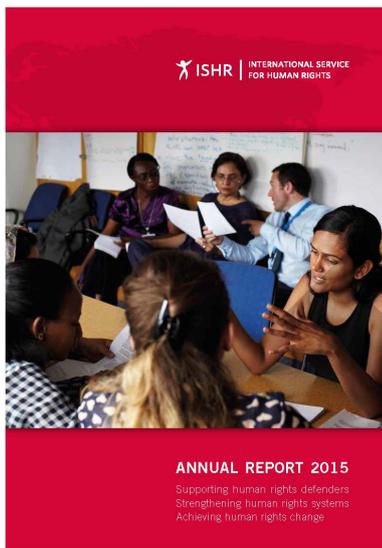


Supporting human rights defenders and achieving human rights change: ISHR's 2015 Annual Report

25.04.2015



We're delighted to present our [2015 Annual Report](#).



This Annual Report is dedicated to Chinese human rights defender, lawyer and democracy activist, Cao Shunli.

Abducted at Beijing airport en route to Geneva to participate in an ISHR training programme in September 2013, Cao was detained incommunicado, denied access to adequate health care, and died in custody on 14 March 2014.

Nothing will atone for Cao's death. Throughout 2014, however, her life served as an inspiration for ISHR's work to strengthen the protection of human rights defenders, to combat and ensure accountability for attacks against them, and to support them in exercising the right to advocate and seek justice at the United Nations that Cao was denied.

The spurious charges used to justify Cao's detention – 'illegal assembly', 'picking quarrels' and 'creating disturbances' – are illustrative of the use and abuse of laws to restrict and criminalise the work of defenders in many countries throughout the world. The importance of a conducive legal environment for civil society actors drove our successful advocacy to reform anti-protest laws in Australia and enact a specific law to protect human rights defenders in Côte d'Ivoire.

The abduction and detention of Cao is emblematic of the enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention of so many human rights defenders around the world. While tragically unsuccessful in securing Cao's release, ISHR's high-level lobbying and advocacy did contribute to securing the release of human rights defenders from imprisonment in other States, including Bahrain, Niger and Sri Lanka.

Read here about [how we achieve impact](#).

The actions to prevent Cao from testifying at the UN reflect the worsening incidence and severity of reprisals against those who turn to regional and international mechanisms to seek justice and exercise the right to freedom of expression denied to them at home. Cao's case informed our strategic advocacy to strengthen mechanisms to end reprisals, including the mandating of a special rapporteur to combat reprisals in Africa.

Following Cao's death, ISHR coordinated civil society action within the Human Rights Council to honour her life and secured high-level statements from the UN Secretary-General and the US State Department, among others, condemning her death. China may have been successful in silencing Cao, but in so doing the Chinese Government paradoxically demonstrated the importance and impact of international human rights advocacy and strengthened the voices and resolve of national-level human rights defenders all over the world. Throughout 2014, ISHR was privileged to support hundreds of activists - from Afghanistan to Venezuela, and from Liberia to Thailand - to use the UN and regional mechanisms as levers for concrete human rights change.

Read here about [where we achieve impact](#).

This [annual report](#), and the human rights achievements it records, is dedicated to Cao Shunli and the many human rights defenders who have died or been disappeared in connection with their vital and courageous work.

Thank you for [standing with us](#) and with them.

Rosemary McCreery, ISHR Chairperson
Philip Lynch, ISHR Director