned. Human rights defenders at the national level, working in tandem with international non-governmental organisations, can give visibility to what is happening in a specific country, focusing on a single or range of issues.

However, in the context of Eritrea, human rights defenders cannot act openly from inside the country due to reprisals or the threat thereof. Eritrean defenders, as well as others working on Eritrean issues operate from outside. While not ideal, this helps to keep human rights in Eritrea high on the international agenda to bring about positive measures and change in the field of human rights.

What should human rights defenders know about working with international mechanisms, and with your mandate?

When human rights defenders interact with international mechanisms, be it at the global or the regional level, visibility can be given to their work. Such visibility can give protection to them by raising the profile of both the issue and of the human rights defender. However, one still needs to bear in mind the possibility of reprisals and act accordingly.

On a practical level, human rights defenders need knowledge about how they can work with the mechanisms, their procedures and any timing requirements involved. For example, as Special Rapporteur, I am required to report to the Human Rights Council in June and to the General Assembly's Third Committee in October. So, I would need to obtain any information from defenders and NGOs by February to include it in my report. Having said that, information can be shared with the mandate at any moment in time.

Another important question human rights defenders ask is how to initiate and maintain contact with the mandate and different mechanisms. What defenders need to know is that this is very simple; an email would be sufficient. In the case of my mandate, I developed a questionnaire to assist with the gathering of information and presentation of the story.

What do you see as ISHR's track record and role in the future?

ISHR's track record is impressive already. I would encourage the organisation to continue its engagement with human rights defenders through its relevant training and cutting-edge work to support them.

Our Work to Support Human Rights Defenders

SRI LANKA: INVESTIGATE AND REMEDY VIOLATIONS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, SAY UN EXPERTS

(Geneva, 31 October 2014) - UN experts have expressed concern over widespread reports in Sri Lanka of intimidation and harassment against human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and clergymen by State officials.

The UN Human Rights Committee, a body of independent experts that monitor the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by its States parties, [released their findings on Sri Lanka](#) yesterday.

The committee of experts also expressed serious concern at the alleged enforced disappearance of human rights defenders, together with reports about the arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of detainees.

'As expected, the Sri Lankan government rejected the Committee's concerns regarding the ongoing and systematic trend of attacking those in Sri Lanka seeking justice and accountability for human rights violations', said Ms Pooja Patel of the International Service for Human Rights.

'This is despite the existence of well documented cases evidencing such a trend, including cases of physical attacks, death threats, administrative detention and politically motivated charges against opposition politicians'.

A number of such cases were outlined in a [submission to the Committee by ISHR and FORUM-ASIA](#).

The Committee's concluding observations express further concern over 'defamation campaigns against human rights defenders and the blocking of websites'. It called on the Sri Lankan government to 'vigorously investigate all cases of threats and attacks against journalists, lawyers, clergymen, political activists, NGO workers and human rights defenders, hold the perpetrators accountable, and provide effective remedies to victims'.

In the month of September alone, [INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre documented several cases](#) of intimidation and harassment against civil society and media personnel. The following are some such examples:

- Two human rights lawyers, Namal Rajapakshe and Manjula Pathiraja, received death threats by unidentified assailants. One of the armed assailants threatened that the lawyers would be killed if they appeared in 'unnecessary cases'. The lawyers are known for their longtime commitment to working with victims of human rights violations;
- Government supporters held demonstrations to campaign against the release of Balendran Jeyakumari, a campaigner for truth and justice in relation to enforced disappearances in the country. Leaflets were distributed at the demonstration which echoed the State's position portraying Ms Jeyakumari as a terrorist supporter;
- At the same demonstration, posters accusing prominent human rights defenders of treacherous acts against the country were displayed;[1]
- A Tamil journalist from the Jaffna Daily 'Uthayan' escaped a murder attempt against him. Two masked men, suspected to be members of security agencies, allegedly attempted to throw Mr Sinnarasa Siventhiran in front of a speeding bus after stopping him on the side of the road. Uthayan's office and personnel have been the target of several attacks in recent years;
- Media activist Mr Thayaparan Ratnam, in Jaffna, has been subject to continuous interrogation, intimidation and harassment by the Terrorist Investigation Division and Criminal Investigation Division. This allegedly followed attempts by journalists based in the North to attend media workshops in Colombo. Mr Thayaparan was amongst journalists who were stopped by military and police on their way to Colombo. The workshop itself was subsequently canceled due to a protest and threats by a mob believed to be supporters of the government;

- Another media workshop in Negombo was disrupted by the so-called 'Nation Building Union', allegedly consisting of former military personnel. The group threatened to 'teach the journalists a lesson' if they continued to hold workshops;
- A meeting scheduled to be held in Trincomalee by two civil society organisations was disrupted by intelligence officials. The intelligence officials compelled organisers to cancel the meeting. The organisers changed the venue of the meeting, which was also disrupted and thus a third venue was chosen which was subsequently subject to surveillance.

The Committee also ensured that it sent a clear message to the Sri Lankan government on the issue of retaliation against those who submitted information, reports or testimony to the UN, saying 'it should ensure that any individual or organisation can freely provide information to the Committee and protect them against any reprisals for providing such information'.

'The systematic practice of intimidating victims and human rights defenders cooperating with the UN human rights mechanisms and processes must end. We share the Committee's disappointment at Sri Lanka's repeated failure to bring perpetrators of reprisals to justice', said Ms Patel. [Human rights organisations recently brought such disturbing trends to the attention of the Human Rights Council and the government of Sri Lanka.](#)

'We call on the government of Sri Lanka to promptly and fully implement the Committee's recommendations, ensuring that human rights defenders in the country are able to undertake their vital work to expose violations, pursue accountability, and promote human rights and the rule of law in a safe environment free from attack or fear,' Ms Patel said.

Contact: Pooja Patel on p.patel@ishr.ch or + 41 76 787 39 28

CALL ON SRI LANKA TO END ATTACKS AND REPRISALS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

(Geneva, 3 October 2014) - Human rights defenders and others working to promote truth, justice and accountability for a UN estimated 40,000 civilian deaths in Sri Lanka during 2009 face a systematic pattern of threats, harassment, intimidation and violence. So says a [new report submitted to the UN by ISHR and FORUM-ASIA.](#)

The report, which is being considered by the UN Human Rights Committee in the context of its review of Sri Lanka next week, has found that threats and attacks against human rights defenders who submit information to the UN are particularly acute and are overwhelmingly perpetrated with impunity.

'Human rights defenders working in Sri Lanka face an increasingly hostile climate, with threats ranging from legislative restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, through to enforced disappearances, torture and even murder', said Ms Pooja Patel of ISHR.

The report documents over 20 cases where human rights defenders have been attacked by State and non-State actors in connection with their work to promote human rights and pursue investigations and accountability for gross and systematic human rights abuses perpetrated by both the government of Sri Lanka and the former Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). Among those cases documented include:

- The **arbitrary arrest and detention** of Ms Balendran Jayakumari, a human rights defender who works on cases of enforced disappearances, and her 13 year old daughter under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.
- The **murder** of investigative journalist Mr Lasantha Wickramatunge and the abduction and serious beating of senior journalist and media rights activist Mr Poddala Jayantha, with lack of adequate investigation, prosecution or accountability in both cases.
- A **crackdown** on the rights to freedom of expression and association, with a recent government directive prohibiting certain non-governmental organisations from conducting press conferences or issuing media releases.
- **Intimidation, threats and reprisals** against human rights defenders, including Mr Sunanda Deshapriya and Ms Nimalka Fernando, who work to expose and seek accountability for human rights violations in Sri Lanka through the UN Human Rights Council.
- The **smearing and defamation** of such human rights defenders as ‘traitors’ by government officials and government-affiliated news agencies, with one newspaper calling for such people to be ‘shot and thrown to the forest for the foxes to eat’.

