



Opinion..... 1
 Council Alert..... 3
 Human Rights Defenders Profiles 6
 Our Work to Support Human Rights Defenders..... 9
 Our Work to Strengthen Human Rights Systems 21
 Key Developments in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights 28
 Opportunities for NGO Engagement 28
 Conferences and events 32
 New Resources 33

One of the greatest strengths of the Human Rights Council is its potential to empower civil society by promoting dialogue at multiple levels. The HRC’s three annual sessions provide human rights defenders from around the world with an unparalleled international platform to cast a spotlight on abuses. The Universal Periodic Review, a unique innovation of the Council, encourages governments to engage with civil society as part of the reporting process. At its best, the Council provides a lever for change, a place where human rights defenders come together to engage with governments, to speak with the media and find common ground for action on vitally important issues.

Opinion

DEFENDING CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE: A GOVERNANCE CHALLENGE FOR OUR TIMES

By Ambassador Keith Harper, US Representative to the UN Human Rights Council

Human rights begin 'in small places, close to home'. Those words from Eleanor Roosevelt are every bit as true today in our modern digitally interconnected world as when originally written over a half-century ago. Throughout history, the personal engagement of individuals and communities - human rights defenders and organizations dedicated to the promotion of human rights - has been the driving force for progress on human rights and democratic governance.

Recent history provides much evidence of the desire of citizens to have a greater say in shaping political outcomes. Making full use of the tools available at the HRC is now more critical than ever before. The Internet and advances in communications technology have brought people together in unprecedented fashion. Those nations who are serious about greater democratization and securing human rights see this digital revolution as providing effective new means to meeting these objectives. But make no mistake: authoritarian regimes perceive the enhanced mechanisms to exercise the rights of freedoms of expression and association as nothing short of an existential threat. They have reacted accordingly. Even as the power of citizens has grown, a new raft of restrictions has been imposed on civil society in many places around the world.

Civil society is a cornerstone of vibrant democracy, and we are deeply concerned at the constant attempt to shrink its space. The State Department's annual human rights reports document a rise in physical threats and attacks against activists and human rights defenders, an increasingly hostile legislative environment, the criminalization of the work of NGOs, reprisals and harassment. Many countries have enacted restrictive regulations on the Internet and have handed down detentions and lengthy prison terms for journalists and bloggers.

This backsliding has been felt at the Council as well. Many of the same States who impose restrictions on NGOs at home, also try to silence the voices of human rights defenders at the UN. Using discredited tactics like the 'No Action Motion', they seek to block Council debate on important issues. Worse, some human rights defenders have faced attacks, imprisonment, even threats to their lives, simply for trying to speak at the Council or provide evidence to its special rapporteurs.

'We must come together to intensify our efforts to support and defend civil society and to stem the rising tide of restrictions and reprisals.'

We must come together to intensify our efforts to support and defend civil society and to stem the rising tide of restrictions and reprisals. Governments and international institutions can best serve progress by fostering a supportive environment where civil society can work freely, independently and without fear of retaliation or intimidation. Specifically the role of governments should be to: (1) develop and promote laws, policies and practices that foster a supportive environment for civil society; (2) intensify multilateral pressure to promote and protect civil society, especially in parts of the world where governments see civil society as a threat; and (3) identify new and innovative ways of providing technical, financial and logistical support to civil society.

The Obama administration has made strengthening the position of civil society a cornerstone of our foreign policy. Last September the President convened foreign leaders and civil society representatives on the margins of UNGA to launch 'Stand with Civil Society', a multilateral initiative to push back on restrictions on civic space by focusing on enhancing norms on freedom of association and assembly, utilizing diplomatic response mechanisms, and providing innovative assistance to NGO partners on the ground. Other key initiatives include the Open Government Partnership (OGP), the Community of Democracies, and the Lifeline: Embattled CSOs Assistance Fund.

Here at the Human Rights Council, we are proud of our leading role in passage of the landmark 2010 resolution on Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly and similar resolutions on Freedom of Expression. In 2012 and 2014 we worked with a cross-regional core group of partners to pass groundbreaking resolutions on Internet freedom which affirmed that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online. Council delegations have continued to work together on a series of important initiatives to keep the focus on the fundamental issues of civil society space, human rights defenders, political participation, the protection of journalists and ending reprisals.

Civil society plays a vital role both within each state and within multilateral organizations. I have observed this both from the NGO side when representing Indian Nations and as a diplomat representing the United States at the UN. Indeed, it is not overstatement that nothing is more effective in promoting human rights than the empowerment of the individuals who are working to secure them. Advancing human rights in the 21st century depends on the ability of individuals to share ideas, speak freely, and to act peacefully on their convictions. Essential progress in our societies most

naturally flows from the grassroots up. Because civil society is so vital, states have an obligation to expand its role, to open up additional space for full participation and to safeguard groups and individuals from reprisals. The United States will continue to make this a key priority.

Ambassador Keith Harper is the US Representative to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Prior to his appointment in June 2014, Ambassador Harper was a partner in a leading law firm. A member of the Cherokee Nation, he also served as Senior Staff Attorney with the Native American Rights Fund from 1995 to 2006.

Council Alert

A PREVIEW OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL'S 27TH SESSION

The Human Rights Council will hold its 27th regular session at the United Nations in Geneva from 8 to 26 September.

In what will be the first session for the new High Commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad Zeid al-Husseini, the Council will have the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to promoting and protecting civil society space when a resolution on the issue is presented. A resolution on tackling impunity for attacks against journalists will also feature at this session, and there is potential for a follow-up resolution on discrimination and violence against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

The programme of work for the session includes a record number of panel discussions (ten panels are planned). Given the limited time available, the Council decided to limit the overall time for its interactive dialogues with special procedures to four hours, by reducing the individual speaking time for States. This change will be implemented on a trial basis, with the United States in particular expressing its unease and cautioning that this should not constitute a precedent. The overall time allocated to civil society was in general already limited to 30 minutes, and will remain unchanged.

Civil Society Space and safety of journalists

In June the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a significant report on civil society space, which will be considered during the 27th session at the Council. The report focuses on 'the importance of the promotion and protection of civil society space' and identifies a range of steps that should be taken by States and the UN to make certain that civil society actors can work free from hindrance and insecurity. The concurrent negotiation of a resolution on this topic, led by Ireland, Chile, Japan, Sierra Leone and Tunisia, provides a critical opportunity to reflect these proposed measures. 'The resolution is vital because it comes at a point in time when civil society around the world is facing unprecedented levels of restrictions and attacks' said Michael Ineichen, Human Rights Council Advocacy Director at ISHR.

'This resolution should also be a reminder to States, such as Egypt, that the international will not tolerate their stifling of civil society', Mr Ineichen said.

ISHR will host a side event with international experts and national human rights defenders to discuss recent developments and next steps in the protection of **civil society space** and the **prevention of reprisals** against human rights defenders. The event will take place **on Friday, 19 September**, from 9.15 - 11.45am, in Room 24 of the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

Following up to last year's panel discussion and the 2012 resolution, Austria together with Brazil, France, Morocco, Tunisia and Qatar will present a resolution on the **protection of journalists**, with a specific focus on impunity. Journalists in a number of countries including Turkey, Egypt or Libya, currently face many restrictions, threats, attacks and violence.

'This resolution allows the Council to make an opportune response to the fact that, in many countries, journalists are one of the groups of human rights defenders which are most exposed to, and least protected from, excessive restrictions and severe attacks', said Ben Leather, ISHR's Advocacy and Communications Manager. 'Their continued ability to play a crucial role in informing society, States and the United Nations about threats to human rights must be guaranteed'.

A further opportunity for the Council to protect civil society's participation in the protection of human rights will come when the Czech Republic together with Botswana, Indonesia, Netherlands and Peru introduces a resolution on **equal political participation**. Meanwhile, Australia will present a resolution on **National Human Rights Institutions**.

Sexual orientation, gender identity and human rights

Uruguay has indicated that it will 'try to encourage an initiative for vulnerable groups, like LGBTI groups, as per the earlier resolution of the UN HRC,' whilst Chile indicated it would be supportive of such a move. While the Human Rights Council adopted its first ever UN resolution on sexual orientation, gender identity and human rights in 2011, the systematic and ongoing violations against LGBTI people across the world since has not received the international attention they deserve.

ISHR is concerned by the fact that it has been three years since the Council's first adoption of a text on sexual orientation, gender identity and human rights. The time has come for the Council to heed calls by LGBTI rights advocates and approve an initiative that responds adequately to the increasing challenges and vulnerabilities faced by LGBTI people on the ground, including by ensuring monitoring and regular reporting to the Council about cases of violations.

Panel discussions

The long list of panel discussions includes one on the **protection of the human rights of persons deprived of their liberty**, lead by Austria, a panel on the **protection of the family and its members**, lead by Egypt, a panel **on the role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights**, lead by Ukraine, as well as an annual discussion on the **integration of a gender perspective** (HRC resolution 6/30).

Ethiopia, on behalf of the African Group, introduced a panel discussion on **South Sudan** focusing on the identification of effective measures to improve the human rights situation in the country. However, the participation of a civil society representative on the panel was not contemplated in the resolution which requested this discussion and therefore no NGO will be represented amongst the speakers. 'The disregard for civil society voices in this debate is ironic during a session that considers the promotion of civil society space' said Clement Voulé, head of ISHR's Advocacy at the African Commission.

