

Women's rights: Recognising and protecting the 'immeasurable contribu- tion' of women defenders

Leading up to the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, ISHR worked extensively with UN human rights experts to draft and issue a significant statement on the situation of women defenders. In addition to recognising the particular risks they face – both because of their gender and identity, and because their work frequently challenges power, privilege, prejudice and patriarchy – the experts provide practical policy guidance to States on the recognition and protection of women defenders. Among other steps, governments should:

- publicly recognise the importance and legitimacy of the work of women human rights defenders, and make a commitment that no violence or threats against them will be tolerated;
- repeal legislation or eliminate any measure intended to penalise or obstruct the work of defenders;
- strengthen State institutions responsible for safeguarding the work of women defenders;
- investigate and punish any form of violence or threat against women defenders, including in relation to reprisals for engaging with the United Nations system, and
- ensure due diligence in protecting women human rights defenders that are threatened by non-State actors, such as business. ○

“ Women human rights defenders lead movements that have swept the globe calling for gender equality and an end to gender-based violence against women. They have flooded the streets, the airwaves, and the internet with their energy and their testimonials, bringing to light truths that are too often buried in darkness.

They are making immeasurable contributions to the advancement of human rights all over the world. They are raising their voices, frequently at great personal risk, to stand up for human rights and justice for all. Often these women are at the forefront of challenging social and cultural norms that limit women's human rights. They take stands that are necessary to progress but unpopular, taking on the most powerful and providing support for the most vulnerable.

Joint statement by UN human rights experts on International Women Human Rights Defenders Day