‘Sri Lankan officials are both perpetrating and failing to protect human rights defenders from attacks, threats and reprisals,’ said FORUM-ASIA’S Executive Director, Ms Evelyn Balais-Serrano. ‘We are particularly concerned at the trend of impunity in relation to the overwhelming majority of such attacks.’

ISHR’s Pooja Patel said, ‘In line with its obligations under both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Sri Lankan officials should refrain from all attacks and restrictions on civil society actors and investigate and pursue accountability where they occur.’

The joint report submitted by ISHR and FORUM-ASIA sets out a series of recommendations which the UN Human Rights Committee should make to the government of Sri Lanka to ensure compliance with its international human rights obligations, including:

- **Removing military oversight from the National Secretariat of NGOs** and ensuring that NGOs can operate freely, independently and without government interference;
- Respecting and **upholding the right of all persons to access and communicate with UN human rights mechanisms**, including the Human Rights Council-mandated international inquiry into Sri Lanka, without hindrance or fear of retaliation or reprisal; and
- **Ceasing the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act against human rights defenders and journalists** and repealing or amending the law so that it complies with international human rights law, including the ICCPR.

In addition to submitting a report, ISHR has also [produced a video which documents cases of reprisals against human rights defenders](#), including Mr Sunanda Deshapriya of Sri Lanka.

Contacts: for ISHR – Pooja Patel on p.patel@ishr.ch or + 41 76 787 39 28/ for FORUM-ASIA – Iniyana Ilango on iniyan@forum-asia.org.

EGYPT CALLED TO RELEASE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND PEACEFUL PROTESTERS IMMEDIATELY AND UNCONDITIONALLY

(Geneva, 28 October 2014) - The International Service for Human Rights strongly condemns the conviction of Egyptian activists and other individuals on 26 October on charges of breaching a draconian anti-protest law and other baseless accusations.

Twenty three individuals – either targeted solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly or random bystanders picked up in the vicinity of the dispersed 21 June protest – were sentenced to three years in prison, an additional three years of police surveillance, a fine of USD 1400 and repayment for property damages they allegedly caused.

The charges relate to a demonstration on 21 June against the repressive anti-protest law (Law 107/2013), which was forcibly dispersed by security forces aided by unknown assailants at the time. The charges include breaching the anti-protest law and other trumped-up charges, such as vandalism and ‘displaying force’.

‘Egypt’s protest law is extremely restrictive and falls far short of meeting international human rights standards. Civil society across the world have repeatedly expressed their concern over the systematic misuse of this law and other related legislation to silence dissent by disproportionately targeting human rights defenders, journalists, political activists and opposition figures’ said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

Among the defendants were [seven women human rights defenders](#), including prominent activist Yara Sallam, the transitional justice officer at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and winner of the 2013 North African Shield for her work with another Egyptian NGO, Nazra for Feminist Studies.

Prior to their conviction, the defendants had been held in pre-trial detention since their arrest on 21 June. The trial, which was originally set for 13 September, was adjourned twice (first until 11 October and finally 16 October) with the defendants remaining behind bars.

‘The judge repeatedly rejected requests for provisional release, despite the absence of any legal justification meriting pre-trial detention such as national security concerns or fear of defendants tampering with evidence or intimidating witness,’ said Khaled Mansour, Executive Director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

‘Extended pre-trial detention, in circumstances that are clearly incompatible with international law, is increasingly used as a punitive measure by the Egyptian authorities to silence human rights defenders and activists,’ said Mr Lynch. ‘It sends a chilling message that no criticism of the Egyptian government will be tolerated’.

The conviction of Yara Sallam and other human rights defenders comes as a coalition of international human rights organisations wrote an [open letter to Member and Observer States at the UN Human Rights Council](#) calling on them to collectively speak out against the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt. As the Egyptian government gears up to have its human rights record reviewed by the UN on 5 November, through the Universal Periodic Review, NGOs have called on States to stand with civil society in calling for an end to repression and attacks against human rights defenders and to ensure accountability for past violations, including the grossly excessive use of force against protesters.

In addition to the open letter, ISHR has also prepared a [Briefing Paper on the situation of human rights defenders in Egypt](#), with proposed questions and recommendations for States to make to Egypt on the issue.

Contact: Philip Lynch, Director, International Service for Human Rights, on + 41 76 708 4738

BAHRAIN SHOULD RELEASE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER NABEEL RAJAB WITHOUT CHARGE OR DELAY

(Geneva, 13 October 2014) - More than 100 international, regional and national non-governmental organisations, including the International Service for Human Rights, have joined to call for the immediate and unconditional release of leading human rights defender, Nabeel Rajab, in Bahrain.

'The authorities of Bahrain should immediately and unconditionally release Nabeel Rajab, who appears to have been arrested and detained in connection with a tweet,' said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

'We call on the government of Bahrain to respect and not criminalise the basic rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly and to release all those people detained in connection with the exercise of such rights without charge and without delay', Mr Lynch said.

Joint statement on Nabeel Rajab

The undersigned more than 100 organisations call for the immediate, unconditional release of detained human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, arrested on 1 October 2014 in Bahrain.

Nabeel Rajab, the President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR) and Deputy Secretary General of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), was summoned on 1 October 2014 to attend an investigation at the Criminal Investigation Directorate, specifically the General Directorate of Anti-corruption and Economic and Electronic Security. The investigation session lasted about 45 minutes and focused on two tweets that the authorities claim have offended the Ministry of Interior.

One tweet, from 28 September 2014, said: 'many #Bahrain men who joined #terrorism & #ISIS have come from the security institutions and those institutions were the first ideological incubator.'

Rajab was detained until the following day when the public prosecution ordered his detention be extended for seven days pending investigation. On 9 October, no hearing took place and his case was instead transferred to the Lower Criminal Court for a hearing on 19 October, thus extending his detention a further ten days. It should be noted that he is no longer under pre-trial detention as he has now been charged. In addition, a new complaint was filed by the Bahraini Defense Forces in relation to the same tweet about ISIS. The BDF claims it was insulting to both security and military institutions of Bahrain.

It is feared that the government of Bahrain may try to imprison Rajab for a long time. Under Article 216 of the Bahraini Penal Code, this crime is punishable with up to three years in prison. Article 216 provides that: 'A person shall be liable for imprisonment or payment of a fine if he offends by any method of expression the National Assembly, or other constitutional institutions, the army, law courts, authorities or government agencies.'

Rajab was imprisoned several times in the past few years. On 9 July 2012, the 5th Lower Criminal Court sentenced him to three months in prison, in a case that is linked to six tweets he posted on 2 June 2012. He had served almost the full sentence before that conviction was overturned on 23 August 2012. However, on 16 August 2012, the Lower Criminal Court also sentenced Rajab to three years' imprisonment for 'participation in illegal gatherings and calling for a march without prior

notification.' That sentence was reduced on 11 December 2012 to two years, and he was released on 24 May 2014.

During his previous imprisonment, Rajab has been subject to discrimination and ill-treatment in prison, including being placed in solitary confinement with a dead animal, being isolated from other political detainees for his entire detention period and being prevented from contacting his family on occasion, including after he reported violations that he had witnessed in prison. He was not permitted to see his family on the Eid this past week.

