

## **[HRC40 | Stifling civil society in the name of national security does not pay off, says Special Rapporteur](#)**

28.02.2019

**Wake up to the adverse effect counter-terrorism and security matrices and measures are having on civil society, says an independent human rights expert in a new report to the UN's Human Rights Council. Silencing civil society is counter-productive; it puts national security at risk.**



In a hard-hitting [new report](#), the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, forcefully argues that national security imperatives are providing a justification and opportunity to clamp down on civil society, and that there are a woeful lack of mechanisms holding States accountable for this.

Existing frameworks related to countering terrorism and violent extremism are bedeviled with ill- defined terms and a lack of accountability mechanisms, all of which sets the scene for repressive measures against lawful, non-violent activities of civil society, writes Special Rapporteur Ni Aoláin. When States define threats against them as threats to national security, it is a quick step to re-branding human rights defenders as terrorists and legitimising further measures in the name of national security.

Ni Aoláin claims her mandate's own data shows that 'targeting civil society is not random or an incidental aspect of counter-terrorism law and practice'. Shrinking space for civil society - made evident in harassment, threats, criminalisation, and the detention of defenders - is 'indisputably linked to the expansion of security', she concludes.

The Special Rapporteur directs her attention not solely to national contexts but to intergovernmental processes, expressing concern about the instrumentalisation of UN accreditation processes by some unchecked national security claims.

'The Special Rapporteur is absolutely right to highlight how UN platforms are used to discredit NGOs,' said ISHR's Salma El Hosseiny. '[Unsubstantiated accusations of terrorist sympathies or affiliation](#) have been made against individual defenders and NGOs by UN members at the UN, in a bid to keep them out of UN discussions.'

Ni Aoláin concludes by saying how counter-productive all of this is. 'Targeting civil society actors is wholly inconsistent with meaningfully attending to genuine terrorist threats,' she notes.

When civil society is stifled, you lose the effect of their work channeling grievances exploited by terrorist groups toward peaceful alternatives and - where the State is unwilling or unable to govern- filling 'a government gap'.

'The Special Rapporteur spells out how making civil society the enemy simply does not pay off,' says El Hosseiny.

The Special Rapporteur ends her report by asking three key questions:

1. How - if at all - are the counter-terrorism measures on civil society organisations monitored?
2. How seriously is the misapplication of the terrorism definition being addressed?
3. What, if any, process exists to curb State abuse of counter-terrorism measures against civil society actors and human rights defenders?

### **ISHR at the Human Rights Council:**

ISHR has joined a group of NGOs in highlighting concerns over reported moves to allow Egypt a role in the Human Rights Council resolution to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. [Read the full letter here](#) as well as the [joint statement delivered](#) during the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur at the 40th session of the Council.

### **ISHR at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW):**

Along with other co-sponsors, ISHR will be holding a [side event in New York on 12 March](#): 'Can peace and security be attained without women human rights defenders?' We look forward to considering some of the Special Rapporteur's conclusions and recommendations, as part of that discussion. Join us!

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