

[UN | Secretary-General's audit of the UN's work on HRDs makes evident significant advances.](#)

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Twenty years after the adoption of the UN Declaration on human rights defenders, the General Assembly asked the Secretary General to assess the value of OHCHR's and other UN bodies' contribution to ensuring the implementation of the Declaration. The Secretary General's report cites several impressive advances but also acknowledges the need for change, calling for a UN 'system-wide approach to strengthen civil society space'.



The ways in which the Office of the United National High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as well as other relevant UN offices, departments and agencies consider the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in their work, is the focus of the Secretary General's recent [report](#).

The report highlights several advances related to the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) including:

- the establishment and continuation of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders;
- the adoption of the first ever treaty body statement on HRDs, by CESCR (para 14);
- the adoption of the first ever joint statement on HRDs by the Special Rapporteur and members of Treaty Bodies (para 15);
- the convening of a Day of General Discussion by the Child Rights Committee on children HRDs (para 16)
- the adoption of a Special Procedures policy on reprisals (para 21)
- the elaboration and adoption of the San José guidelines on reprisals (para 22)
- the negotiation and adoption of literally every resolution on HRDs, civil society space and reprisals at the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly
- the designation of the Assistant Secretary General as UN Senior Official on Reprisals (para 24)
- the establishment of a range of HRD networks, both regional and thematic (para 32)
- the development of a Model National Law on HRDs (para 43)
- the development and enactment of national HRDs law in Burkina Faso (para 39) and Cote d'Ivoire (para 43)

'There have been significant advances made in recent years in regard to the promotion of the work of human rights defenders and their protection,' said ISHR's Executive Director Phil Lynch.

'ISHR is pleased to have been involved in pushing for several of these initiatives.'

The Secretary-General recognizes the importance of the work of human rights defenders in his report, noting, '[w]hen human rights defenders are engaged and protected, the work of the United Nations is enhanced by the perspectives and experience they bring to the table. Their reports can provide early warning of impending crises and their analysis can help us to better understand the root causes of conflict and provide insights regarding potential solutions.'

However, he also noted, '[a]t the same time, threats to human rights defenders are themselves an indicator of areas where further engagement is needed.'

The report concludes with a list of recommendations. The recommendations in the report pick up and reflect two key recommendations pushed by ISHR over an extended period, namely that:

- the work of HRDs is vital to peace, security and conflict prevention and that threats against them should be seen as an early warning indicator triggering further engagement in a situation of concern (para 64)
- the UN 'should develop a more coherent and comprehensive approach' to implementing the Declaration, including by developing a 'system-wide approach to strengthen civil society space and give guidance on UN engagement with and support for human rights defenders, in line with the Declaration and relevant international human rights standards' (para 66).

'Twenty years after the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was first adopted, the work of defenders remains as vital and as threatened', stated Lynch.

He added, 'It is vital that the United Nations recognises the work of human rights defenders and continues to take strong actions for their protection.'

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