The undersigned organisations consider the detention of Rajab since 1 October to be a clear act of discrimination. Last month, another citizen was accused of a crime under the same article of the law, 'offending the army'; however while that person was released within 24 hours, Rajab was denied release, presumably due to his reputation as a well-known human rights defender with a lot of influence on twitter, both locally and internationally.

We believe strongly that Nabeel Rajab has been targeted solely due to his peaceful and legitimate human rights work and in particular his recent successful missions to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and the European Union in Brussels. He is being detained for merely exercising his rights of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The undersigned over 100 organisations call for:

1. The immediate and unconditional release of Nabeel Rajab and all other human rights defenders who have been detained in Bahrain solely as a result of their legitimate human rights work;
2. The Bahrain authorities to take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Nabeel Rajab;
3. The Bahrain authorities to guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bahrain are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

We further urge the UN, the US administration, the UK government, as well as other governments that have influence in Bahrain, the EU and leading human rights organizations to put real pressure on the government of Bahrain in order to immediately stop the judicial harassment of human rights defenders; drop all charges against them and release all detained human rights defenders and political prisoners, including Nabeel Rajab, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, founder of BCHR and GCHR, and Naji Fateel of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights.

The letter was signed by 104 Organisations and the family of Nabeel Rajab. The full list of signatures is available [here](#).

Contact: Phil Lynch, Director, International Service for Human Rights, on p.lynch@ishr.ch or + 41 76 708 4738

MARTIN ENNALS AWARD HONOURS COURAGEOUS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FROM MEXICO, CHINA AND BANGLADESH

(Geneva, 7 October 2014) - Three courageous activists have been recognised for their work to promote and protect human rights at great personal risk with the conferral of the prestigious Martin Ennals Award and Prizes at a ceremony in Geneva today.

The Martin Ennals Award was conferred on Alejandra Ancheita, a Mexican human rights defender and the Executive Director of ProDESC, whose work to expose and pursue accountability for corporate human rights violations, together with her work to promote and protect women's rights and indigenous rights, has led to her being defamed, attacked and subject to digital hacking and surveillance. The Award was presented by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

Martin Ennals Prizes were awarded to **Adilur Rahman Kahn** of Bangladesh, who has been detained for his work to document and pursue accountability for torture, ill-treatment and fatal attacks against protesters in the country, and posthumously to **Cao Shunli** of China, who was arbitrarily detained, ill-treated, denied access to adequate medical treatment and ultimately died in custody in connection with her efforts to hold China to account for its human rights obligations through the Universal Periodic Review.

The Martin Ennals Award is a unique honour which is conferred annually to a human rights defender who has demonstrated dedication and commitment in the face of great personal risk, with the laureate chosen by a jury comprising representatives of ten of the world's leading human rights organisations,

'The conferral of the award to Alejandra Ancheita is a recognition of her pioneering and innovative work to hold transnational corporations to account for their adverse impacts on indigenous rights and on land and environment rights,' said ISHR Director and Martin Ennals jury member Phil Lynch.

'The Award should also prompt authorities to strengthen implementation of Mexico's law on the protection of human rights defenders and to invest greater political and financial resources in ensuring that human rights defenders in the country can work in a safe environment, free from attacks and harassment from both State and non-State actors,' Mr Lynch said.

A number of recent reports, prepared by both UN experts and non-governmental organisations, show that the situation for human rights defenders in Mexico is worsening, despite the passage of a law for their protection in 2012, with journalists and those who oppose major development projects identified as being at particular risk. In the vast majority of cases of attacks, there is a lack of investigation or accountability.

'Cases of threats, attacks, trespass, harassment and surveillance against Alejandra Ancheita, ProDESC and other human rights defenders in Mexico must be investigated fully and promptly, with perpetrators held to account,' Mr Lynch said.

The Award ceremony included a special tribute to Cao Shunli, who died on 14 March 2014, with a minute of sustained applause. This followed on from NGO efforts at the Human Rights Council in March to honour her with a minute of silence, a move that was blocked by the Chinese delegation, with support from Russia, Cuba and others. ISHR also understands that Chinese officials had lobbied Swiss and Ville de Geneve authorities not to allow the Martin Ennals Foundation to honour Cao Shunli.

'China's efforts to silence Cao Shunli paradoxically demonstrate the power and importance of her voice. Her calls for the Chinese government to combat corruption, respect basic democratic rights and uphold the rule of law will continue to reverberate, both in China and at the UN, until those calls are met,' Mr Lynch said.

‘Around the world – from China, to Bangladesh, to Mexico – human rights defenders face threats, attacks and reprisals for their work. The work of these defenders is crucial to foster democracy, promote accountability and uphold the rule of law. It is for this very reason that anti-democratic, corrupt and repressive governments so frequently target and attack their work,’ said Mr Lynch.

‘ISHR calls on all governments to recognise, respect and protect human rights defenders and to provide a supportive and enabling environment for their important work,’ Mr Lynch said.

Further information about the Martin Ennals Awards, including biographical information, photographs and videos of the Award and Prize winners, is available at <http://www.martinennalsaward.org/>.

The Martin Ennals Award Jury comprises representatives from the following leading international human rights organisations:

Amnesty International
EWDE Germany
Front Line Defenders
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
HURIDOCS
International Commission of Jurists
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
International Service for Human Rights
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Contact: Phil Lynch, Director of the International Service for Human Rights, on p.lynch@ishr.ch or + 41 76 708 4738

Our Work to Strengthen Human Rights Systems

HIGH COMMISSIONER CALLS ON GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO ‘DEAL WITH THE MESSAGE NOT THE MESSENGER’

(New York, 24 October 2014) - ‘Deal with the message not the messenger’, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights urged States in his inaugural address to the UN General Assembly, condemning attempts to silence human rights defenders.

During his first interactive dialogue with the General Assembly, High Commissioner Mr Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein was firm in his support for human rights defenders as ‘critical players in the promotion and protection of human rights, complementing States’. He noted that many defenders risk their lives to argue for human rights promotion. States should therefore use their resources to provide counter arguments if necessary, but not attack the individuals, he said.

Support for defenders and concern about intimidation and reprisals were expressed by several States - including Chile, the EU and the US – during the dialogue, as they asked the High Commissioner to elaborate on how to protect human rights defenders. In response Zeid noted ‘an acute need for concerted action’ to prevent and address reprisals, and welcomed the recent [Human Rights Council resolution on civil society space](#) as a positive step in articulating protection.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)’s focus on [widening democratic space](#) was, however, questioned by Russia, who suggested this focus may a contravention of

sovereign space. In response, the High Commissioner noted that increasing democratic space had been an issue of concern for OHCHR from the beginning of its work, whilst prioritising the issue is necessary due to the increasing closure of space for civil society around the world.

Welcoming the High Commissioner's firm stance, ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw said, 'In dialogue with the General Assembly, as well as in his exchange with members of the Human Rights Council, Mr. Zeid has been firm in condemning attacks against human rights defenders, including those engaging with the UN system. This comes at a time when Human Rights Council resolution 24/24 remains deferred by the General Assembly for further consideration and firm commitments to ensure a more effective response to reprisals are sorely needed.'

The High Commissioner also condemned attacks against OHCHR officials and Special Procedures, urging States to direct their attention 'to the content of reports, rather than to the person who has issued them'.

Financial constraints crippling the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Zeid argued that true solutions to the 'deepening turmoil in the world... can only come from more emphatic and comprehensive protection of human rights'. However, financial constraints are severely hindering OHCHR's ability to provide the service which States expect it to, he said.

He said this was critical at a time of 'relentless slaughter' in Syria, an overspill of violence into Iraq, the 'deplorable' conflict in Ukraine' and the 'slow, smouldering spread of Ebola'.

