



DIVERSITY.

DIGNITY.

EQUALITY.

FAIRNESS.

FREEDOM.

HUMANITY.

INCLUSIVITY.

JUSTICE.

PEACE.

SUSTAINABILITY.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2021–25



**HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS** are people who promote and protect the human rights of others, whether individually or in association with others. They are people who act with humanity, serve humanity and bring out the best in humanity.

**This strategy** has been developed in a context characterised by uncertainty and change, including a worsening climate emergency, a global pandemic and associated financial crisis, deepening inequalities, worsening authoritarianism and populism, as well as the erosion of multilateralism, and the rule of law.

It is also a context characterised by increased awareness and action at the local, national, regional and international levels. Human rights defenders are mobilising around issues such as environmental justice, racial justice, gender equality, freedom of

expression and association, access to information, democratic representation and participation, the redistribution of economic and political power, and state and corporate accountability for intersecting human rights violations and abuses.

On many of these issues, we are at an inflection point; a point at which the work of human rights defenders is perhaps more imperiled but more important than ever.

*For example:*

➔ **ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**, whose knowledge is vital to live more responsibly and sustainably, are being killed and displaced for their work to prevent exploitation and to protect precious forests and oceans.

➔ **STUDENTS AND WORKERS** mobilising online and offline to call for democratic freedoms and protest against authoritarianism are being surveilled, harassed and criminalised under abusive counter-terrorism laws.

➔ **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS** taking to the streets to demand racial justice are being met with disproportionate force from police and security forces.

➔ **WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS** are being detained and tortured in retaliation for their work to challenge patriarchy and demand an end to discrimination and violence.

➔ **AT-RISK MIGRANT ACTIVISTS AND HUMANITARIAN WORKERS** who support migrant rights are being criminalised and prosecuted as threats to national security.

The freedom, safety and work of these and many other human rights defenders is vital to build a better future for all.

United Nations Geneva © Unsplash



For all of these defenders,

## INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAWS AND MECHANISMS

can protect and amplify their work and impact on the ground.



For many defenders working in restrictive national contexts, regional and international mechanisms may be the only platforms available. For these mechanisms to be effective, however, they need to be **credible, accessible and responsive to defenders**, providing them with a safe and influential platform from which to demand justice, push for accountability, and contribute to positive change.

The purpose of this Strategic Framework is to guide the effective pursuit of **ISHR's Vision, Mission and Values, and the achievement of ISHR's Overall Goals**. It articulates Strategic Goals and a framework for identifying priorities, and maps an organisational structure and working methods that will ensure agility and sustainability in a fast changing world. The strategy was developed through a highly consultative process over a 10 month period with extensive and invaluable inputs from human rights defenders,

NGOs working at the national, regional and international levels, human rights experts, and diplomatic and financial partners, as well as ISHR Board and staff. It is complemented with a results framework, and implemented through an annual activity plan and budget, and reviewed and updated on a biennial basis to ensure it remains relevant, responsive, ambitious and agenda setting. The framework provides the structure for our planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning process.

## Our Vision

All people enjoy all human rights, in communities that are diverse and inclusive, in a world that is fair, just, sustainable and peaceful.

## Our Mission

We support and act in solidarity with human rights defenders in their work for freedom, dignity, equality, justice and other fundamental values at the international, regional and national levels.

## Our Values

We are principled and passionate about human rights. We are deeply connected and act in collaboration and solidarity with human rights defenders. We seek to learn and expand our human rights knowledge and share our human rights expertise. We promote equality, inclusivity, diversity, transparency and accountability, both internally and externally.



Badiucio's Lennon Wall flag © Cedric Gelissen Photography

## Our Theory of Change

- » **If** the environment in which human rights defenders operate at the national, regional and international levels is safe and enabling,
  - » **And if** human rights defenders have the capacity, connections and support to organise and engage with international and regional mechanisms,
  - » **And if** such mechanisms are accessible and responsive to human rights defenders, and effective in promoting, protecting and contributing to the realisation of human rights and accountability for violations and abuses
- Then**, human rights defenders will be able to work more effectively, collaboratively and influentially at the national, regional and international levels to advance their goals to ensure that all people enjoy freedom, dignity and equality, in communities that are diverse and inclusive, in a world that is fair, just, sustainable and peaceful.

### Our Overall Goals

*What we aim to achieve to realise our vision in accordance with our theory of change.*

1

Human rights defenders are equipped, connected, supported and influential.

2

States, businesses and other non-State actors respect and protect human rights defenders.

