

# EMPOWERING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

We provide human rights defenders with intensive training, strategic advice, advocacy support, inside intelligence and information products, together with access to our vast network of diplomats and decision makers, making them the most powerful advocates possible for human rights change.

## Building the international expertise of frontline human rights activists



While international and regional human rights mechanisms provide key avenues for human rights advancement, the systems can also be complex, overwhelming and difficult to navigate. During 2015, we provided intensive training, mentoring and advocacy support to more than 150 frontline human rights defenders, substantially building their capacity to use these mechanisms to push for change. Among them, 20 defenders – from Burma to Burkina Faso, China to Venezuela – participated in our renowned two-week Human Rights Defender Advocacy Programme. 100 percent of the participants reported being either ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the training, and more than half said it had substantially assisted them to ‘fully achieve’ their human rights advocacy objectives.

The fact that the ISHR programme receives more than 200 applications each year and attracts the support of expert and high-standing trainers, such as UN Special Rapporteurs and senior diplomats, is evidence of both its reputation and continued high demand.

In addition to our Geneva-based programmes, ISHR also provided targeted and in-depth training to defenders in the regions, including in Africa, Asia and Latin America, together with thematically tailored courses, including for those working in the areas of women’s rights, LGBTI rights and, business and human rights.



‘The UN is really important, and civil society should know how to use it, what tools can help them push Indonesia from the grassroots level to do what the UN recommends. But a lot of socialisation and capacity building needs to happen first. Training is key.’

**Muchamad Darisman**, Indonesian human rights defender



100%



**TRAINEES**  
who reported they were

‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’

with ISHR’s training and advocacy support

56%



**TRAINED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

who consider they fully achieved their advocacy objectives with ISHR’s support



100%



**TRAINED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**



who consider they at least partially achieved their advocacy objectives with ISHR’s support





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‘Navigating the ins and outs of the Human Rights Council is quite an art. The ISHR training helped demystify many of the processes and practices of the Council and gave me opportunities to deliver NGO statements, participate in side events and undertake advocacy on issues of concern in Australia. The networks of human rights defenders I built during the training have also been invaluable to my ongoing work.’

**Anna Brown**, leading LGBTI human rights advocate and ISHR trainee



## Strengthening the resilience and impact of those working in the most restrictive environments



In environments where fierce opposition to human rights progress exists, developing strategies to improve the resilience and effectiveness of human rights organisations is essential. In October 2015, ISHR brought together a group of 15 human rights defenders working in highly restrictive and dangerous environments. The defenders came from States including Bahrain, Belarus, Burma, China, Ecuador, Egypt, the Gambia, Iran, Russia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. They worked on a diverse range of issues, including women’s rights, LGBTI rights, the protection of journalists, the release of political prisoners, accountability for war crimes, peacebuilding, minority rights, labour rights, the rule of law, and protection of the rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly and protest, among others. Many had faced imprisonment, defamation and other violations in connection with their work, in some cases extending to the death, detention or ill-treatment of family members and associates.

Meeting over a number of days, the defenders worked to identify, develop and document strategies and tactics to ensure the relevance, resilience and effectiveness of their organisations and movements. Now back in their countries, many of them report that applying these lessons has helped ensure the survival of their organisations and enhance their impact, even in the face of worsening crackdowns.



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‘Given the Government’s move to restrict civil society space, we need to act immediately to protect our civil rights before they are further restricted. To do this effectively, we need help from the international community.’

**Lira Ismailova**, human rights defender from Kyrgyzstan and ISHR trainee





'The Middle East and North Africa are suffering from unprecedented levels of violence and rights violations. Human rights defenders within the Middle East are under attack like never before. The Human Rights Council has become a critical tool for these defenders to ensure visibility and international pressure at a time when effective national institutions of accountability and protection of rights are almost non-existent.'

**Salma Amer**, *Advocacy Officer, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies*



## Securing access for human rights defenders to the UN



Throughout 2015, ISHR continued to assist and advise a wide range of human rights defenders and NGOs to gain UN accreditation, enabling them to have their voices heard on the international stage, such as at the UN Human Rights Council. In addition to providing one-on-one advice to organisations like Freedom Now and the International Dalit Solidarity Network, ISHR also produced the first-ever comprehensive guide to obtaining consultative status through the UN Committee on NGOs. The launch of this guide at high-level events in Geneva and New York, where it was described by the President of the UN Human Rights Council as 'of critical significance' to enabling civil society access to the UN, has also catalysed the development of an agenda and coalition for reform of the Committee. Such reform is vital to ensure NGO access to the UN is afforded on a basis that is transparent, expeditious and non-discriminatory.



'We welcome ISHR's 'Practical Guide to the UN Committee on NGOs' as a specific and valuable contribution to facilitating NGO participation at the UN.'

**Joint statement by Chile, Mexico and Uruguay** to the *UN Economic and Social Council*, July 2015



## Providing essential information



The provision of information in accessible formats and a diversity of languages is vital to ensure it reaches human rights defenders on the ground. In 2015, ISHR’s website – which provides a rich repository of news, handbooks and briefing papers – received over 130,000 visits, representing a 25 percent increase on the previous year. This growth reflects ISHR’s efforts over the year to provide key content not only in English, but also in French, Spanish and Chinese. The initiative was rewarded with an increase in site visits from human rights defenders in Colombia of over 95 percent, Venezuela of more than 110 percent, Côte d’Ivoire of more than 160 percent and China of over 170 percent! Our Chinese language webcast of a key UN Torture Committee review of the country attracted more than 2,500 views alone.

In addition to publishing the Practical Guide to the UN Committee on NGOs, in 2015 ISHR also published a fully revised Simple Guide to the UN Treaty Bodies in English, French and Chinese, an innovative new Toolkit for Human Rights Defenders on Promoting Business and Human Rights in English, French and Spanish, together with our renowned monthly Human Rights Monitor and our periodic Monitors on the Human Rights Council, General Assembly and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.



‘It is vitally important for human rights defenders at the national level to engage with the regional and UN human rights mechanisms if they want to strategically advance their domestic objectives’.

**Tilder Kumichii**, woman human rights defender from Cameroon and participant in ISHR consultations in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire in 2015



ENDER TOOLKIT  
BUSINESS  
RIGHTS

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO THE  
UN TREATY BODIES

ISHR | INTERNATIONAL SERVICE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

CATALOGUE  
POUR DÉFENS  
DROITS DE L  
POUR LA PROMOTION DE  
DROITS DE CHÔMEUR PAR LES

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MOVIMIENTO  
DE LAS EMPRESAS  
DERECHOS PARA  
UNA GUIA PARA  
EMPRESAS DE