He noted that the OHCHR was expected to deal with such crises in spite of the fact that little more than a third of their current finances come from the UN regular budget. As one of the three pillars of the UN, human rights receives on average 85% less UN funds than either peace and security or development.

'The General Assembly has been warned of the effect of the drastic under-resourcing of OHCHR before', said ISHR's Michelle Evans, 'Mr. Zeid has placed the issue centre stage, highlighting the absurdity of keeping OHCHR on such a limited budget at a time of so many global human rights challenges.'

In the context of the budget discussions, Belarus complained of a 'proliferation of Special Procedures' suggesting that financial difficulties are due to 'the inappropriate use of resources.' Eritrea stated that Commissions of Inquiry were 'wasteful', claiming that the Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea would have no impact on the situation there.

The provision of technical support and capacity-building by OHCHR was welcomed by several States, including members of the Caribbean Community. Russia welcomed OHCHR to several Commissions of Inquiry, including on DPRK and Eritrea, but said that the development of new Special Rapporteurs was not the best use of resources.

Other issues highlighted by the High Commissioner included the importance of finding common ground regarding the right to development and upholding economic, social and cultural rights. He was firm in asserting that States must implement all components of the International Bill of Human Rights with equal energy.

Zeid discussed OHCHR support to Human Rights Council panels and reports on sexual orientation and gender identity. [Newly elected Human Rights Council member](#) El Salvador underlined its support

to the UN's Free and Equal Campaign, on LGBT rights, noting that to help spread the campaign's messages, translation of materials was urgently needed. Chile and the US also reiterated the importance of challenging discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, in order to champion human rights for all.

Overall, States were very welcoming of the High Commissioner and his report, with Liechtenstein noting that if there was one issue on which there was consensus it was the 'brilliant move' by the Secretary General in appointing Zeid. France said the voice of the High Commissioner must be heard more in New York, including at the Security Council.

'The High Commissioner has rightly alerted States to the precarious financial situation faced by his Office whilst emphasising the importance and impact of its work', said Ms Openshaw. 'He made clear that if global challenges are to be addressed effectively, States must support and finance OHCHR, and work in harmony with civil society to prioritise human rights protection.'

STATES MUST ENSURE DESIGNATION OF UN-WIDE FOCAL POINT ON REPRISALS, SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR TELLS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(New York, 24 October 2014) - Presenting his [inaugural report](#) to the General Assembly, the new UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Michel Forst, provided Member States with a vision for the mandate and proposed new working methods to maximise his effectiveness. In reflecting upon the UN's role in protecting defenders, Mr Forst noted that 'the UN depends entirely on free and safe cooperation with civil society for its effective functioning,' without which it loses legitimacy. A coordinated and unified response to prevent and address reprisals would be a cornerstone in ensuring that cooperation.

During the dialogue, Mr Forst emphasised that he would be focusing his efforts on supporting the vision of human rights defenders and ensuring implementation of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. To this end he outlined a series of regional consultations he will hold over the coming months to assess the nature of, and context in which, violations against defenders occur, as well as the effectiveness of existing protection measures and mechanisms.

Mr Forst spoke of seeking a balance between 'rectifying the wrong and celebrating the right', noting that his reports to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly would seek to expose human rights violations and share good practices in legislation and regulatory measures which could have a multiplying effect around the world.

'The Special Rapporteur put an emphasis on developing and maintaining constructive dialogue, whilst ensuring consistent follow-up to his recommendations and those made by previous mandate holders Hina Jilani and Margaret Sekaggya', said Ms Openshaw for ISHR.

Mr Forst noted his intention to carry out missions to assess the level of implementation of previous recommendations made. Such an approach was warmly supported by the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, with Ireland adding that increased follow-up would have a positive effect on combating impunity.

The Special Rapporteur spoke of a general clampdown on freedoms of expression, association and assembly as a common context for violations against defenders. He noted his intention to work closely with relevant UN mandates – including country and thematic rapporteurs – and regional mechanisms to enhance effectiveness. He highlighted his upcoming visits to the Inter-American

Commission on Human Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, before the end of 2014.

Cuba and Russia challenged this approach, asking Mr Forst how he planned to fulfil the mandate without being more selective in his activities, particularly if he intended on increasing work with country mandates. However, the new approaches were welcomed by many other States. Morocco encouraged the Special Rapporteur to consider the role that national human rights institutions might play to support his mandate.

To increase the visibility and effectiveness of the mandate Mr Forst spoke of the need for innovative tools including websites and the use of social media, calling on States to support him in their development.

In the spirit of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Mr Forst encouraged Member States to acknowledge the vital role of civil society and work to encourage others to protect rights and protect defenders. Belarus and Indonesia made comments to detract from the discussion on the rights of human rights defenders to be protected, but many other States, including the UK, thanked the Rapporteur for bringing welcome attention to the legitimacy of human rights defence and the need to prevent attacks against activists, including reprisals.

Following the interactive dialogue with Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Ms Gabriela Knaul presented her report to the General Assembly. During the dialogue, Ms Knaul referred to the case of UAE human rights defender, Osama Al Najjar who was arrested shortly after having met with the Rapporteur during her official visit to the country. A description of his detention, interrogation and torture were included in the [Secretary General's 2014 report](#) to the Human Rights Council on cooperation with the UN. Ms Knaul added her voice to that of the High Commissioner and several Special Procedures, calling for consideration of Human Rights Council resolution 24/24 and the timely appointment of a UN system-side focal point for reprisals.

'Osama and others around the world do not have the luxury of time', she said, referring to Mr Al Najjar's reported continued detention.

STATES SHOULD USE UPR TO ADDRESS ONGOING REPRESSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN EGYPT

(Geneva, 23 October 2014) - States should send a signal to Egyptian authorities that repression of human rights defenders and civil society actors must stop now, a group of international NGOs including the International Service for Human Rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch [said today](#).

In a joint letter addressed to State members and observers of the UN Human Rights Council, the NGOs express serious concern about the recent crackdown on independent civil society in Egypt.

The upcoming review of Egypt's human rights record by the Human Rights Council's universal periodic review (UPR) on 5 November 2014 comes at a critical time for human rights, freedoms and independent Egyptian civil society, including rights defenders and democracy activists, the letter says. Governments around the world should use the UPR as an opportunity to challenge the authorities' crackdown.

The letter expresses concern about the recent deadline imposed on NGOs to register under a repressive Law on Associations. The law gives authorities sweeping powers over registered civil

society organisations, which is why many Egyptian human rights organisations have chosen instead to register as law firms or not-for-profit companies. Authorities have also proposed even more repressive legislation to replace the current Law on Associations which would give authorities additional powers over NGOs' registration, funding and activities and impose heavy penalties reaching to up to five years imprisonment.

'Such laws make a mockery of recent resolutions of the Human Rights Council on [civil society space](#) and [human rights defenders](#)', said Michael Ineichen, Human Rights Council Advocacy Director at the International Service for Human Rights.

'States participating in the UPR must give concrete effect to these resolutions, by demanding that Egypt comply with international human rights law as it relates to civil society and human rights defenders,' Mr Ineichen said.

The NGO letter also expresses concern about the repeated failure by Egyptian authorities to provide accountability for past and ongoing human rights violations by security forces, including torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and unlawful killings as a result of the use of excessive lethal force to disperse peaceful protests.