Sudan

The **USA** will introduce a resolution on the human rights situation in **Sudan**. During the organisational meeting on 25 August, US Ambassador Keith Harper stated that there is a need to see a stronger resolution reflecting cases of bombardments of civilians and killings of peaceful protesters,

as well as to significantly strengthen the Council's response to the human rights conditions on the ground.

Renewal of special procedures mandate and appointment of mandate holders

Resolutions to renew the mandates of the **Special Rapporteur on promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence**, and the **Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances** will be tabled by Switzerland and France respectively, each of them working with a core group.

Moreover, the Council will appoint new mandate holders to the position of Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe **drinking water and sanitation** and Special Rapporteur on the rights of **persons with disabilities**, as well as to the position of the Independent Expert on **Cote d'Ivoire** and Independent Expert on **Sudan** (if renewed). The Council will also appoint one member from Western European and other States to the Working Group on **Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances**, and one member from Asia-Pacific and Eastern European States to the Working Group of **Experts on People of African Descent**.

It is planned that the Council will elect members of the **Advisory Committee** for its seven vacant seats. The Secretariat has received the nominations of six candidates from the Governments of France, Guatemala, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea.

Country-specific developments

Several **thematic reports** on the situation of human rights in specific countries will be presented to the Council this session, including the reports of the experts on the situation of human rights in **Cambodia** (Surya Prasad Subedi), **Somalia** (Bahame Nyandugua) and **Sudan** (Mashood Baderin).

The Council will conduct an **interactive dialogue** with the experts on the above countries as well as on the **High Commissioner's report on Ukraine**. These meetings provide an opportunity for human rights defenders to highlight human rights violations in their countries.

Ethiopia, on behalf of African Group, requested to convene an Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on the Situation of the Human Rights in the **Central African Republic** under Agenda Item 10.

Resolutions to be presented to the Council's 27th session (as announced at the organisational meeting on 25 August):

Resolution on human rights and indigenous people (Guatemala, Mexico)

Resolution on civil society space (Ireland, Chile, Japan, Sierra Leone, Tunisia)

Resolution on child morbidity and mortality (Ireland, Uruguay)

Resolution on National Human Rights Institutions (Australia)

Resolution on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation (Germany, Spain)

Resolution on the human rights situation in Sudan (US)

Resolution on the safety of journalists (Austria, Brazil, France, Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar)

Resolution on the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence (Switzerland, Argentina, and Morocco)

Resolution on promotion of human rights through sport and Olympic ideals (Russia)

Resolution on the renewal of the mandate of the Working Group on enforced and involuntary disappearances (France, Argentina)

Resolution on violence and discrimination against a range of persons (Chile)

Resolution on the consequences of foreign debt and vulture funds on human rights and in particular ESCR (Argentina)

Resolution on local governments and human rights (Republic of Korea)

Resolution on preventable maternal mortality and morbidity (New Zealand, Burkina Faso, Colombia)

Resolution on children's rights (Romania)

Resolution on the promotion of technical cooperation in the work of the Human Rights Council (Thailand, Brazil, Honduras, Indonesia)

Resolution on technical assistance and capacity building for Yemen on human rights (Netherlands, Yemen)

Resolution on equal political participation (Czech Republic, Botswana, Indonesia, Netherlands and Peru)

Resolution on right to development, and human rights and coercive measures (Iran, NAM)

Resolution on reducing and eliminating child early and forced marriage (Sierra Leone, Argentina, Canada, Uruguay, Montenegro)

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Human Rights Defenders Profiles

HENRI TIPHAGNE: INDIAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

People's Watch has been fighting the suspension of its registration by the Indian government, under the Foreign Contributions Regulations Act, for nearly two years. Despite this, the Tamil Nadu-based human rights NGO continues to promote and protect human rights by monitoring human rights violations, undertaking strategic advocacy and demonstrating solidarity with peoples' struggles. Henri Tiphagne, Executive Director of People's Watch, speaks to ISHR about the challenges faced by human rights defenders in India.

'The journey to human rights work is a long one.'

My own human rights work has several important starting points. The first one happens to be the inspiration drawn from my mother, who worked to combat leprosy in India for almost 60 years. She

worked with the poorest of the poor, the most excluded communities of leprosy victims. The second factor was my engagement with the student movement known as the All India Catholic University Federation, which is a member of Pax Romana. The third factor was my engagement in grassroots work after I had finished university, engaging in relief operations in a flood affected area in Tamil Nadu. During this time, my colleagues from the student movement and I became aware of the specificities of working at the grassroots and understanding the dynamics of powerlessness to which is linked caste and caste-based discrimination. We then began working with the landless labourers in that part of Tamil Nadu, leading us into direct day to day confrontations with law enforcement agencies. Through this experience I also gained understanding of the ways in which law could be used to challenge injustice and, as a result, I was inspired to pursue studies in law and subsequently to work in human rights.

‘The right to assemble and the right to associate are the two major challenges that human rights defenders face in India today, in spite of India’s reputation for being a vibrant democracy.’

We are not easily allowed to form associations which have the objective to work on human rights, and if we are then there are problems in registration. In Tamil Nadu, for example, there is a fairly recent law that says an organisation cannot have the words ‘human rights’ in its title. We also face constraints in exercising our right to seek and utilise resources, whether domestic or international, for human rights work.

In spite of our vibrant constitution and our vigilant judiciary, which most often is willing to stand on our side, we find that our right to assemble, to protest, to show dissent is being violated. Social protest in this country is gradually becoming criminalised. For instance, even the mobilisation of affected communities in a continuous non-violent assembly may be rendered a criminal activity by the State and there are instances where cases of sedition are filed against the organisers.

‘What we need is domestic legislation that is based on the provisions contained in the UN Declaration on human rights defenders.’

India recently adopted the Whistle-blowers Protection Act in 2014, which includes protection for whistle-blowers who are public servants as well as any other persons, including NGOs. This should now be complemented by the enactment of a law on the protection of human rights defenders. The passage of such a law, however, will also require better public and political recognition of the vital work of human rights defenders and NGOs.

‘The existing legal framework for human rights NGOs in India is deeply problematic.’

In India, an organisation cannot receive foreign funding without registration under the FCRA and periodic reporting to the government under this law. In 2010, as a result of many years of effort by previous governments led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and then the subsequently by Dr. Manmohan Singh, the FCRA was amended to make it more stringent. The original law itself already subjected NGOs to many arduous requirements. The FCRA 2010 places India on par with the NGO laws of Russia, Ethiopia and Egypt. Countries such as Kenya, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan are now contemplating such an Act as well. India has become a bad model for other countries to follow.

The FCRA 2010 calls for 1) the mandatory re-registering of organisations with the Ministry of Home Affairs every 5 years; 2) it says that the government can cancel your registration, which means that all the assets that your organisation acquired through foreign funding will revert back to the State, and 3) there is a provision for being suspended for a period of 180 days while the State carries out investigations into an organisation during which period the bank accounts are frozen. The grounds for such suspensions include that one should not be seen as carrying out activities of a political

nature, a provision which is often arbitrarily applied to human rights defenders. Mobilising and assembling people in protests to show their dissent, according to this Act, may be construed as using foreign funds against the State. Additionally, foreign resources are not allowed to be used for any publication work, including electronic means of publication such as websites, blogs, social media, etc.

‘The suspension faced by CPSC under the FCRA is quite possibly linked to the work People’s Watch have been doing in engaging with international human rights mechanisms.’

People’s Watch’s legal body registered under the FCRA is called the ‘Centre for the Promotion of Social Concerns (CPSC)’. The CPSC was suspended three times for a total period of more than 21 months, from 16 July 2012 to 16 March 2014. We have reason to believe it is linked to our work with the UN human rights system.

People’s Watch, through AiNNI (the All India Network of NGOs and Individuals working with National and State Human Rights Institutions), played a big role in organising the official country visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya, to India in 2011 when I accompanied her around the country to meet with defenders from different regions. During the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur in Geneva in March 2012, I made an oral statement on behalf of FORUM-ASIA highlighting the continuous peaceful assemblies of affected communities against the establishment of a nuclear power plant in Koodankullam, Tamil Nadu. Also in 2011, the National Human Rights Commission of India was coming up for re-accreditation by the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) on NHRIs. On behalf of AiNNI, we prepared and submitted an alternative report based on 250 responses to right to information petitions. This report was endorsed by more than 300 NGOs throughout India.

We then got our first suspension order dated 16 July 2012, followed by two more in February 2013 and October 2013. During this 21-month period, our organisation was completely decimated, as it became increasingly impossible to pay wages of staff as well as respond to the needs of victims and the beneficiaries of our school-based human rights education programmes in 18 states of India, reaching 400,000 students. Not to mention the psychological distress and immense pressure encountered by those of us in decision-making posts. Finally, earlier this year, we were able to get a Delhi High Court ruling in our favour to allow us to operate our bank account and pick up the pieces.

‘The future for human rights defenders in India is uncertain.’

