



Strengthening capacity, building resilience, creating impact

Human Rights Defender Advocacy Programme

In 2017, ISHR provided expert training and advocacy support to over 250 human rights defenders in Geneva, New York and in the field. Our field-based trainings, conducted in English, Spanish and Chinese, took place in countries including Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Mexico, the Philippines and Tanzania.

According to an independent expert evaluation of this work, ISHR's capacity building programmes:

- Equip defenders to engage effectively and leverage the UN and regional human rights systems
- Build defenders' support and protection networks
- Energise and inspire defenders, strengthening their resilience
- Make defenders more confident and influential agents for change at the national level



Juan Auz | Ecuador



 **@BettyBarkha**
(Fiji), FRIDA – The
Young Feminist Fund

‘The last two weeks were spent with some of the most brilliant and passionate human rights defenders, all facilitated by @ISHRglobal’

250

Number of human rights defenders to whom ISHR provided training or advocacy support

 **40%**
from 2016

■ The Human Rights Defender Advocacy Programme (HRDAP) is ISHR’s flagship capacity building and advocacy support programme. Running in its current format since 2014, HRDAP has substantially strengthened the capacity, networks, resilience and effectiveness of over 70 human rights defenders from more than 40 countries. In 2017, participants in HRDAP worked on issues including women’s rights, LGBTI rights, corporate accountability, and safeguarding civil society space in countries including Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Fiji, India, Nigeria, Peru, Romania, Russia, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

HRDAP 2017 coincided with the 35th session of the Human Rights Council. This meant that as well as receiving training on the UN human rights mechanisms from a range of experts, participants were able to build networks in Geneva and around the world, lobby UN member States and UN staff, learn from each other’s wealth of experience, and even deliver statements and provide testimony at the Human Rights Council itself.

Here is a selection of their many achievements and activities:

- **Adaobi Egboka of Nigeria** and **Vitaly Servetnik of Russia** personally met with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to discuss the challenges and protection needs of human rights defenders.
- **Nazeeha Saeed from Bahrain** shared her insights on extra judicial violence and killings based on sexuality and gender in testimony at the Human Rights Council.
- **Paula Wachter, an Argentinian** women human rights defender, sounded the alarm at the Human Rights Council about countries using concepts of ‘traditional values’ and the ‘traditional family’ to excuse violations of human rights.
- **Amanda Bosco from Uganda** delivered a statement – prepared collaboratively with other LGBTI participants – highlighting the risks faced by LGBTI rights defenders, during the presentation of the first ever report of the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity at the Human Rights Council.
- Defenders from **Cambodia, Ecuador, Peru** and **Russia** submitted information to the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders to inform his report on business and human rights.

“The training process gives human rights defenders more confidence to engage with policy makers, both in the UN and with their own governments. Individuals who participated in the Human Rights Defender Advocacy Programme, ISHR’s annual 2.5-week training programme in Geneva, stressed that the intensive training they had received had benefited them and their work in numerous ways, both tangible and intangible. Not only were they more effective in making use of the various mechanisms and special procedures within the UN to raise awareness of their concerns and advocate for better protections, but they were also inspired and energised by their time in Geneva and the networks and contacts they made while there. Many spoke of going back to their home countries with a renewed sense of purpose, as well as new strategies to use in their ongoing human rights work.

INDEPENDENT EXPERT EVALUATION OF ISHR
(MAY 2017)

Immediately following the 2017 edition of HRDAP, 100% of participants reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the programme, 100% had fully or partially achieved their primary advocacy objective, and 88% said they would apply the learnings and skills significantly in their national level work. They also told us that the programme was energising and built their resilience, with one defender from Latin America saying, 'I learned a lot while in Geneva, but the real value is that I went back to my country and felt stronger and more like I was part of a bigger effort. I didn't feel so alone.'

In addition to HRDAP's short-term outcomes and impacts, the programme also creates long-term sustainable impact.