The seven organisations deplore that as the UN's top human rights body, the Human Rights Council has so far failed to send a collective message that these and the other gross human rights violations that have marred Egypt in recent years must stop. The reluctance of many delegations at the Council to address the most urgent and severe aspects of the human rights situation in Egypt is extremely concerning, the letter says. It re-emphasises the need for Member and Observer States of the Council to use the upcoming UPR of Egypt to highlight the ongoing repression and to make concrete recommendations to the Government of Egypt in this regard. States should not 'waste the critical opportunity to address the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt but act in defense of human rights, freedoms and civil society', the letter concludes.

Download the [letter here](#).

Building on recommendations made previously [by ISHR](#) and others, the letter makes the following recommendations (summary - full letter [here](#)):

The Government of Egypt should cease threats against human rights defenders and civil society organizations and activists, including by withdrawing the 10 November 2014 deadline for all NGOs to register under the Law on Associations and retracting the draft Law on Associations. The authorities should enact legislation on associations in line with international standards, including the right to receive and use funding.

The Government of Egypt should revoke the Protest Law of November 2013 and introduce new legislation that would guarantee freedom of assembly through a transparent and simple notification process. Any new legislation should also provide for criminal responsibility and ensure accountability for the use of force.

The Egyptian authorities should open an independent and impartial judicial investigation to determine the identity of those responsible for ordering and carrying out unlawful killings in the course of suppressing the mainly peaceful demonstrations since 3 July 2013, including the 14 August 2013 Raba'a and Nahda Square dispersals in which at least 1,000 protesters were killed.

The Government of Egypt should respect and guarantee the independence of the judiciary and refrain from any undue, inappropriate or unwarranted interference in judicial matters.

The Egyptian authorities should immediately and unconditionally release all those detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, including those detained solely for their alleged membership of the Muslim Brotherhood. The authorities should further ensure that pre-trial detention is not a general rule but rather an exceptional measure and, to this end, cease the routine

renewal by prosecutors of detention orders “pending investigation” as a punitive measure to prolong the detention without charge of activists and peaceful protesters.

The Government of Egypt should end the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including extended solitary confinement; allow detainees requiring urgent medical attention to be transferred to appropriate medical facilities; and ensure the families of all those arrested and detained since 3 July 2013 are informed promptly of the current place of detention of their relatives, their current legal status, and any subsequent transfers to other places.

States should keep a close watch on the human rights situation in Egypt after the conclusions of the UPR of Egypt.

The letter was sent on behalf of Amnesty International, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the International Service for Human Rights.

Contact: Michael Ineichen, Human Rights Council Advocacy Director, m.ineichen@ishr.ch

NEW MEMBERS ELECTED TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MUST UPHOLD HIGHEST HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

(New York, 22 October 2014) - The 15 new members that were elected today to the UN Human Rights Council must uphold the highest human rights standards and fully cooperate with the Human Rights Council, says the International Service for Human Rights.

The General Assembly has elected the following States to the 47-member Council: Albania, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Ghana, Latvia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Paraguay, Portugal, Qatar, Bolivia, Botswana, Congo, India and Indonesia.

By becoming members of Human Rights Council – the UN’s top human rights body – States are committed to ‘uphold the highest human rights standards’, and to cooperate fully with the Council and its independent experts (or ‘special procedures’).

‘Election to the Council means new members must demonstrate they will comply with the Council’s criteria for membership. This includes accepting the requests of the special procedures to undertake country visits, and acting in good faith to implement human rights recommendations made by those experts,’ said ISHR’s Michelle Evans.

‘Members must also take effective measures to address violations of human rights for which they are responsible, commit to end attacks and intimidation against human rights defenders, and support a strong and vibrant civil society.’

‘It is regrettable that several of the newly-elected States have not shown respect and support for the work of non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders at home or on the international stage,’ said Ms Evans.

‘Indeed, it is imperative that Council members take action in their own countries to ensure human rights defenders can undertake their important work in a safe and enabling environment. This includes enacting specific laws and policies to protect defenders, as well as refraining from interfering with the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly and peaceful protest,’ said Ms Evans.

Council members are also obliged to guarantee to all persons the right of unhindered access to the Council and mechanisms so they can be heard by the international community and seek accountability for violations.

ISHR calls on newly-elected member States to be credible and effective members of the Council by urgently taking action to these ends.

Contact: Michelle Evans, ISHR's New York Manager and Advocacy Coordinator on m.evans@ishr.ch or +1 212 490 2199.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ALERT: FORECAST OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS FOR THE 69TH SESSION

(New York, 20 October 2014) - The Third Committee of the General Assembly meets at UN Headquarters in New York from 7 October to 26 November 2014. The General Assembly delegates most of its human rights-related work to its Third Committee, including consideration of the annual report of the Human Rights Council, interactive dialogues with invited special procedures and treaty body chairpersons, and the negotiation of some 50 human rights resolutions.

KEY RESOLUTIONS

Four country-specific resolutions are expected again this year: on the **Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea** (DPRK) (led by EU and Japan), **Iran** (Canada-led), **Myanmar** (EU-led) and Syria (led last year by Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia & United Arab Emirates). Syria, DPRK and Iran will be voted, but it is hoped that the text on Myanmar will be adopted by consensus again this year.

A live question is whether the DPRK itself will table their own resolution on the situation in DPRK. Unlike in previous years, the DPRK is fully engaged this session in lobbying against the EU-led resolution, which includes the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the DPRK ([A/HRC/25/63](#)) to refer the case to the International Criminal Court. The COI found systematic, widespread and grave human rights violations occurring in the country.

Despite some positive political developments in Myanmar, there is widespread agreement that the human rights situation on the ground has not improved enough for the resolution to be discontinued. In particular, an OHCHR country office has yet to be established, despite last year's resolution call for speeding up this process. NGOs continue to encourage the retention and expansion of language on accountability.

Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Finland (on behalf of Nordic States) will table the biennial resolution on extrajudicial executions. In the 67th session, a major gain was made when 'gender identity' was added to the list of vulnerable groups that States were specifically urged to protect. Negotiations on this year's text are expected to be difficult and attempts at amendments to delete language that refers to sexual orientation and gender identity are anticipated.

Elimination of violence against women and children

The biennial resolution on the elimination of all forms of violence against women, led by France and the Netherlands, this year focuses on accountability for violence against women and girls. It is expected that language in the text will draw from the [Agreed Conclusions](#) negotiated at the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), when the priority theme was the elimination of violence against women and girls.

A new initiative seeks to raise awareness on bullying against children. The draft resolution, led by Mexico, requests the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children to draft a study analysing the causes of bullying and identifying good practices on combating bullying. Many NGOs and States expect the text to acknowledge bullying against LGBTI youth -- a recognition that UNESCO underscores in its [2012 booklet on homophobic bullying](#).

Discussions on a resolution on 'Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family' (G77-led) will likely be influenced by the [recently adopted resolution on 'protection of the family'](#) by the Human Rights Council.

Several other resolutions on related themes – Trafficking in women and girls; the Rights of the child; and Early and forced marriage-will also be considered during this session.

Death penalty

This year the General Assembly will consider its fifth resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty. In June 2014, the Human Rights Council passed a resolution on this issue, in which for the first time, the UN deplors the human rights violations experienced by those facing the death penalty and other affected persons. Supportive States of the General Assembly resolution will continue working this session to build consensus around the moratorium on the use of the death penalty as part of the drive toward abolition.

Right to Privacy

This will be the second year that a resolution (last year led by Germany and Brazil) on the right to privacy in the digital age will be negotiated. The 68th Session resolution mandated the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report for the 27th session of the Human Rights Council and the current General Assembly session. It is hoped that key points advanced in that report – including the need for states to adopt clear comprehensive and non-discriminatory legislative framework to regulate surveillance by law enforcement or intelligence agencies – will be included in this session's resolution.