Since its election the new Indian government has not yet made its position on NGOs clear. There have, however, been leaked documents from the Intelligence Bureau circulating the media in recent weeks which accuse human rights NGOs as being responsible for the slow economic growth rate in the country through their opposition to major development projects (such as nuclear power plants, dams, etc.) which bring investment. The litmus test will be in 2015, when over 30,000 organisations across the country will be going before the Ministry of Home Affairs for their re-registration under the FCRA

‘Engagement with the UN human rights system is a two-way street.’

The UPR provides a unique and important opportunity for engagement of civil society with the State and the other States in the UN, in realising domestic human rights obligations. People’s Watch has tried as much as it can to use this and other international mechanisms to bring about domestic change. A global approach to human rights is what is much needed.

‘Reprisals are, unfortunately, an occupational hazard.’

In the case of People’s Watch, we had plenty of support from the OHCHR and Special Rapporteurs, as well as international NGOs, who were all ready to speak out on the undue suspension that we faced. However, we were advised by the best advisers in the country, including former ministers, judges, and chairpersons and members of NHRIs, not to make it into a global issue at that moment. In that situation, our local solidarity was more important than big, radical decisions from outside pressure. The local solidarity and support has gone a long way for us. It is only now that we are speaking out due to the fact that we have temporarily won our case in court. While there may be times when we have had to be silent, the more we take recourse to international human rights mechanisms the more I am sure there will be gradual change towards better understanding of the work of human rights defenders and better protection to human rights defenders when undertaking their work, including when engaging with the UN.

‘At People’s Watch, we have shown our convictions are stronger than that of the government. I believe that in the end it is the defenders who stand tall, in spite of everything, due to the solidarity we share at local, national, regional and international levels and the support that has been shown.’

Henri Tiphagne is Executive Director of People’s Watch in India. His work has also extended to national networks such as the All India Network of NGOs and Individuals working with National and State Human Rights Institutions (AiNNI) and the Human Rights Defenders Alert-India (HRDA), the Convenor of the Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (WGHR) as well as at the regional and global levels as the Chairperson of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and Executive Committee member of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN).

Our Work to Support Human Rights Defenders

SRI LANKA MUST END REPRISALS AGAINST THOSE WHO COOPERATE WITH THE UN

(Geneva, 25 August 2014) - Sri Lanka must end a series of attacks against human rights defenders for cooperating with the United Nations human rights mechanisms, a coalition of leading non-governmental organisations said today.

A UN Human Rights Council mandated inquiry is currently investigating alleged violations of international humanitarian law, as well as gross and systematic human rights abuses, committed by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which led to a UN estimated 40,000 civilian deaths in 2009 alone.

In a [joint letter to the President of the UN Human Rights Council and to Ambassador Ravinatha Pandukabhaya Aryasinha of Sri Lanka](#), the NGOs outline an alarming trend of intimidation, threats and reprisals in Sri Lanka against people believed to be engaging with the Human Rights Council and other UN human rights mechanisms, including the Commission of Inquiry.

In one such attack, a mob disrupted a meeting of families of persons who have been disappeared in the north of Sri Lanka. In another, a leading newspaper labelled those who give evidence to the UN as 'traitors' and said that 'clearly what should be done is to shoot them and throw them to the forest for the foxes to eat'.

'These are the latest in what is a clear pattern of systematic reprisals against human rights defenders and victims in Sri Lanka who seek to engage with the UN. Such acts inflict further harm on victims and their families, entrench the existing climate of fear in the country, and serve as a warning against any form of engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, including the investigation process,' said Ms Pooja Patel of the International Service for Human Rights.

'This pattern has been brought to the continuous attention of the UN Human Rights Council by civil society, human rights experts and States, as well as by both the UN Secretary-General and High Commissioner. The time has now come for a resolute response,' Ms Patel said.

'The Government of Sri Lanka has the primary responsibility for protecting people from threats, intimidation and reprisal, and must condemn all such acts immediately and unequivocally as well as take all necessary lawful steps to affirm and uphold the right of all persons to free communication with the UN, safe from hindrance or insecurity' said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

'The UN Human Rights Council also has a responsibility to protect those who engage with it from intimidation and reprisals,' Mr Lynch said. 'We call on the President, Bureau and Members of the Council to condemn the systematic reprisals faced by Sri Lankan human rights defenders and other individuals, as well as to remind Sri Lanka of its obligation to ensure that all persons can exercise their right to free and unhindered access to UN human rights mechanisms.'

'States must be resolute in addressing cases of reprisals, including by mobilising their diplomatic representatives in Sri Lanka to take all such steps as are necessary to protect human rights defenders from all forms of intimidation, threat or attack,' Ms Patel said.

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UN WORKING GROUP CONCERNED BY RESTRICTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN AZERBAIJAN

(Update - Geneva, 28 August 2014) - The UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights has expressed grave concern at restrictions on human rights defenders and non-governmental organisations working on issues of business and human rights in Azerbaijan.

The comments came after ISHR called on the Working Group to ensure that 'the situation and protection of human rights defenders' was 'the key priority' during the Group's first-ever mission to Azerbaijan, from 18 to 27 August.

In a [statement issued at the conclusion of the visit](#) and in advance of a detailed report to be submitted to the Human Rights Council in June 2015, the Working Group said, 'It is a matter of concern that a number of prominent civil society actors were placed in pre-trial detention just before our visit and that human rights organisations face problems with accessing bank accounts and registering'.

The Working Group statement also affirmed the importance of the work of human rights defenders to economic and social development, saying 'Free and vibrant social dialogue is critically important to the promotion of business and human rights. It allows different views to be aired to ensure well-

informed policymaking. The Government must ensure that the legitimate and peaceful activities of human rights defenders are not obstructed'.

Welcoming the Working Group's statement, ISHR's Michael Ineichen said, 'In Azerbaijan and many other countries, human rights defenders face grave risks for their work to promote corporate responsibility and accountability. We urge the Working Group to ensure a strong focus on the situation of human rights defenders in country missions, communications and in all other aspects of its mandate and to speak out strongly against any restrictions or reprisals associated with their work.'

(Geneva, 19 August 2014) - A group of United Nations experts on business and human rights should raise serious concerns about the repression of civil society when they visit Azerbaijan this week, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

The UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights is conducting a [visit to Azerbaijan from 18 to 27 August](#) to examine implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The visit comes as Azerbaijan intensifies a year-long crackdown on human rights defenders and non-governmental organisations, including those working on issues of corporate transparency and accountability.

According to Human Rights Watch, in the last month alone [Azerbaijan has arrested at least four leading human rights defenders](#) on bogus charges, including prominent activists Leyla Yunus and Rasul Jafarov, while also imposing [financial sanctions on a number of individuals and organisations who work on issues of business and human rights.](#)^[1] Earlier today, a group of UN [human rights experts condemned](#) the 'growing tendency to prosecute prominent human rights defenders in Azerbaijan' and urged the Government 'to reverse the trend of repression, criminalisation and prosecution of human rights work in the country'.

'Human rights defenders and non-governmental organisations have a vital role to play in promoting corporate respect for human rights and exposing and seeking accountability for corporate human rights violations. They should be protected and not persecuted for this work,' said Michael Ineichen of the International Service for Human Rights.

In June 2014, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a [significant resolution](#) which recognises 'the valuable role played by civil society, including non-governmental organisations, in promoting the implementation of the Guiding Principles and accountability for business-related human rights abuses'. This resolution complements the Guiding Principles themselves, which recognise the role of defenders in preventing, mitigating and seeking remedy for corporate human rights violations and stipulate that governments and businesses must not interfere with the important and legitimate activities of human rights defenders.

'In light of recent developments in the country, the situation and protection of human rights defenders should be the key priority for the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights during its mission to Azerbaijan,' Mr Ineichen said.

Globally, a number of recent reports have highlighted the serious threats and risks – from defamation, to judicial harassment, to arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings – that human rights defenders who work on issues related to [land and environment rights](#), the natural resources sector and [major development projects](#) face.

'Human rights defenders in oil-rich Azerbaijan face the double jeopardy of a repressive government and powerful, profit-driven non-State actors,' said Mr Ineichen.

'In the past the UN Working Group has been subject to some criticism that it has been insufficiently attentive to the situation of human rights defenders. The Group's visit to Azerbaijan presents both an opportunity and imperative to place the protection of human rights defenders at the heart of the business and human rights agenda,' he said.

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NIGER MUST PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WORKING ON ISSUES OF CORPORATE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

(Geneva, 8 August 2014) - **Joint NGO statement on the protection of human rights defenders working on issues of corporate transparency and accountability in Niger**

Background: Arrest of civil society activists

On the day of French President François Hollande's visit to Niger on 18 July 2014, several members of Niger's civil society were arrested in Niamey after having urged greater transparency and fairness in dealings between the government and extractive industries. We are deeply concerned that the arrests of these human rights defenders appear to have been directed at stifling or silencing their advocacy in relation to business and human rights, particularly the conduct of French and other transnational corporations.

