



Laureates:

Mairead Maguire, Ireland (1976)
Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Guatemala (1992)
Jody Williams, USA (1997)
Shirin Ebadi, Iran (2003)
Leymah Gbowee, Liberia (2011)
Tawakkol Karman, Yemen (2011)

Open Letter to Foreign Ministers, Member States of the United Nations General Assembly

As women Nobel peace laureates, we have worked together since 2004 to support women human rights defenders around the globe. Collectively, we have met with thousands of women human rights defenders who work tirelessly to promote human rights in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Burma, Canada, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Iran, Iraq, Kenya, Liberia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, the United States, Uganda and Yemen.

What all these women human rights defenders share in common, besides courage, is the fact that this work puts them at extraordinary risk. Women human rights defenders face harassment, arrests, torture, sexual violence, death threats and killings, often committed with impunity. For this reason, we applaud the UN General Assembly for tabling a draft resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders.

The resolution is the first of its kind, and this focus on the protection of women human rights defenders is long overdue. The resolution acknowledges the important contribution of women human rights defenders to the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy, rule of law, development, as well as peace and security. In addition, the resolution highlights the specific risks and obstacles that women human rights defenders face, and the protection measures that States must implement for them to be able to carry out their work safely and without fear of reprisals.

In what proved to be a milestone moment, **Mrs. Margaret Sekaggya—the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders**—published a report in 2011 acknowledging the enormous risks faced by women human rights defenders.

We are very encouraged that the UN is making such significant progress in the promotion and protection of the rights of women human rights defenders. However, much remains to be done. The resolution's key message—that women human rights defenders face specific challenges and require specific protection—is

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very much in keeping with the work of the UN to date. For this reason, we are very disappointed that only a small minority of States are supporting the resolution by co-sponsoring the text.

29 November is the 8th anniversary of **the International Women Human Rights Defenders Day**. On this day, hundreds of organisations across the globe dedicated to the defence and the promotion of human rights will publicly acknowledge the work of women human rights defenders and denounce the risks, threats and violence they face.

We hope that, thanks to your important support of the resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders, we can together celebrate a big step forward in human rights.

Respectfully yours,

Leymah Gbowee, Nobel peace laureate, 2011 (Liberia)

Shirin Ebadi, Nobel peace laureate, 2003 (Iran)

Mairead Maguire, Nobel peace laureate, 1977 (Northern Ireland)

Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Nobel peace laureate, 1992 (Guatemala)

Jody Williams, Nobel peace laureate, 1997 (United States)