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUES

The Third Committee will hold [dialogues](#) with over fifty Special Procedure mandate holders, Independent Experts, Chairs of Working Groups and Chairs of treaty bodies. In addition, the President of the Human Rights Council will present the Council's annual report to the Third Committee on 17 November 2014 and to the plenary of the General Assembly (date TBD). Of note are the following reports:

Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions: The Special Rapporteur's report ([A/69/265](#)) focuses, in part, on the use of drones and the challenges their use poses to the right to life/dignity in particular.

Human rights defenders: The need to combat impunity for attacks against human rights defenders, together with the enactment of specific laws and policies to protect their work, have been identified as key priorities by the new UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, in his inaugural report ([A/69/259](#)). The report sets out a [vision and priorities](#) for the mandate over the coming three years, including a focus on groups of human rights defenders who are 'most exposed' or at risk, such as those working to promote economic, social and cultural rights, the rights of minorities, the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, women human rights defenders, and those working on issues of business and human rights or on accountability for past violations. The report expresses grave concern at the related issues of lack of cooperation with the mandate by some States, and the intimidation and reprisals faced by many human rights defenders

and non-governmental organisations in connection with their engagement with international and regional human rights mechanisms.

Right to freedom of association and assembly: The Special Rapporteur's report ([A/69/367](#)) address concerns about the exercise of the rights to freedom of association in the context of multilateral institutions. Of particular note is the [call by the Special Rapporteur](#) for a radical overhaul of the system for accreditation of non-governmental organisations, and an intensification of efforts to combat reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN.

Human rights and transnational corporations: The Working Group's report ([A/69/263](#)) is focused on National Action Plans on business and human rights, which they say must be underpinned by the core human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality, participation and inclusion, accountability and the rule of law. The Group asks that particular attention be given to the issue of gender and its intersection with groups particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses, such as human rights defenders. A National Action Plan should ensure that any such individuals or groups do not suffer doubly because of their marginalization.

Country situations

The Third Committee will also review the reports of mandate-holders on various country situations, including on Iran, Belarus ([A/69/307](#)), Eritrea (oral report only), Myanmar ([A/69/362](#)), DPRK (not yet released), and the Palestinian territories ([A/69/301](#)).

It is likely that some States will criticise the reports of certain Special Procedures. Previously the Third Committee's disapproval of reports has escalated to personal attacks on mandate holders and accusations that they have not complied with the Code of Conduct for Special Procedures. Similar concerns remain this year in relation to many of the reports.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Reprisals

With the President of the General Assembly deferring consideration of Human Rights Council resolution 24/24 at the end of the last General Assembly session, the issue of how to secure a better and more effective UN response to reprisals continues to be a live debate. States are considering whether it is feasible to find a solution during or after this Third Committee session. At the heart of the issue is how to safeguard the institutional relationship between the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, as well as how to make effective progress on preventing and addressing intimidation and reprisals against those that cooperate, or seek to cooperate, with the UN.

There exists increasing evidence that reprisals continue and that they represent an egregious attempt to silence those that engage with the UN. Recent reports of [defenders denied the right to travel to attend the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples](#) are an example pertinent to New York. A recently released [ISHR video, 'Reprisals – the human cost of cooperating with the UN'](#) also highlights cases of reprisals against human rights defenders engaging with the UN on a range of rights issues. These cases, along with those detailed in the Secretary General's report to the recent session of the Human Rights Council, simply confirm that efforts to prevent and eradicate reprisals require a more unified, systematised UN response.

The Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Madame Alapini-Gansou - whose mandate includes the prevention and response to intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating with the Commission - has added her voice to the call to UN Member States to better address reprisals. In an interview with ISHR, Madame Alapini-Gansou called on Member States to find a means to make more effective the UN response to

reprisals through the designation of a focal point. She noted that such a step at the UN level would help consolidate efforts being advanced regionally, including at the African Commission itself.

A full list of documents for each Third Committee agenda item can be found at <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/69/documentslist.shtml>

Contact: Michelle Evans, ISHR's New York Manager and Advocacy Coordinator on m.evans@ishr.ch or +1 212 490 2199.

UN CALLED TO STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION AND COMBAT REPRISALS

(Geneva, 17 October 2014) - The United Nations and its Member States have a legal obligation to strengthen civil society participation, radically overhaul the system for accreditation of non-governmental organisations, and combat reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN, according to a [major new report](#) to be considered by the UN General Assembly.

According to the report, prepared by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, [Maina Kiai](#), a range of UN policies and practices are incompatible with the rights to freedom of association and assembly, while some Member States have systematically worked to prevent non-governmental organisations and individuals from engaging with the UN, even resorting to torture, arbitrary detention, surveillance and travel bans.

The report makes a series of concrete recommendations, many of which reflect those made in a [major ISHR report to the Special Rapporteur in July 2014](#), to ensure that civil society can contribute to and strengthen the work of multilateral institutions, free from hindrance or attack.

'A strong civil society is essential for multilateral institutions' effectiveness, as it is often the best source of information on the ground,' says the Special Rapporteur in the report.

In addition, States and multilateral institutions themselves have a legal obligation to ensure that people 'can exercise their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in multilateral arenas,' the Rapporteur says.

The report documents a range of ways in which the United Nations itself is falling short in this regard, including through an accreditation process for NGOs to participate at the Human Rights Council and other fora which is 'long, complex, costly, beyond the capability of many small civil society organisations, and impossible to obtain for informal organisations and grass-roots networks.'

The Special Rapporteur is particularly critical that the accreditation process, which is overseen by States elected to the UN's Committee on NGOs, has resulted in the systematic exclusion of NGOs working on issues such as women's rights, sexual orientation and gender identity. 'As of April 2014, out of the 48 organisations which have had their accreditations repeatedly deferred, 46 work on human rights issues,' the report says. According to the Rapporteur, 'States sitting on the Committee should champion the right to freedom of association and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly,' with Mr Kiai praising Belgium, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay, in particular, for their 'role in combating attempts by peer members to arbitrarily dismiss applications of NGOs'.

Welcoming Mr Kiai's report, ISHR's Michelle Evans said, 'This report exposes the ways in which certain States use and abuse UN procedures to block or exclude NGOs and other civil society actors. We strongly support the Special Rapporteur's call for the UN to "reform the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations to prevent Member States from blocking accreditation applications with perpetual questioning and unilaterally vetoing applications".'

'The Special Rapporteur is absolutely right in saying that the UN, and other multilateral institutions, "function best when accessible to the greatest diversity of voices possible",' Ms Evans said.

In addition to expressing deep concern about the role of States such as China, Cuba, Russia and others in working to block applications for accreditation by NGOs or objecting to their participation, the Special Rapporteur also expresses 'the utmost concern' about States 'repeatedly targeting individuals because of their advocacy work in multilateral arenas'.

According to the report, 'there have been repeated instances of reprisals against individuals, or their relatives' in connection with their engagement with the UN Human Rights Council, UN treaty bodies and UN human rights inquiries, with States including Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates specifically cited in this regard. In addition to direct attacks, the Rapporteur also warns of 'the chilling effect of reprisals on civil society actors, often forcing them to censor themselves'.

States have an obligation to 'provide full protection to those who participate or seek to participate in multilateral arenas,' Mr Kiai says, reiterating previous calls for the UN General Assembly to support the designation of a high-level focal point to combat reprisals 'as soon as possible'.