Among the activists who were arrested was Mr. **Ali Idrissa**, the national coordinator of the Network of Civil Society Organizations for Transparency in Extractive Industries and Budgetary Analysis (known as ROTAB for its French acronym) and of Publish What You Pay-Niger, as well as a member of the board for Niger's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI Niger). Ms. **Solli Ramatou**, national coordinator of the Group for Reflection and Action on Extractive Industries in Niger (known as GREN for its French acronym) was also among those arrested, as well as Ms. **Naomi Stansley**, Mr. **Maikoul Zodi**, Mr. **Halidou Mounkaila**, Mr. **Boubacar Illiassou** (members of ROTAB) and Mr. **Bozari Boubacar** (a member of GREN). These advocates were released later the same day.

ROTAB and GREN have worked for years for greater transparency in the opaque extractive sector in Niger. The 'Save Niger' civil society coalition ('Sauvons le Niger'), which both organizations belong to, had published a statement the day before President Hollande's arrival calling for greater transparency and fairness in uranium mining contracts between Niger's government and **Areva**, the French nuclear firm. The coalition had also called for the residents of Niamey to welcome President Hollande with a yellow scarf to symbolise their rejection of the pillage of the country's natural resources by foreign companies.

This strongly stated position by the coalition, and its use of the occasion of President Hollande's visit to criticise the political and economic relations between France and Niger as well as the manner in which Areva exploits uranium in Niger, seem to have been the root causes of the arrest of these members of civil society, who still do not know if formal charges will be filed against them.

We, the undersigned organizations, consider that members of civil society, particularly local NGOs, play a fundamental role in the defense of human rights that are impacted by companies. We

strongly condemn the arrest of the civil society representatives mentioned above. Their arrest strikes us as a violation of their rights of freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Recommendations to the government and authorities of Niger

Concerned by the actions of the authorities in Niger and seeking to ensure respect for human rights defenders, we call on the Government of Niger to take all necessary steps to:

- Protect in all circumstances the physical security and psychological integrity of the human rights defenders mentioned above, and of all human rights defenders in Niger;
- End all forms of harassment – including judicial harassment – against them and all human rights defenders in Niger;
- Respect the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly of civil society in Niger working for greater transparency in natural resource management;
- Comply with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1988, particularly:
 - Article 1, which states, ‘Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels’; and
 - Article 12.2, which states, ‘The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration’;
- Guarantee, as an EITI-compliant country, complete transparency in extractive industry revenue management, and a truly open debate with civil society on natural resources and the allocation of revenues that they generate;
- Ensure that revenues from natural resources benefit all segments of society in Niger;
- Comply with the State duty under United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to protect persons from human rights abuses by companies, including by ensuring effective remedies for victims of abuses involving companies, and ensuring ‘that the legitimate and peaceful activities of human rights defenders are not obstructed’; and
- More generally, comply with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as regional and international human rights instruments ratified by Niger.

Recommendations to Areva

Reaffirming the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, we, the undersigned organizations, call on Areva to:

- Respect Nigerian national laws, including the Mining Code;

- In accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, respect all internationally-recognised human rights, undertake due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for direct and indirect adverse human rights impacts, and cooperate in ensuring access to effective remedy for those affected;
- In accordance with the Guiding Principles, conduct meaningful consultations with affected groups, including with human rights defenders and other civil society actors, to identify the actual or potential adverse human rights impacts with which the company may be directly or indirectly involved, and refrain from any interference with their exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly and peaceful protest;
- Ensure the complete implementation of the company's Values Charter, including 'compliance with the principles of Human Rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'; and
- Publicly state its opposition to restrictions on the legitimate activities of human rights defenders in Niger, including those who advocate for greater transparency and fairness in relations between the government and the extractive industries.

NB: The Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (a signatory to this statement) invited Areva to respond to concerns raised by civil society in Niger on a number of occasions. All of Areva's responses on these issues can be found [on its website](#).

Recommendations to the governments of Niger and France jointly

Noting the friendship and cooperation that have existed between Niger and France for decades, we, the undersigned organizations also:

- Encourage both countries to take into greater consideration the concerns of civil society in Niger on issues of transparency and respect for human rights by business;
- Call on both governments to guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and association, as well as to peaceful public assembly and protest; and
- Call on both governments to ensure that Niger's natural resources, particularly uranium, drive development and improvements in well-being for all of the people of Niger.

Signed,

International NGOs

1. Business & Human Rights Resource Centre
2. Front Line Defenders
3. Inclusive Development International
4. International Service for Human Rights
5. Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of FIDH (the International Federation for Human Rights) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

6. Oxfam America

African NGOs and Institutes

1. African Law Foundation (Nigeria)
2. Association Nigérienne de Défense des Droits de L’Homme (Niger)
3. Centre for Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand (So. Africa)
4. Centre du Commerce International pour le Développement (CECIDE)(Guinea)
5. Centre pour la Justice et la Réconciliation (Dem. Rep. of Congo)
6. Conseil Régional des Organisations Non Gouvernementales de Développement du Kasai Oriental (CRONGD) (Dem. Rep. of Congo)
7. Foundation for Environmental Rights, Advocacy & Development(Nigeria)
8. Groupe d’Appui aux Exploitants des Ressources Naturelles (Dem. Rep. of Congo)
9. Groupe de Recherche et de Plaidoyer sur les Industries Extractives(GRIPIE) (Côte d’Ivoire)
10. Groupe de Réflexion et d’Action sur les Industries Extractives au Niger (GREN) (Niger)
11. Justicia asbl (Dem. Rep. of Congo)
12. Ligue Guinéenne des Droits de l’Homme (Guinea)
13. Ligue Sénégalaise des Droits de l’Homme (Senegal)
14. Synergie pour le Développement (Senegal)
15. Peace Point Action (Nigeria)
16. Rencontre pour la Paix et les Droits de l’Homme (Rep. of Congo)
17. South African Constitutional Literacy and Service Initiative

USE ‘POLITICAL WILL’ TO REVIEW ANTI-HOMOSEXUALITY LAWS IN MALAWI

(Geneva, 4 August 2014) - ISHR has welcomed an assurance to the UN given by the government of Malawi that authorities will not arrest people in relation to same-sex relations until laws criminalising homosexuality have been reviewed.

The Human Rights Committee, the UN’s expert body on the situation of civil and political rights in countries, received assurances from Malawi’s Secretary for Justice and Solicitor-General, Janet Chikaya-Banda, that ‘political will’ existed to improve national legislation relating to homosexuality.

‘We are encouraged that the government of Malawi reiterated to UN experts their commitment to address the precarious situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in their country, and we echo the Human Rights Committee’s recommendations that Malawi repeal discriminatory provisions in the law that criminalise homosexuality as well as to create a mechanism that can respond to the immediate protection needs of LGBTI people,’ said Pooja Patel of ISHR.

However, citing a lack of funds, Ms Chikaya-Banda stated that the review of sections 137A, 153 and 156 of the Penal Code, which criminalise consensual homosexual activity, has been stalled at the Law Commission. The penalties under these provisions range from up to fourteen years' imprisonment and the potential for corporal punishment.

Ms Chikaya-Banda also told the expert committee that 'Malawi has not set up a mechanism to specifically monitor cases of violence based on sexual orientation, nor has it set up awareness-raising campaigns on the same'.

Furthermore, Ms Chikaya-Banda claimed that further action on the part of the government had not been taken because 'there is basically no data' when it comes to allegations of violations against persons based on their sexual orientation and gender identity in Malawi. Yet, the report of the government submitted to the Human Rights Committee acknowledges that '[homosexuality] is not practiced in the open... it is therefore very unlikely that cases of discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation would be reported'.

'The government of Malawi should avail itself of the assistance and support of the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to translate its political will into reality', stressed Ms Patel.

In 2012, President Joyce Banda, during her State of the Nation address, announced her intention to repeal Malawi's sodomy laws. Shortly thereafter, she suspended enforcement of the law in order to 'encourage public debate'.

'We believe that suspending the application of this law was a step in the right direction,' said Gift Trapence, Executive Director of Centre for the Development of People. 'However, two years have passed and nothing further has been tangibly done to fulfil the promise of decriminalising homosexuality in Malawi. Most disturbingly, we have seen the continued arrest and imprisonment of LGBTI people regardless of this moratorium'.

ISHR calls on the government of Malawi to prioritise repeal of provisions of the Penal Code which criminalise homosexuality, strengthen protections against violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, and ensure threats and attacks against LGBTI persons are properly investigated and perpetrators held to account.

Contact: Pooja Patel, International Service for Human Rights, Geneva, p.patel@ishr.ch

UGANDA CALLED TO STRENGTHEN PROTECTION OF LGBTI DEFENDERS FOLLOWING CONSTITUTIONAL COURT DECISION

(Geneva, 4 August 2014) - The Government of Uganda should respond to a landmark Constitutional Court decision to strike down the draconian Anti-Homosexuality Act by legislating to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity and to protect human rights defenders who advocate for LGBTI rights, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

The deeply problematic law criminalised same-sex relations with sentences of up to life in prison, prohibited advocacy in relation to LGBTI rights, and was associated with an increase in violence and discrimination against LGBTI persons. [ISHR had previously condemned the bill when it was signed into law earlier this year by President Yoweri Museveni.](#)

'We applaud the brave human rights defenders in Uganda who fought this case amidst threats of arrest and mob violence', said Pooja Patel of ISHR.

The Court ruled on procedural grounds, stating that the lack of quorum in Parliament on the day the Act was adopted had violated legislative process.