3

Human rights laws and mechanisms are accessible, responsive and effective.



Brenda participating in ISHR flagship training programme © Cedric Gelissen Photography



Our Strategic Goals

Major goals and objectives we want to achieve to advance each of our overall goals over the next five years.

Strategic Goal

1

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE  
EQUIPPED, CONNECTED, SUPPORTED  
AND INFLUENTIAL

Working together for human rights



Human rights defenders have the tools and networks to be effective and influential in promoting, protecting and contributing to the realisation of human rights.



Human rights defenders have the **tools and capacities** (including strategies, networks, knowledge and narratives) to engage and influence international, regional and national mechanisms and actors, online and offline, and, through them, to contribute to the promotion, protection and realisation of human rights at all levels.



Human rights defenders are supported and provided with **solidarity** by collaborative and intersectional networks and coalitions.



Human rights defenders deprived of liberty, subject to reprisals or other grave violations are able to seek **justice and accountability** through international and regional human rights bodies and to leverage the voices of civil society, States, and international and regional mechanisms take action when their rights are restricted.



Listening to human right defenders and diplomats © Ben Buckland



Strategic Goal

2

STATES, BUSINESSES AND OTHER NON-STATE ACTORS RESPECT AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Taking a stance © Ben Buckland



States respect and protect human rights defenders and fulfil their human rights obligations at the international, regional and national levels, enabling and promoting their work. Businesses and other non-State actors respect human rights and contribute to a safe and enabling environment for defenders where they operate or have influence.

States **stop or refrain from restricting, hindering or criminalising** human rights defenders and their work, including by repealing or amending restrictive legislation.

States and international and regional mechanisms hold States that restrict, hinder or criminalise human rights defenders and their work **accountable**.

States consult with and become **positive advocates** for human rights defenders and **take legislative and policy action to respect and protect** human rights defenders at the national, regional and international levels.

Businesses and other non-State actors are **effectively regulated** with respect to human rights and human rights defenders, consult with and become **positive advocates** for defenders, **take action to respect and contribute** to the protection of defenders, **refrain from actions that restrict or violate** their rights, and are held accountable when they fail to do so.



Civil society participation is crucial at the Human Rights Council © UN photo / Jean-Marc Ferré



Strategic Goal

3 HUMAN RIGHTS LAWS AND MECHANISMS ARE ACCESSIBLE, RESPONSIVE AND EFFECTIVE

Fanny from ISHR, delivering a statement at the Council



International and regional human rights laws and mechanisms are accessible to human rights defenders and responsive to their demands, and are effective and influential in promoting, protecting and contributing to the realisation of human rights and accountability for violations and abuses.

➔ There is renewed and strengthened **support**, including through **adequate funding and effective narratives**, across all regions for **multi-lateralism and an international order** founded on respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.

➔ Human rights mechanisms are **effective and fit for purpose**. They respond to the calls and demands of human rights defenders, discuss situations from all regions on their merits, establish appropriate mechanisms and mandates to promote accountability and justice, and develop and adopt policies, resolutions and decisions in consultation with defenders which promote the recognition and protection of human rights defenders.

➔ Human rights mechanisms are accessible and safe, with **policies and processes to enable safe and meaningful participation** for human rights defenders, online and offline, and to ensure that cases of intimidation and reprisals are properly investigated and perpetrators are held accountable and appropriately sanctioned.

➔ Human rights laws and standards provide human rights defenders with **recognition and protection and an enabling environment** for their work, including respect for the rule of law and the rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, participation and non-discrimination.



## WHO WE SERVE AND WORK WITH

ISHR supports and acts in solidarity with human rights defenders in their work for **freedom, dignity, equality, justice and other fundamental values at the international, regional and national levels**. We undertake this work with and through other non-governmental organisations, networks and coalitions.

ISHR is deeply informed by the situation, protection needs and priorities of human rights defenders. We work with them in partnerships that are long-term, committed, respectful, empowering and which recognise and honour their knowledge and expertise.

Specifically, ISHR supports, and promotes solidarity with and between, defenders working in the following areas or contexts, which we recognise as intersectional and interdependent:



By supporting defenders working on these issues, ISHR contributes to realising the Sustainable Development Goals, including:



- 1 Equality, dignity and non-discrimination
- 2 Environmental justice and sustainability
- 3 International accountability for repression of human rights defenders
- 4 Transparency and rule of law

Within these programme areas, priority support is provided having regard to a range of criteria reflecting the gravity and urgency of the situation and the potential impact of ISHR's engagement.