Welcoming the strong focus on reprisals, ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw said, 'This report provides concrete guidance to both States and multilateral institutions as to how they can safeguard the right to participation and combat cases of intimidation and reprisals.'

Consistently with recommendations made by ISHR in its [major submission to the Special Rapporteur in July](#), recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur in this regard include that States should:

- refrain from any acts of intimidation or reprisal and publicly and unequivocally condemn cases where they occur;
- adopt and implement specific laws and policies to protect those engaging or seeking to engage with UN human rights mechanisms and other multilateral institutions;
- appoint a national focal point on reprisals; and
- ensure accountability for cases of reprisals, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors, through prompt, thorough and impartial investigations, and access to justice for victims.

'States should take strong and principled action at both the national and international levels to safeguard the right of all persons to communicate with the UN free from hindrance, threats and attacks,' Ms Openshaw said.

Ms Evans and Ms Openshaw also welcomed the principles set out in the report to guide multilateral institutions in their engagement with civil society, including that NGOs and other civil society actors should have the right to full and effective participation in all meetings and activities, the right to comprehensive and fair access to information, and the right to submit documents and deliver statements on an equal footing with States and private sector actors.

'The principles and recommendations set out in this report, many of which were strongly endorsed by ISHR in our submission to the Special Rapporteur, will assist to ensure both that multilateral institutions benefit from the rich and diverse input of civil society actors and that those actors are able to exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly,' Ms Evans said.

The Special Rapporteur's report is scheduled to be tabled and debated at the UN General Assembly in New York on 28 October 2014.

*Contacts: Michelle Evans, New York Manager, International Service for Human Rights, on m.evans@ishr.ch
Eleanor Openshaw, Program Manager (Reprisals), International Service for Human Rights, on e.openshaw@ishr.ch*

COMBAT IMPUNITY AND ENACT LAWS TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, CALLS UN EXPERT

(Geneva, 14 October 2014) - The need to combat impunity for attacks against human rights defenders, together with the enactment of specific laws and policies to protect their work, have been identified as key priorities by the new UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Michel Forst, in his [inaugural report](#) (also available in [French](#)).

The report, will be presented to the General Assembly in New York next week, sets out a vision and priorities for the mandate over the coming three years, including a focus on groups of human rights defenders who are 'most exposed' or at risk, such as those working to promote economic, social and cultural rights, the rights of minorities, the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, women human rights defenders, and those working on issues of business and human rights or on accountability for past violations. According to the Special Rapporteur, each of his 'future thematic and mission reports will contain a specific section dedicated to analysing the development of trends and particular threats facing the most exposed groups'.

Building on the recommendation of the previous Special Rapporteur that States enact specific laws and policies to protect human rights defenders, Mr Forst's inaugural report identifies a need to 'intensify efforts to convince governments to develop specific national measures, following the examples of Brazil, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire and Mexico' and foreshadows a future study focusing on the importance of national laws and mechanisms and ways to improve their effectiveness. He also pledges to play a significant role in the identification and dissemination of 'good practices' in the implementation of the Declaration of Human Rights Defenders, including through a more visible social media presence for the mandate, such as Facebook and [Twitter](#).

The report expresses grave concern at the related issues of lack of cooperation with the mandate by some States, and the [intimidation and reprisals](#) faced by many human rights defenders and non-governmental organisations in connection with their engagement with international and regional human rights mechanisms. The Special Rapporteur is 'struck by the number and gravity of threats' against those who cooperate with the UN, the report says, including 'threats against the defenders themselves or their families, defamation campaigns, death threats, physical violence, abductions, hounding by law enforcement, assassinations or various forms of harassment and intimidation by the police'. In this connection, the Special Rapporteur pledges to follow up more actively and systematically with States in relation to the investigation and remediation of alleged threats and attacks against defenders, together with the implementation of recommendations to ensure their protection. He also pledges to provide 'regular and detailed information to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly' on the status of States' responses to communications and implementation of recommendations, bringing much needed additional transparency and pressure to bear in this regard.

The need to ensure accountability and combat impunity for attacks against defenders comes through as a strong theme in the Special Rapporteur's report, with Mr Forst identifying that 'it is partially because of the de facto impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of reprisals against defenders that the phenomenon grows and expands' and pledging that 'one of the main lines of his work will be to combat the culture of impunity'. It is likely that the Special Rapporteur will dedicate a forthcoming report to this topic.

Finally, the Special Rapporteur identifies a need to further intensify cooperation with other UN mandate holders, together with the Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Defenders appointed by regional mechanisms, including the [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) and the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#). In this regard, it is notable that the Special Rapporteur has already issued joint statements with other mandate holders, such as the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association and Assembly, on issues including the detention of Bahraini [human rights defender Maryam Al-Khawaja](#), the use of anti-terrorism legislation to [criminalise human rights defenders in Ethiopia](#), and the passage of draconian [anti-protest legislation in the Australian state of Tasmania](#).

Contact: Phil Lynch, Director, International Service for Human Rights, on p.lynch@ishr.ch or +41 76 708 4738

Key Developments in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

ARBITRARY DETENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER LEYLA YUNUS NEEDS TO END

Leyla Yunus, a prominent and outspoken activist in Azerbaijan, has been held under pre-trial detention since July 2014. A hearing was attended in the week of October 20 (the date was not specified) to decide on whether to extend this. In letters Ms Yunus sent to her husband and in meetings with her lawyer, she reported ill-treatment by both guards and other inmates... [more](#)

BROADCASTING ACT CHALLENGES INDEPENDENCE OF ONLINE NEWS MEDIA IN SINGAPORE

In Singapore, a law approved in 2013 is threatening freedom of expression. The Broadcasting Act requests online news media to register to the Media Development Authority in order to obtain the license to publish articles online. The terms of the licenses give officials unlimited authority to force the removal of content they consider inappropriate and place onerous restrictions on news websites... [more](#)

RULING BY THE INTER-AMERICAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS REJECTED BY THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

In the week of 20 October, a ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights called on the Dominican Republic to provide redress to Dominicans of Haitian descent and Haitians for abuses such as illegal deportation, denial of identity documents and arbitrary deprivation of nationality. Nevertheless, one week later, the government formally rejected the court's ruling... [more](#)

PROTESTERS AGAINST AUSTRALIA'S INTERVENTION IN IRAQ ALLEGEDLY ABUSED BY POLICE

On 2 October, eight peaceful protesters landed on Swan Island, Australia. They were there to carry out a non-violent protest against the Australian government's 'rushed' decision to participate in the war in Iraq. While four of them were arrested by the local authorities, the other four activists were allegedly stripped and threatened with drowning, rape and kicking... [more](#)

WORRYING ATTACKS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN BAHRAIN

On 14 October, activist Zainab Al-Khawaja, who was eight months pregnant, was attending a court hearing on charges of ‘destroying government property’ after tearing a picture of Bahrain’s king at a protest in 2012. During the hearing, she was once again arrested, as she displayed a picture of Bahrain’s King and appealed for the freedom of protesting against ‘oppression and oppressors’... [more](#)

BAN IMPOSED ON TV CHANNEL IN PAKISTAN

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority suspended for 15 days the broadcast of ARY TV, a Pakistani private TV channel. As Mustafa Qadri, Pakistan researcher at Amnesty International noted, ‘ARY TV must be immediately allowed back on air. There is simply no justification for the Pakistani authorities to silence sections of the media solely because of their political leanings’... [more](#)

Opportunities for NGO Engagement

COMMITTEE ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

The Committee on Enforced Disappearances welcomes civil society reports for its 8th session, which will be held from [2 to 13 of February 2015](#). The written information should be sent before 1 December to ced@ohchr.org. More information can be found [here](#).

COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE

The 53rd session of the Committee Against Torture will take place from [3 to 28 November](#). The Committee will consider the State reports of Australia, Burundi, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Sweden, Ukraine, the United States of America and Venezuela. It will adopt the list of issues for Armenia, Gabon, Qatar, Senegal and Togo.

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The 53rd session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights will take place from [10 to 28 November](#). The Committee will consider the State reports of Finland, Guatemala, Montenegro, Nepal, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Vietnam.

The pre-session Working Group for the 54th session of the Committee will take place from [1 to 5 December](#). The Committee will consider the reports of Chile, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Sudan, Thailand, Uganda and Venezuela.

Organisations may send representatives to attend the above events, however the accreditation [request form](#) must be submitted at least ten days before the beginning of the session or the pre-session.

WEBCASTS OF THE TREATY BODY MEETINGS

If you are unable to attend relevant treaty body meetings, you can watch them live online. A group of Geneva-based NGOs, including ISHR, has coordinated to make this possible. The webcasts can be viewed at www.treatybodywebcast.org.

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

The 21st session of the UPR Working Group will take place in Geneva from [19 to 30 January 2015](#). The States under review: Kyrgyzstan, Kiribati, Guinea, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Spain, Lesotho, Kenya, Armenia, Guinea-Bissau, Sweden, Grenada, Turkey, Guyana, Kuwait.

Please consult [this webpage](#) as well as a [Practical Guide](#) for Civil Society on the Universal Periodic Review for further information and guidelines.

The [UPR pre-sessions](#) for the 21st session of the UPR will take place from 1 to 4 December at the Centre International de Conférences Genève.

FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

The 7th session of the Forum on Minority Issues will focus on 'Preventing and addressing violence and atrocity crimes targeted against minorities'. The meeting will be held from [25 to 26 November](#), in room XX of the Palais des Nations, Geneva. For more information on this Forum session, including practical and substantive information, please visit the Forum's [website](#).

FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The 3rd session of the Forum on Business and Human Rights will take place from 1 to 3 December. Statements and submissions can be sent to forumbhr@ohchr.org and the online registration can be done [here](#). For further information, please visit the Forum's [website](#).

UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND

The [United Nations Democracy Fund](#) (UNDEF) invites civil society organisations to apply for funding for projects to advance and support democracy. Project proposals may be submitted online between 15 November and 31 December on the [UNDEF website](#).

FORTHCOMING COUNTRY VISITS BY SPECIAL PROCEDURES

Afghanistan	Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, 1 - 10 November
Côte d'Ivoire	Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, 10 - 20 November
Burundi	Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, 14 – 25 November
Botswana	Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, 14 – 26 November
Slovenia	Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, 17 – 21 November
Paraguay	Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, 21 – 28 November
Sweden	Working Group on People of African Descent, 1 – 5 December
Nepal	Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, 4 – 11 December
Spain	Working Group on Discrimination against Women, 9 - 19 December

Kazakhstan Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and association,
19 – 30 January 2015

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

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING PROGRAM

The international human rights training program organised by [Equitas](#) will take place in Montreal, Canada, from 7 to 26 June 2015. Deadline for application is 17 November 2014. You can find more information on how to apply [here](#).

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL AND FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights will take place in Geneva from 27 February to 8 March 2015. You can find more information [here](#)

INVITATION: ISHR 30TH ANNIVERSARY & HIGH-LEVEL LEGAL BRIEFING

20 November 2014, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Over the last 30 years, ISHR has worked to support human rights defenders and to build and strengthen human rights laws and systems for their protection. We're delighted to invite you to two exciting events in honour of our important anniversary.

HIGH-LEVEL LEGAL BRIEFING

Join us for the launch and discussion of two groundbreaking legal reports:

- A memorandum of advice on the **legal obligations of the Human Rights Council, its President and Bureau to combat reprisals** prepared by Sir Nicolas Bratza and Professor Egbert Myjer (both formerly of the European Court of Human Rights), together with leading international law firm Freshfields.
- A major comparative research report on the recognition and **protection of human rights defenders under national law**, drawing on good practice and restrictive practice from over 40 jurisdictions.

The reports and a briefing will be presented by former President of the European Court of Human Rights, **Sir Nicolas Bratza**, together with ISHR Director **Phil Lynch**, followed by comments from leading Bahraini human rights defender **Maryam Al-Khawaja**.

Thursday 20 November, 15h00 to 16h15
Room IX, Palais des Nations, Geneva

30-YEAR CELEBRATION

Mark 30 years of ISHR supporting human rights defenders at our celebratory reception!

Join current and former members of ISHR's team, UN and NGO colleagues, diplomatic partners and donors as we celebrate our successes, acknowledge those that have been part of them, and look towards the future.

We are thrilled that this event will be addressed by UN Deputy High Commissioner **Flavia Pansieri**, ISHR Board Chair **Rosemary McCreery**, former ISHR Director **Chris Sidoti** and ISHR staff.

Thursday 20 November, 16h30 to 18h30

Restaurant des Délégués (E building, floor 8), Palais des Nations, Geneva

[RSVP FOR EITHER OR BOTH EVENTS NOW](#)

Please note: Accreditation is required for entry to the UN premises. If you do not already hold a valid badge, we may be able to assist with this. Please indicate these requirements in your RSVP form (using the link above). We must receive this by 10 November to make an accreditation request.

New Resources

KUMULIKA:

The 55th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights was held from 28 April to 12 May 2014 in Luanda, Angola. The new issue of Kumulika, ISHR's analytical publication on the African Commission, covers key developments at the 55th session and the NGO Forum which preceded it. The guide is available in [English and French](#).

PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL IN FRENCH

The Permanent Mission in Geneva of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), in collaboration with the Presidency of the Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, has recently published a practical guide in French about the mechanism and procedures of the Human Rights Council. The electronic version of the guide is available [here](#). Paper versions can also be requested to the Permanent Mission of the OIF.

UPR BRIEFING PAPERS ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN STATES UNDER REVIEW

ISHR has published a series of briefing papers on the situation of human rights defenders, which are intended to assist States and other stakeholders to formulate questions and recommendations regarding the protection of human rights defenders during the UPR.

A new briefing paper is available on [Honduras](#).

Opportunities to work with Human Rights

VACANCY: SPECIAL ADVISER ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS- INTERNATIONAL SERVICE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

ISHR is seeking a Special Adviser on Human Rights Defenders to join our dynamic team. This is a new position, based predominantly in Paris, and will involve working with and reporting to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mr Michel Forst, on a day-to-day basis.

The aim of the position is to strengthen the capacity and profile of the mandate and expand its range of activities, with a view to contributing to enhanced protection and a more enabling operating environment for human rights defenders, particularly those most exposed or at risk.

Applications close 9 November 2014. To find out more, click [here](#).

VACANCY: DIRECTOR - CHILD RIGHTS CONNECT

Child Rights
for an inspirational
international
implementing an
coherent strategy
international human
national level
respect of children's

Applications close 6
find out more, click



For more information about our work, or any of the issues covered in this publication, please visit our website:

www.ishr.ch

or contact us:

information@ishr.ch



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Connect is looking
Director to lead its
network in
integrated and
linking the
rights system to
advocacy and greater
rights.

November 2014. To
[here](#).

GENEVA OFFICE

Rue de Varembé 1, 5th floor
P.O. Box 16
CH-1211 Geneva 20 CIC
Switzerland

NEW YORK OFFICE

777 UN Plaza, 8th floor
New York, NY 10017
USA