‘The Court’s decision was not based on the substance of the law. The law falls far short of international human rights standards, showing complete disregard for individual’s rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association which are fundamental pillars of a safe, secure and democratic society’, stressed Phil Lynch, Director of ISHR.

‘While LGBTI rights defenders may no longer face the immediate risks of arrest and disproportionate sentencing under this law, the Court did not go far enough to provide for a safe space for defenders to undertake their vital work,’ said Ms Patel. ‘We are concerned that human rights defenders working on the rights of LGBTI people in Uganda will continue to be targeted with intimidation and violence’.

ISHR urges the government of Uganda to recognise that the work of human rights defenders is vital to developing an inclusive, healthy and prosperous society, and stressed that targeting human rights defenders for their work constitutes a step backwards for democracy and development in Uganda.

Contact: Pooja Patel, International Service for Human Rights, Geneva, p.patel@ishr.ch

AUSTRALIA SHOULD DROP DRACONIAN ‘ANTI-PROTEST’ BILL

(Geneva, 13 August 2014) - The Australian state of Tasmania should dump a repressive bill which will criminalise protests against mining, logging and other business operations, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

The [Workplaces \(Protection from Protesters\) Bill](#) is due to be considered by the Tasmanian Parliament next week. Its wide-ranging provisions, which include significant fines and mandatory prison terms for participants in protests which ‘hinder or obstruct’ business activities, are manifestly incompatible with the fundamental rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Australia is a party.

‘Peaceful protest has a crucial role to play in promoting corporate responsibility and accountability and in exposing corporate human rights violations,’ said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

‘This bill, with its overbroad provisions and draconian penalties, will have a significant chilling effect on free speech about business activities and operations,’ he said.

The Bill makes it a criminal offence for a person to participate in a protest on business premises or on any road, footpath or public land used to access the business premises where to do so would ‘prevent, hinder or obstruct’ business activity or access to the premises. First-time offences are punishable by fines of up to \$10,000, with subsequent offences subject to mandatory jail terms of up to two years.

‘The rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly may only be limited so far as is strictly reasonable, necessary and proportionate. This Bill - which criminalises free speech, authorises the use of force against peaceful assemblies, and subjects demonstrators to manifestly excessive penalties - falls far short of the mark,’ Mr Lynch said.

In March, Australia supported a [resolution at the UN Human Rights Council expressing grave concern at the criminalisation of peaceful protest](#) and calling on States to recognise that exercise of

the right to protest is crucial to democracy and accountability. The resolution also called on States to ‘clearly and explicitly establish a presumption in favour’ of the right to protest and to ‘facilitate peaceful protests by providing protestors with access to public space’.

As recently as June, Australia also supported a [resolution which recognises the vital role of civil society in ‘promoting accountability for business-related human rights abuses](#) and in raising awareness of the human rights impacts and risks of some business activities and enterprises’.

‘This proposed law runs completely counter to Australia’s obligations and statements under international law. If Australia is serious about its commitment to free speech and corporate respect for human rights it will ensure that Tasmania does not proceed with this odious Bill,’ Mr Lynch said.

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VIETNAM AND UN SHOULD INVESTIGATE AND ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR REPRISALS

(Geneva, 31 July 2014) - Both Viet Nam and the UN should investigate and ensure accountability for the intimidation and harassment of individuals who sought to meet with the UN’s expert on freedom of religion during his recent mission to the country.

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, was due to visit Viet Nam from 21 to 31 July, but his planned visits to An Giang, Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces from 28 to 30 July were forced to be abandoned.

‘I received credible information that some individuals with whom I wanted to meet had been under heavy surveillance, warned, intimidated, harassed or prevented from travelling by the police,’ Mr Bielefeldt said. ‘Even those who successfully met with me were not free from a certain degree of police surveillance or questioning.’

‘Allegations that individuals who met or sought to meet with the Special Rapporteur were subject to intimidation and threats must be fully and independently investigated, with the perpetrators held to account,’ said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

‘As a matter of international law, these individuals have a right to unhindered communication with the UN and to be free from any form of intimidation or reprisal in connection with such communication,’ Mr Lynch said.

‘This right gives rise to a correlate legal obligation on the part of both Viet Nam and the UN itself to fully and promptly investigate the allegations, ensure that the victims receive adequate remedy, and ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable.’

As the body that mandated the Special Rapporteur, the UN Human Rights Council has a particular responsibility in this regard.

‘Intimidation and reprisals against those who seek to engage with Special Rapporteurs amount to attacks on the individuals, the office of the Special Rapporteur and the institution of the Human Rights Council itself,’ Mr Lynch said.

‘As the office holders charged with upholding the integrity of the Council and protecting those who engage with its mechanisms, the Council President and Bureau should immediately demand a full investigation and accounting from Viet Nam and make the results of such a process public,’ Mr Lynch said.

According to ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw, this latest case of intimidation and threats against persons seeking to cooperate with the UN again demonstrates the importance of the UN General Assembly mandating a high-level focal point on reprisals.

'Member States of the UN are currently debating the need for a stronger institutional response to combat reprisals. This latest case should end the debate,' Ms Openshaw said.

'Individuals have the right to engage with the UN without being threatened or attacked and States have the obligation to uphold this right. Where a State fails to do so or is itself the perpetrator, the UN has a moral and legal duty to act. The appointment of a senior UN focal point to promote investigation, accountability and non-recurrence is crucial and the UN General Assembly should act without delay in this regard,' Ms Openshaw said.

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LEADING LGBTI ORGANISATION RECEIVES UN ACCREDITATION

(New York, 30 July 2014) - **ARC International is accorded UN consultative status but the need to challenge discrimination in the process of civil society accreditation continues.**

A leading lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) rights advocacy organisation, ARC International, has had the doors to the United Nations finally opened to it through the accordance of UN 'consultative status'.

The development follows a recent successful vote for ARC International by the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is a significant move because it means ARC International, which works for the improvement of LGBTI rights through the UN system, will now be able to directly engage in more UN activities and mechanisms.

ARC International Co-Director Kim Vance said the organisation was very pleased to have been accorded the UN consultative status.

'For us as an organisation, which has been working in UN spaces for many years, it means we are better able to achieve one of our core missions, which is to facilitate access to the UN mechanisms,' she said.

With consultative status NGOs have the right to make oral and written statements, and to organise panel discussions at the UN, in their own name. Until now, ARC has had to rely on other organisations to assist it in carrying out its work.

'We would like to thank our civil society partners who have enabled us to conduct our work within UN spaces over the last ten years, especially the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and ILGA-Europe' said Kim Vance.

'We would also like to thank ISHR for its valuable support throughout this process.'

ISHR has worked with many human rights groups to support their applications for UN consultative status.

Pooja Patel, who leads ISHR's work on LGBTI Human Rights Defenders, said ISHR is delighted that ARC has received the accreditation as it will enable the organisation to continue and expand its valuable work to promote LGBTI rights and combat discrimination at the UN.

LGBTI organisations continue to face discrimination at the UN

Whilst ARC's accreditation is a hugely positive development, many LGBTI organisations and others continue to face a highly politicised and discriminatory process when applying for consultative status.

Their applications continue to be delayed by the NGO Committee – effectively the gatekeeper of full rights of access to the UN for NGOs. It is this Committee that makes recommendations to ECOSOC, which then has the ultimate approval on applications for consultative status.

ISHR has consistently spoken out against the politicization of the accreditation process for NGOs and the discriminatory practice of the NGO Committee.

'It discredits the UN as a whole when the NGO Committee is seen to reject or unduly delay NGO applications for accreditation just because some States oppose their views or disagree with the content of their work,' said ISHR's New York Advocacy Director Michelle Evans.

Drawing on the experience of engaging with the Committee, ARC Co-Director John Fisher said 'LGBTI groups, and those working on sexual and reproductive rights, continue to face systemic obstacles before ECOSOC's NGO Committee. This must stop if the NGO Committee is to fulfil its mandate in a credible and non-discriminatory manner.'

States support a non-discriminatory process for accreditation

States have also lamented the practice of the NGO Committee in limiting NGOs' rights of association and expression, and have consistently spoken in favour of accreditation of organisations covering the full spectrum of human rights.

In a joint statement of 14 July to ECOSOC, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay said, 'The independent character, diversity and pluralism of those that form and act in conformity with the principles and aims of the Charter, should be the only criteria considered by the NGO Committee in an objective manner, to decide on according consultative status before ECOSOC'. Furthermore they warned the Committee that it should not in any circumstance operate as a 'forum for undue questioning, sanctions or reprisals' against NGOs for their opinions or the work they carry out.

The States went on to confirm that the recommendation to accord ARC International for consultative status, 'was in line with strengthening the diversity of voices that our Organisation should embrace.'

'We very much welcome the important statement made by Chile, Mexico and Uruguay in underlining the true purpose and role of the NGO Committee,' said Ms Patel.

'ISHR also considers undue delay in the processing of applications to be a form of reprisal, hindering NGOs' access to international bodies. We call on other States to show their commitment to enabling and protecting the work of civil society by similarly demanding the NGO Committee act in a non-discriminatory fashion when considering NGO applications for consultative status.'

Read more on the process of ARC's application for consultative status and the functioning of the NGO Committee [here](#).