## WHAT WE DO

We achieve our goals through **five integrated tactics**, developed and implemented in partnership with human rights defenders and their organisations, networks and coalitions at the national, regional and international levels:

- 1 **Training, capacity building, strategic advice, advocacy support and fellowships for human rights defenders**
- 2 **Legislative and policy research, development, advocacy and advice**
- 3 **Strategic litigation and interventions**
- 4 **Narrative development, campaigning and mobilisation**
- 5 **Coalition, network and movement building and co-ordination, including acting as secretariat for HRCnet and as co-convenor of the Business Network on Civic Freedoms and Human Rights Defenders**

We are committed to robust **monitoring and evaluation** of the impact of our interventions and the achievement of our objectives. ISHR's Results Framework and our Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning practice aim to ensure that:

- » our strategies and activities are effective in achieving our goals, remain relevant and responsive to identified areas of need, and represent an efficient use of limited resources;
- » we assess and report on our progress;
- » we monitor, learn, adapt and report on our successes and failures.



Berta Caceres Protest © Flickr

## WHERE WE WORK

### ↘ COUNTRIES AND SUB-REGIONS

Programmes periodically develop and review a list of priority countries. This list is not exhaustive but may be relevant to determining whether to prioritise support to a particular human rights defender or to the development of projects, campaigns or activities at the national level. Criteria which may be considered in identifying priority countries or sub-regions include:

- » whether assistance or support is requested from national or regional-level human rights defenders (particularly ISHR alumni or partner organisations), or the need for support is identified through national or regional consultations or research
- » the potential for systemic and sustainable human rights impact in the country or sub-region through engagement with international or regional mechanisms
- » whether ISHR can add distinctive value
- » the availability of human and financial resources.

### ↘ MECHANISMS AND BODIES

ISHR engages with international and regional mechanisms and bodies – including multilateral bodies and multi-stakeholder initiatives and associations – for four primary purposes:

- » We support and accompany human rights defenders to ensure their engagement with international and regional mechanisms and bodies is effective and influential.
- » We build and strengthen partnerships with and solidarity between human rights defenders using the spaces and opportunities associated with international and regional mechanisms and bodies.
- » We inform and influence the agendas and outputs of international and regional mechanisms and bodies so as to strengthen the recognition and protection of human rights defenders, promote accountability for violations or abuses against them, and ensure they are responsive to human rights defenders' calls.
- » We strengthen and safeguard the safety, accessibility, credibility, effectiveness and influence of international and regional mechanisms and bodies.

ISHR's engagement with international and regional mechanisms and bodies is always informed by defenders on the grounds and frequently in coalition with key regional and international partners and networks, such as HRCnet.

Criteria which may be considered in identifying whether, when and how to engage with a mechanism or body include:

- » the purpose of engagement and potential for impact through engagement with the body or mechanism
- » whether ISHR can add distinctive value
- » the availability of human and financial resources.

Applying these criteria, there are a range of mechanisms and bodies with which we engage or seek to build engagement at the international and regional levels. Such engagement includes:

- » **Strategic engagement** with mechanisms such as the UN Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human & Peoples' Rights at which we accompany and support human rights defenders, influence agendas and outputs, and strengthen access, participation and working methods
- » **Targeted engagement** with mechanisms such as the UN Security Council or World Economic Forum with which we engage in a targeted way to strengthen human rights defender access and participation, and influence agendas and outputs, but don't generally advise or accompany human rights defenders in their engagement
- » **Exploratory engagement** with bodies such as the African Union or the UN Climate Change Conference which we recognise as an important or influential mechanism or body but in relation to which ISHR needs to build further expertise, profile and partnerships to ensure sustainable impact.



# HOW WE WORK

ISHR’s governance, management, operations and working methods are agile, strategic, innovative, collaborative, effective, efficient, accountable and sustainable.

## OUR BOARD

The ISHR Board is responsible for the overall strategy, governance and sustainability of the organisation, including adopting and reviewing progress against this Strategic Framework.

- » The Board is comprised of a **diverse group of outstanding individuals** united by a **deep commitment to human rights and ISHR Values**.
- » The Board **works collegially and collectively** to provide ISHR with strategic leadership, policy guidance, organisational development support, and to ensure prudent, sustainable and accountable management.
- » Board members contribute individually to ISHR in accordance with their capacities, including in terms of access to networks, fundraising, mentoring and professional development, publicity and media engagement, organisational representation, and high-level advocacy.