In order to better assess the long-term effects of HRDAP, ISHR recently asked participants in the 2014 and 2015 programmes to evaluate its ongoing impact on their work. In response, they highlighted how they had actively engaged in international advocacy since HRDAP. They pointed to the valuable networks they developed, including within the HRDAP group itself, and how they had been able to leverage these to further their national and regional advocacy objectives.

For ISHR, HRDAP is more than just a training and capacity building programme. It is also a programme which helps ensure that our work remains deeply connected to and informed by the situation, priorities and protection needs of defenders on the ground. We make a special effort to continue to develop our relationships with and provide support to participants well beyond completion of the programme, with many participants becoming key partners for ISHR in our work to achieve national level change.

IMPACT

STRENGTHENING DEFENDERS' NETWORKS AND LEGAL PROTECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

Alphonsus Gbanie, coordinator of the Human Rights Defenders Network-Sierra Leone (HRDN-SL), participated in ISHR's Human Rights Defender Advocacy Programme in 2014. Using the skills and leveraging the networks developed through HRDAP, Alphonsus and HRDN-SL are now spearheading the development of a national law for the protection of human rights defenders in the country. Alphonsus has also built on the relationship he began with the Irish Mission in Geneva, turning it into a long-standing partnership with the Irish Embassy in Sierra Leone. This has translated into financial support for HRDN-SL and into diplomatic support for advocacy initiatives.

IMPACT

RESPONDING TO THE CRACKDOWN ON LGBTI RIGHTS IN EGYPT

Over the course of 2017, a number of high-level officials, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, made important and timely public statements condemning the crackdown on LGBTI rights and their defenders in Egypt. Tarek Mostafa, who participated in ISHR's Human Rights Defender

“One of the most notable aspects of ISHR’s trainings is the effort to serve the needs of the alumni after the training programme has ended. Participants underscored how much they value ISHR’s ongoing support, guidance, and the sharing of relevant information about developments within the UN. As one HRDAP alumni reported, “The training was strikingly different from other training workshops I have attended. Inter-active, participatory. We worked a lot, but you were learning and doing at the same time. And ISHR doesn’t stop at the training itself. It is also very good about maintaining contact with participants after the training.” Similarly, another HRDAP alumni stated, “I have gone to workshops [by others] in the past and then never heard from the people again. But ISHR stays in dialogue with us. It is very impressive how they do it. They remember you, and send a message saying, “We saw something that might be important for your work. Let me know if we can help.” I have been very impressed with their efforts.”

INDEPENDENT EXPERT EVALUATION OF ISHR (MAY 2017)

“Coming to Geneva for the Human Rights Defender Advocacy Programme has provided me with ideas and opportunities to improve the lives of vulnerable groups and empower the impoverished. To ISHR, thank you. You have empowered me to empower others.”

VICTORIA RENNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT RISK (SIERRA LEONE) AND PARTICIPANT IN ISHR'S 2017 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ADVOCACY PROGRAMME



TRAINEES REPORTED:

100% were **'satisfied'** or **'very satisfied'** with ISHR's training and advocacy support

100% **fully or substantially achieved** their key advocacy and learning objectives

88% considered that the skills and networks acquired would **strengthen their national advocacy**



Advocacy Programme in 2015, says that such statements are vital – demonstrating solidarity and increasing pressure for change. Tarek says that his work and that of his organisation, Nazra for Feminist Studies, to engage and leverage the UN for national change has become significantly more strategic and effective as a result of his participation in HRDAP.



IMPACT
CAPACITATING A MOVEMENT IN INDIA

With the number of applicants for HRDAP exceeding the number of funded places by a ratio of at least 30:1, ISHR selects participants with a demonstrated commitment to using the learnings to capacitate their own networks at home. Drawing on expertise and insights developed through HRDAP, participants from Human Rights Defenders Alert in India have been able to train more than 1000 other civil society actors on how to engage most effectively and strategically with the UN to safeguard civil society space at home.