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Our Work to Strengthen Human Rights Systems

UN SECURITY COUNCIL: STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AND FOCUS ON HUMAN RIGHTS TO PREVENT CONFLICT

(New York, 28 August 2014) - The UN Security Council should strengthen its relationship with civil society and its focus on the promotion and protection of human rights if it is to more effectively discharge its mandate in the area of conflict prevention, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

The call comes in the wake of the Security Council adopting an important resolution, [Resolution 2171](#), in which it expressed its 'willingness to strengthen its relationship with civil society', acknowledging the importance of civil society organisations in matters of peace and security.

Welcoming the resolution, ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw said, 'Through this resolution the Security Council has recognised that efforts to prevent and resolve conflict are strengthened by a vibrant civil society, effective national and international human rights monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and the increased participation of women in all decision-making processes.'

'The Security Council resolution reflects both an evolving relationship with civil society, and the push by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, during the tenure of Navi Pillay, for the Security Council to place greater emphasis on human rights monitoring and protection,' Ms Openshaw said.

The adoption of the resolution came at the conclusion of a [significant debate within the Council on conflict prevention](#), at which Ms Pillay gave her last Security Council briefing before her term expires this month. Opening the debate, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said the UN needs to 're-examine and redefine our approach' to conflict prevention. In her remarks, High Commissioner Pillay emphasised that this approach requires 'strengthening civil society actors' and 'increasing participation of women in decision-making and dialogue'. Both the High Commissioner and the resolution also recognised the 'preventative role of human rights accountability mechanisms', with such mechanisms serving both an early warning and deterrent function.

'Language on the importance of the role of civil society has become more evident in Security Council thematic and country resolutions. Resolution 2171 builds on important references in prior resolutions, including last year's [Resolution 2122](#) which recognises the importance of interactions of civil society, including women's organisations, with members of the Council at headquarters and during Council field missions,' Ms Openshaw said. This latest resolution calls on the Secretary-General to update the Council on progress to ensure the participation of women in discussions on conflict resolution.

'The Security Council's increased engagement with civil society, particularly members of women's groups, comes as a result of civil society efforts - led by the [NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security](#) - to demand entry to Council spaces. Through engaging with the Security Council

and urging effective implementation of its resolutions, the NGO Working Group is pressing the Council to mainstream a gender dimension in its mission, mandate and activities,' Ms Openshaw said.

To date, Security Council engagement with civil society has been centred on informal meetings, including the Arria briefings. These briefings – first started in 1992 – provide Security Council members with an informal setting for discussion with civil society actors on issues of concern. They take place on a regular basis and are convened by a Council member who invites all other members. Unlike the Human Rights Council, however, the Security Council does not currently afford formal opportunities for civil society to provide briefings or make statements to the Council while it is in session.

'While space for civil society engagement with the Security Council remains limited, the regular briefings now provided by the High Commissioner are an important development,' Ms Openshaw said.

During the Security Council debate, the UN High Commissioner described these briefings - and information provided by OHCHR offices and country teams - to the Council as a key advance, with the integration of a 'firm and principled' human rights approach being crucial to 'end crises and save lives'. The resolution itself 'recognises the important role the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ... can play in conflict prevention, and also recognises the role their briefings on human rights violations and hate speech play in contributing to early awareness of potential conflict'.

'During her term High Commissioner Pillay has played a crucial role in providing up-to-date information and expert analysis on human rights situations to the Security Council, with such information and analysis vital to the Council acting effectively to prevent or resolve conflict,' Ms Openshaw said. 'We look forward to working with High Commissioner Zeid, when his term commences in September, to strengthen the Security Council's focus on human rights and its relationship with both civil society and OHCHR.'

While in New York, High Commissioner Pillay also met with civil society organisations that engage with the UN for a final time. Acknowledging civil society's vital contribution to the UN, she used the opportunity to affirm the need for a stronger response to 'abhorrent' intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN and called for greater financial support for OHCHR, which remains the 'Cinderella' of the UN, receiving some 3% of the overall UN budget to cover its entire operations.

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NGOS WELCOME APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AT THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION

(New York, 27 August 2014) - The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has [announced the appointment](#) of a new Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza. Mr Lanza, a Uruguayan journalist and lawyer, has been appointed for a 3-year term, renewable once. He will take office on 6 October ahead of the 153rd Session of the Commission.

'ISHR welcomes the appointment of Edison Lanza as Special Rapporteur and looks forward to working with him to ensure that human rights defenders, journalists, legal professionals and other

civil society actors are able to exercise their fundamental right to freedom of expression, without restriction or retaliation,' said Eleanor Openshaw of the International Service for Human Rights.

Mr Lanza has considerable experience working with civil society organisations and monitoring bodies on the right to freedom of expression at the national level. He also has significant experience working with international and regional human rights mechanisms, including through the conduct of strategic litigation before the Inter-American Commission and consultancy work with the Office of the UN Special Rapporteur of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression.

In announcing Mr Lanza's appointment the Commission emphasised the [rigour and transparency of the selection process](#), which included substantial consultation with and input from civil society on the quality of final candidates.

'The process for Mr Lanza's appointment is a good practice example of engagement with civil society,' said Ms Openshaw. 'Input from civil society is essential to ensure the appointment of independent, expert candidates with a sound understanding of the human rights situation, both in law and on the ground,' she said.

Freedom of Expression is given a particular emphasis within the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, with the relevant Rapporteur the only mandate holder not to have additional duties as a Commissioner, meaning that he or she is able to focus exclusively on the Rapporteurship. The importance of the mandate is reinforced by the position's designation as a 'Special Rapporteur' – the only such case in the Commission. The [mandate has previously come under attack](#) in efforts by certain States to weaken the Commission.

Mr Lanza's appointment has been welcomed by [NGOs working on freedom expression](#). However, they highlighted both the breadth and depth of threats to freedom of expression across the continent that he will need to address in his new role, and the pushback his mandate is likely to continue to experience from some States of the OAS.

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STRENGTHEN PROTECTION OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN MEXICO AND MESOAMERICA

(Geneva, 25 August 2014) - Governments in Mexico and Mesoamerica should strengthen national laws and mechanisms to protect human rights defenders, including through the adoption of gender-specific provisions and policies to better recognise and protect women human rights defenders, ISHR and Just Associates (JASS Mesoamerica) said today.

A regional roundtable discussion on the protection of women human rights defenders in Mexico and Mesoamerica was held on the side-lines of the 152nd Special Session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Mexico City on 15 August 2014. The event focused particular attention to the need for stronger national implementation of a [UN General Assembly resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders](#), adopted last year.

'While the adoption of Resolution 68/181 was rightly hailed as historic, its real value is as a roadmap for the development and implementation of gender-specific policies and programmes for the protection of women human rights defenders at the national level,' said Ms Pooja Patel of ISHR.

'The time has come for authorities in Mexico and throughout Mesoamerica to translate the resolution into action,' Ms Patel said.

'Women human rights defenders in Mexico and Mesoamerica face a range of violations perpetrated by both State and non-State actors, including defamation, ill-treatment, arrests, criminalisation and sexual violence, often with complete impunity,' said Ms Cristina Hardaga of Just Associates (JASS).

Ms Hardaga also pointed out that these violations have different impacts and responses compared to the same type of attacks perpetrated against male human right defenders. 'The protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and journalists established in Mexico in 2012 requires further strengthening in order to be effective, including the through the adoption of a clear gender perspective,' Ms Hardaga said.

During the roundtable Mr Jesus Peña Palacios of the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights offered a number of concrete steps that can be undertaken to address some of these concerns in the immediate term, including through clear documentation of the violations disaggregated according to gender, as well as supporting networks for women human rights defenders.

Ms Ana Güzemes, Director of UN Women in Mexico said, 'not only are the life and integrity of the women human right defenders at stake, but so are the historical struggles for gender equality.'

The representative from the Embassy of Norway in Mexico - which sponsored the event - stressed the need for discussions on how to transform UN resolutions into concrete actions. She highlighted the importance of the UN resolution on women human rights defenders since it recognises their specific contributions to strengthening democracy and the particular threats and obstacles they face in this regard.

The discussion concluded with the participation of specialists from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights who emphasised the importance of protecting the right to defend human rights, recalled the existing mechanisms to implement protective measures, and provided clarity regarding the requirements that make them effective.

The event was co-organised by Just Associates (JASS), ISHR, Centre ProDH, CEJIL, MHI, WHRD-International Coalition and the National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Mexico, with the support of the Embassy of Norway, UN Women and the Office of the UN High Commissioner. Civil society participants included those from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Discussions focused on assessments of the ground realities for women human rights defenders as well as implementation of State obligations on the protection of human rights defenders, including the UN resolution on women human rights defenders.

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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MUST ACT TO PROTECT CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

(Geneva, 13 August 2014) - Laws to protect human rights defenders and journalists, adequate resources for non-governmental organisations, internet freedom, and respect for the right to peaceful protest have all been identified as key elements of democracy and development in a [significant new UN report](#) to be considered by the Human Rights Council in September.

The report – which was prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with input from States, parliamentarians, and human rights experts, lawyers and defenders – focuses on 'the importance of the promotion and protection of civil society space'. It is expected to inform the development and adoption of a new resolution on that topic by the Human Rights Council at its 27th session which starts on 8 September.