Strategy planning at ISHR © Cedric Gelissen Photography



ISHR staff © Cedric Gelissen Photography

## OUR STAFF

ISHR staff are individually and collectively responsible for the implementation of this Strategic Framework.

- » ISHR staff are **diverse, deeply committed to human rights and ISHR Values**, and work in a way which is agile, strategic, innovative, collaborative, effective, efficient, accountable and sustainable.
- » ISHR is committed to the **holistic security and wellbeing** of staff, fellows, interns and trainees, including their physical, psychological and digital safety and wellbeing, and has a comprehensive suite of policies and practices in this regard.
- » ISHR is committed to, and provides opportunities for, the **professional development** of staff, both internally and externally.

## OUR OFFICES

- » ISHR has permanent offices in **Geneva and New York**, enabling us to build and leverage our distinctive expertise and networks at the UN and among key diplomats for the benefit of defenders.
- » ISHR establishes **presences in strategic locations** from time-to-time as is appropriate and necessary to best enable achievement of our Overall Goals and Strategic Goals. As is the case with our office in **Abidjan in Cote d’Ivoire**, such presences may include the co-location or secondment of ISHR staff with key national and regional human rights defender organisations or networks or the relocation of staff to provide enhanced access to key decision-makers.

## OUR STRUCTURE AND WORKING METHODS

ISHR’s structure and working methods promote and enable achievement of our Overall Goals and Strategic Goals in alignment with our organisational values.

Programmatically, ISHR is structured as a series of agile, overlapping, interdependent and multidisciplinary **clusters**.

In addition to these agile clusters, ISHR establishes **working groups** to respond to particular needs, to develop organisational strategies and policies and to promote and enable organisational development and learning. These groups include:

- » Working Group on **Non-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion**
- » Working Group on **Wellbeing**
- » Working Group on **Digital Security**
- » Working Group on **Programme Coordination, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**.

ISHR staff periodically elect a **Staff Representative** to the Board who is mandated to represent the views and interests of staff directly to the Board, enhancing access to expertise and support and also strengthening managerial accountability.

Collectively, this structure is designed to promote and enable:

- » accessibility and proximity to human rights defenders and mechanisms;
- » organisational agility, dynamism and responsiveness in a rapidly changing and uncertain external environment;
- » diverse and direct staff input into organisational strategy and priorities;
- » high levels of innovation, trust and responsibility;
- » high levels of coordination, collaboration and support;
- » alignment with organisational values of transparency and accountability;
- » organisational, collective and individual wellbeing, including learning and development, and sustainability;
- » the most efficient and effective use of human and financial resources.





## REQUIRED FINANCIAL RESOURCES

In accordance with our fundraising strategy, ISHR acquires and prudentially manages the financial resources necessary to flexibly and effectively implement this Strategic Framework, ensure the security, sustainability, agility and effectiveness of the organisation, and establish and maintain a core minimum reserve.



Supporting each other © Unsplash


For this purpose, over the period 2021 – 25:

- ISHR will further **diversify and deepen our funding base**, retaining existing donors and cultivating new donors (including governmental, philanthropic, corporate and private donors), with a view to raising the funds necessary to implement this strategy effectively and sustainably.
- ISHR will build and maintain **reserves** of a minimum **25% of annual operating expenses**, in line with good management and accountancy standards and for the purpose of enabling innovation and to ensure the security, sustainability, agility and effectiveness of the organisation.
- ISHR will seek to maintain the **proportion of core/unrestricted funds at 40% or above** of total income to ensure flexibility and responsiveness, and ensure that **no individual donor accounts for more than 20%** of income to safeguard independence.

Together we are stronger © Flickr







No matter who we are or where we live, our lives are better when we treat each other fairly and with respect. That's what human rights are all about – making sure that values like freedom, equality and solidarity are at the heart of our decisions and are reflected in our behaviours and laws around the world.

ISHR is a highly committed and collaborative organisation with passionate and professional staff.

We equip human rights defenders from around the world so they can strategically use international law and the UN to denounce abuses happening on the ground and bring justice, equality and peace to their communities.

We help make the UN and regional systems more accessible, effective and protective for human rights defenders and the victims they represent.

We campaign so the world's leaders get a strong message to listen, hear and heed the activists and organisations who defend human rights.

We promote accountability for violations and build powerful partnerships for change and impact on the ground. You can help us.

**Let's achieve this together!**

## STAY IN TOUCH AND SUPPORT OUR WORK

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[www.ishr.ch/donate](http://www.ishr.ch/donate) If you share our values and believe in our work then support us through donations



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FOR HUMAN RIGHTS