Importance of a free and independent civil society

According to the report, a vibrant, independent and diverse civil society is essential to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law; both holding governments to account and promoting good governance. In this regard, Turkish parliamentarian and disability rights expert Ms Safak Pavey highlighted the crucial role of civil society in ‘limiting the powers of governments’, while Tunisian human rights lawyer Mr Mokhtar Trifi noted that, during the period of transition in his country, ‘civil society played a fundamental role in building a new State by participating in the development of new laws and policies essential for human rights and democracy’.

In addition to stressing the role of civil society ‘in the realization of human rights on the ground’, the report also recognises the vital work of non-governmental organisations at the international level, including within the United Nations. According to ISHR Board member and pro-democracy campaigner Hina Jilani, ‘no notion of “international community” is complete without the recognition of civil society as an integral part’.

Threat and risks faced by civil society

According to the report, civil society actors around the world face worsening restrictions and risks, described by the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Flavia Pansieri, as including ‘prohibition from receiving funding, imprisonment for revealing corruption, bans on peaceful demonstrations, confiscation of computers, shutting down internet access, and even killings’. Journalists, women human rights defenders, organisations representing racial and religious minorities, and LGBT persons and organisations are identified as being at particular risk.

The Deputy High Commissioner’s grave concerns are echoed in the report by UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Expression, Mr Frank La Rue, who identifies key threats as worsening internet restrictions ‘justified by reasons of national security’, an increase in attacks against journalists and media workers, excessive regulation and use of force against demonstrations and protests, and the denial of access to information held by governments and public bodies.

The report notes a disturbing global trend towards reducing both the independence and resources of non-governmental organisations, including through legislation which imposes obstacles to forming an association or subjects such organisations to inappropriate government oversight or control, or which restricts access to funding, particularly ‘foreign funding’.

The report also notes with concern the issue of intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN to expose and seek accountability for human rights violations, recognising that there is an ‘alarming trend aimed at curtailing the voice of civil society in its endeavor to contribute to the work of the United Nations and its human rights bodies, including the Human Rights Council’.

Ensuring a safe and enabling environment for civil society

The report identifies a range of steps and measures that should be taken by States and by the UN itself to ensure that civil society actors can work free from hindrance and insecurity, and can contribute to ‘a healthy and stable society’ and ‘sustainable social and economic development’. In ISHR’s view, the following steps and measures identified in the report should be both reflected in any resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on protecting civil society space and in State law, policy and practice itself:

- States should consult and engage with civil society in the development and implementation of national laws and policies, particularly those that relate to or may impact upon human rights (para 70);

- States should develop robust laws and policies which ensure that civil society can operate in a safe environment, including by enshrining rights that enable civil society to operate, such as the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, opinion and expression (para 68);
- States should review and amend national laws and policies which restrict or criminalise the work of civil society and non-governmental organisations, including legislation which imposes unnecessary obstacles to the establishment of non-governmental organisations or restricts their access to funding, and laws which restrict or prohibit advocacy, including in relation to issues of sexual orientation or gender identity (para 69);
- States should develop specific laws and establish national mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists (para 71);
- States should review and amend laws which restrict freedom of peaceful assembly and should prevent and sanction the excessive use of force in relation to assemblies (para 69);
- States should not impose unnecessary restrictions on the internet, including those justified by reference to ‘traditional values’ or ‘national security’;
- States should refrain from and ensure adequate protection from any act of intimidation or reprisal against civil society actors, and fulfil their duty to end impunity for any such acts by bringing perpetrators to justice and providing an effective remedy to victims (para 74); and
- States should support the active participation of civil society at the United Nations and, through the Human Rights Council and the UN as a whole, ensure a stronger, practical response to reprisals, including by supporting the positive consideration of Human Rights Council resolution 24/24 at the General Assembly (paras 74 and 51).

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HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE RESPONDS TO NGO CALLS TO STRENGTHEN RESPONSE TO REPRISALS

(Geneva, 1 August 2014) - The effort to combat reprisals has taken an important step forward with the appointment of a member of the UN Human Rights Committee as Rapporteur on reprisals. The Committee has acted quickly to implement recommendations made by NGOs, and [endorsed by Treaty Body Chairpersons](#), aimed at a more consistent, systematic and coordinated approach to preventing and responding to reprisals.

At their recent annual meeting, Treaty Body Chairpersons agreed on a series of measures to enhance the treaty bodies’ individual and collective responses to reprisals.

‘Reprisals or sanctions against those that engage with treaty bodies strike against the integrity of the treaty body system, undermines its effectiveness and are, of course, a grave violation of human rights,’ said Professor Malcolm Evans, Chair of the Meeting of Chairpersons.

The measures agreed by the Chairpersons include the establishment of rapporteurs on reprisals, improved coordination amongst treaty bodies, and the definition of a joint policy on reprisals to be approved at the Chairpersons’ next annual meeting.

Several of the recommendations respond to calls made to the Chairs in a [joint submission by NGOs](#), including ISHR, ahead of their meeting. ‘We welcome the fact that the Chairs have responded to civil society calls to improve treaty bodies’ responses to reprisals,’ said ISHR’s Pooja Patel. ‘The swift

action taken by the Human Rights Committee in establishing its Rapporteur on reprisals is very encouraging and we look forward to seeing the other Committees appoint their own rapporteurs at their upcoming meetings,' she added.

NGOs had also emphasized the need to provide rapporteurs on reprisals with a broad mandate to operate. 'We are glad to see that the Chairpersons responded to this,' said Ms Patel. 'They have specified that treaty body rapporteurs should act to prevent, protect against, investigate and pursue accountability for acts of intimidation or reprisals'.

In its own [detailed submission on Reprisals to the Treaty Bodies](#), ISHR called on each treaty body to create a public webpage on reprisals to give visibility to the Rapporteur and provide information on cases, including responses from States to inquiries from the treaty body. Of the three Committees with focal points or rapporteurs on reprisals - the [Committee against Torture](#), the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – only CAT has clearly accessible information on reprisals its website.

Sir Nigel Rodley, Chair of the Human Rights Committee, said that he expects information on the new Rapporteur on reprisals to be incorporated in the [committee webpage](#) imminently. He also noted the importance of NGOs promoting the appointment and responsibilities of the new rapporteur. 'We're counting on pivotal civil society organisations like ISHR and the CCPR Centre, which do so much to stimulate and coordinate NGO participation in our work, to alert people to its existence,' Professor Rodley said.

The importance of civil society to supporting the work of the treaty bodies was also emphasized by Professor Evans in regard to the definition of the joint treaty body policy against reprisals over the next year. 'Since civil society will be among the beneficiaries of such a policy, it is important that their voices are heard, along with all other stakeholders, in its formation', he said.

Ongoing cases of reprisals and intimidation show that individual human rights bodies and mechanisms cannot effectively challenge reprisals alone. In emphasising the limitations of the response of the rapporteur to prevent reprisals, for example, Professor Rodley noted, 'It's important not to oversell its possibilities to avoid or save people from harm.'

Treaty Body Chairs have identified better coordination and systematization as a vital component to challenging reprisals. Professor Rodley said this is 'a natural response' to the General Assembly's condemnation of reprisals against those engaging with treaty bodies, as expressed in Paragraph 8 of [General Assembly Resolution 68/268](#) enhancing the role of the treaty bodies.

Furthermore, Treaty Body Chairs emphasised that a more effective approach to reprisals amongst treaty bodies is only a piece of the required response within the UN. They have [specified](#) that the joint treaty body policy should be part of a more general approach to reprisals by the relevant UN human rights mechanisms.

Stressing this point, Professor Evans said, 'Combating reprisals is a multi-faceted and multi-level task which will require sustained and mutually reinforcing commitment from the Treaty Bodies, States Parties, civil society and many others. The work of the Treaty Body Chairs will hopefully provide renewed impetus to the work already undertaken, and be an inspiration to others to develop appropriate responses.'

One such response to provide more effective responses to combating reprisals, is the designation by the Human Rights Council of a high-level UN-wide focal point on reprisals. 'Establishing the focal point still needs the backing of the General Assembly' said ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw.

‘States have prime responsibility to ensure that those exercising their right to engage with the UN are safe to do so,’ noted Ms Openshaw ‘This requires putting in place effective measures at national and regional levels to protect individuals and combat impunity. It also involves taking action to strengthen the capacity of human rights mechanisms to prevent and respond to reprisals’.

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Key Developments in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS IN AZERBAIJAN

Prominent human rights defenders such as Intigam Aliyev and Leyla Yunus have been placed under a three month pre-trial detention. Authorities in Baku have said the charges against the activists are based on illegal financial activities of the NGOs they run. NGOs believe this is an attempt to repress recent activism to expose Azerbaijan’s human rights record... [more](#)

CHINESE HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER RELEASED

After two-and-a-half years of isolation and imprisonment, human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng has been released from prison. The lawyer has lost considerable weight and several teeth. Gao’s attorney Jarod Genser is seeking permission for him to leave China and join his family in California, where they have sought political asylum... [more](#)

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR INVESTIGATION OF POLICE TACTICS IN MISSOURI

Amnesty International has deployed a 13-person human rights observer mission to Ferguson, Missouri in the United States to observe police and protester activity and to gather testimonies. Amnesty International USA executive director Steven W. Hawkins is calling for ‘a thorough investigation into Michael Brown’s death and the series of events that followed’... [more](#)

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS TARGETED BY BANGLADESHI POLICE

Human rights defenders have increasingly been targeted in Bangladesh in the context of an on-going hunger strike by garment workers. Activists who have attended protests have been beaten and arrested by police... [more](#)

Opportunities for NGO Engagement

In Brief

SPECIAL SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAQ

The Special Session on ‘the human rights situation in Iraq in light of abuses committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups’ will take place on [1 September](#), at 10.00 am in room XX, Palais des Nations. NGOs wishing to submit written statements for the Special Session are invited to contact hrcngo@ohchr.org for submission guidelines.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The Human Rights Council's [27th session](#) is scheduled for 8 to 26 September. The opening meeting will be convened on 8 September at 9.00 am in room XX of the Palais the Nations.

The list of reports for the session as well as the tentative programme of work can be found [here](#) and the note verbale from the Council's Secretariat [here](#).

ISHR will provide weekly updates through its [Human Rights Council Monitor](#).

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF CHILD

The 69th pre-sessional working group of the Committee will be held from [22 to 26 September](#). It will consider the State reports of Ethiopia, Ghana, Mexico, Nepal and the Netherlands. Cuba and Honduras will be reviewed under the optional protocol on the sale of children ([CRC-OP-SC](#)) and Cuba, Honduras, Nepal and the Netherlands will be reviewed under the optional protocol on children in armed conflicts ([CRC-OP-AC](#)). NGOs can send their submissions to paolazzi@childrightsconnect.org by 1 September 2014.

NGOs are also encouraged to send their submissions for the 70th pre-sessional Working Group ([February 2015](#)) to the same e-mail address by 1 November. The Working Group will consider reports of Bangladesh, Brazil, Central African Republic, Chile, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, Poland, Timor-Leste, United Arab Emirates. Countries reviewed under the CRC-OP-SC and the CRC-OP-AC will be Lao People's Democratic Republic and Latvia.

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will meet in Geneva from [15 September to 3 October](#) for its 12th session. The Committee will consider the reports of Belgium, Denmark, Ecuador, Mexico, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea. It will adopt the list of issues for Croatia and Czech Republic.

The 2nd pre-session of the Committee will be held from [7 to 10 October](#). The Committee will adopt the list of issues for the Cook Islands, Croatia, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Mongolia and Turkmenistan.

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

The 59th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women will take place from [20 October to 7 November](#). The Committee will consider the reports of Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, China, China (Hong Kong), China (Macau), Ghana, Guinea, Poland, Solomon Islands and Venezuela. The provisional agenda is available [here](#).

The pre-sessional Working Group for the 61st session of the Committee will take place from [10 to 14 November](#). The Committee will consider the reports of Bolivia, Croatia, Gambia, Namibia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Spain and Vietnam.

NGOs wishing to provide written submissions to any of these sessions should do so by [3 October](#).

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

The Human Rights Committee will meet for its 112th session from 7 to 31 October. It will examine the reports and country situations in Israel, Sri Lanka, Haiti, Montenegro, Malta and Burundi. The

deadline for both electronic and hardcopy information on States to be examined by the Committee is [12 September](#). Representatives of NGOs wishing to attend the session must register online before 29 September at [CSO-Net](#).

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. NGOs may submit written information for the examination of the State party's report by the 17 October. Click [here](#) for the tentative programme.

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The 53rd session of the Committee 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 on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights will take place from [1 to 5 December](#). The Committee will consider the reports of Chile, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Sudan, Thailand, Uganda and Venezuela.

All NGO [submissions](#) to the Committee must be done a month and a half before beginning of the session with respect to States for examination, and two months before the pre-session working group with respect to States upon which list of issues will be adopted. 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 now 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 20th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) will be held from [27 October until 7 November](#). The tentative timetable can be found [here](#).

The deadline for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to receive written contributions from the stakeholders of the countries to be reviewed during the 22nd session of the UPR is [15 September 2014](#). List of States under review: Belarus, Liberia, Malawi, Mongolia, Panama, Maldives, Andorra, Bulgaria, Honduras, United States of America, Marshall Islands, Croatia, Jamaica, Libya. Stakeholders' submissions should be sent using the new '[On-line UPR submissions system](#)'.

MEETING OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS/REPRESENTATIVES/INDEPENDENT EXPERTS AND CHAIRPERSONS

The 21st session of the meeting of Special Rapporteurs, Representatives, Independent Experts and Chairpersons of Working Groups of the Human Rights Council will take place from [29 September to 3 October](#).

WORKING GROUP ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN LAW AND PRACTICE

The Working Group accepts information throughout the year on allegations of discrimination against women in law and practice. The next session of the Working Group will be held in Geneva from [13 to 17 October](#).

CONTRIBUTE TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MARCH 2015 SESSION REPORT

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is preparing a report for the March 2015 session of the Human Rights Council on the theme, 'Towards a better investment in the rights of the child'. NGOs are invited to contribute information on the main challenges related to the mobilisation, allocation and spending of resources for children.

Submissions should be sent to registry@ohchr.org by 3 October and must be less than 5 pages. For further information: iguerras-delgado@ohchr.org

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](#).

In Depth

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: CRIMINALISATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE AMERICAS

(New York, 27 August 2014) - A call for submissions to inform a forthcoming report on the criminalisation of human rights defenders is an important opportunity to highlight the ways in which law is used and abused to suppress dissent and to silence and stifle freedom of expression and association, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

The Office of the Rapporteur on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is calling for submissions to inform his upcoming report on criminalisation of human rights defenders through the misuse of criminal law.

The [Rapporteur has highlighted](#) that, in recent years, the trend of criminalisation has posed an increasing threat to human rights defenders and organisations.

'Cases such as the closure of leading non-governmental organisation the [Pachamama Foundation](#) in Ecuador demonstrate the spurious ways in which criminal laws and laws relating to national security and public order are increasingly being used to target human rights defenders,' said Eleanor Openshaw of ISHR.

'The Rapporteur's decision to focus on criminalisation is both timely and relevant,' Ms Openshaw said. In its [recent resolution](#) on the protection of human rights defenders, the Organisation of American States expressed concern about the misuse of measures governing national security, counterterrorism, and the establishment and operation of NGOs, that have incriminated defenders and undermined their work and safety.

The UN Human Rights Council has also passed a resolution, Res 22/6, which urges States 'to address, and to take concrete steps to prevent and stop, the use of legislation to hinder or limit unduly the ability of human rights defenders to exercise their work, including by reviewing and, where necessary, amending relevant legislation and its implementation in order to ensure compliance with international human rights law'.

'The planned IACHR report provides the opportunity for the criminalisation of defenders in the Americas to be better understood, and for concrete recommendations to be made to protect defenders from becoming victims of judicial harassment or the misuse of the criminal justice system,' Ms Openshaw said.

The Office of the Rapporteur circulated the following questionnaires to solicit information, requesting they be returned to cidhdefensores@oas.org with a subject line of 'Subject: Questionnaire on Criminalization.' The deadline for submissions is: 16 September 2014.

[Questionnaire in Spanish](#)

[Questionnaire in English](#)

[Questionnaire in Portuguese](#)

[Questionnaire in French](#)

Contact: Eleanor Openshaw, International Service for Human Rights, on e.openshaw@ishr.ch

FORTHCOMING COUNTRY VISITS BY SPECIAL PROCEDURES

Peru	Working Group on Discrimination Against Women, 11 – 19 September
Oman	Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, 7 – 13 September
Afghanistan	Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, 1 - 10 November
Nepal	Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, 4 – 11 December
Spain	Working Group on Discrimination Against Women, 9 - 19 December

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

PROTECTING CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE AND PREVENTING REPRISALS: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Friday 19 September: Room XXIV from 9.15 - 11.45

Please join ISHR for this important Human Rights Council side-event with international experts and national human rights defenders to discuss recent development and next steps in the protection of civil society space and the prevention of reprisals... [more](#)

PREVENTING RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN INDIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES AFTER THE 2014 ELECTIONS

Tuesday 16 September: Room XXIV from 9.15 - 11.45

Following up to recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders relating to the protection of defenders working on inter-communal harmony in India, as well as the unofficial visit of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief earlier this year, this event seeks to discuss means of strengthening social cohesion and mutual respect amongst religious communities in India.

New Resources

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.

New briefing papers this month are available on Honduras, Libya and the Maldives.

NEW STRATEGY TOOLKIT

New Tactics in Human Rights has developed [a Strategy Toolkit](#) to support the important work of human rights advocates. The tool kit is available online and is accompanied by videos, exercises and worksheets. The purpose of the kit is to help advocates be clear about where they are starting from, where they want to get to, and the steps needed to get from one to the other.

HRW REPORTS ON THE RAB'A MASSACRE AND MASS KILLINGS OF PROTESTERS IN EGYPT

On 12 August 2014, Human Rights Watch released a report on alleged crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations in Egypt. Their ['All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt'](#) calls on the UN Human Rights Council to establish an international commission of enquiry to investigate all human rights violations resulting from the mass killings of protestors since 30 June 2013.



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or contact us:

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