

**INTERNATIONAL SERVICE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS:
AN EVALUATION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) is an independent, non-governmental human rights organization that supports and enables human rights defenders to promote and protect human rights around the world and works in partnership with these defenders and others to strengthen human rights standards and systems internationally, regionally, and nationally.

In 2016, ISHR obtained a 2-year core support grant from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The grant, which runs from January 2016 to December 2017, enables “ISHR to serve human rights defenders through capacity-building and access to the international and regional human rights mechanisms, and by improving their legal protections at the international, regional and national levels, including by developing national laws in line with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.”

Article 9 of ISHR’s grant agreement with Norway specifies that “a mid-term review focusing on progress to date shall be carried out.” ISHR commissioned Holly Cartner¹ to conduct this mid-term evaluation to look at the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability of its work, focusing primarily on 2016, the first year of the grant. The evaluation also looks at ISHR’s planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems, as well as its risk management practices. The evaluation is based on 52 interviews with relevant actors, which were conducted from March to May 2017. In addition, relevant documents were reviewed as part of the evaluation process.

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Programmatic Work: Summary of Key Findings

There was unanimous agreement among external interlocutors that ISHR is a sophisticated and influential human rights actor that possesses a wealth of expertise, deep networks of partners, and a relationship of trust with many actors within the United Nations (UN) system.

Interviewees underscored the special niche that ISHR occupies in supporting, training, and advocating on behalf of human rights defenders. Many of ISHR’s partners and beneficiaries see it as playing a critical role both in terms of its training and capacity-building programs, as well as

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its work to strengthen standards for the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs). Many interviewees noted that the organization serves as a “bridge” between those HRDs operating at the grassroots or national level and policymakers and others operating at the international level.

Despite an increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders and closing space for human rights work, most interviewees were adamant that ISHR has achieved – in whole or in part – many of the anticipated outcomes it identified in its proposal to Norway, as well as a number of other important results. What is more, interlocutors appreciate that ISHR has thoughtfully adapted to the ever-changing political environment, evaluating its impact and adjusting its objectives and strategies as the context has shifted.

Logic Model/Theory of Change

ISHR’s vision is “the effective implementation of all international and regional human rights instruments in all nations and for all people.”² ISHR works to ensure that ultimately all human rights protections will be fully implemented at the national level. According to ISHR’s theory of change: Human rights defenders, the essential agents + International and regional human rights laws and systems, the powerful levers = national-level change.³ Thus, human rights defenders are central to the change that is being sought and most specifically to the long-term impact at the national level.

The vast majority of ISHR’s activities and intervention strategies, from trainings, advocacy accompaniment, policy development and advocacy, to building and coordinating coalitions, are directly and logically linked to strengthening the capacity of human rights defenders so that they can effect change at the international, regional, and most importantly the national level. There is also a logical connection between ISHR’s ultimate vision and its work to promote new and stronger international human rights standards and more effective mechanisms at the international level. The accomplishments it made during the evaluation period, which are discussed in more detail below, were unanimously viewed by interlocutors as critical achievements and outcomes logically linked to the pursuit of that vision.

Effectiveness

In general, ISHR is recognized by interviewees as an effective and influential organization that has contributed in important and concrete ways to achieving positive outcomes for the protection of human rights generally and the benefit and protection of HRDs more specifically. Its activities and interventions have been largely effective in strengthening the work of human rights defenders by providing training, capacity-building, collaborative advocacy initiatives, and

² See ISHR’s theory of change: How do we achieve and measure impact, April 14, 2016, and below Organizational theory of change, p.13.

³ Annual Report 2016, ISHR, p.3.

access to international and regional (especially in Africa) mechanisms and policymakers, among other things. It has also been effective in leading efforts to strengthen international standards on the protection of human rights defenders and has created and/or improved mechanisms to ensure that such standards are implemented at the national level.

There was widespread agreement among interlocutors that ISHR's work has been effective in bringing about numerous concrete outcomes, including many of the anticipated outcomes specifically identified in its proposal to Norway. Outcomes identified by interlocutors as being particularly effective included: concrete transfer of knowledge and skills through its highly regarded Human Rights Defenders Training Programme (HRDAP) and other trainings, the appointment of UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI); appointment of High-ranking Official to Combat Reprisals against HRDs; renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on HRD; resolution at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) on the protection of Women HRDs; greater legal protection for HRDs working on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESC); and greater awareness of need for reform of the ECOSOC NGO Committee, and successful advocacy leading to the webcasting of all open sessions of the committee. Finally, interlocutors repeatedly pointed to ISHR's Model National Law on Protection of Human Rights Defenders as a surprisingly effective tool to generate momentum for implementation of the UN Declaration on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders at the national level. Initiatives that were considered less effective included its work with the Women's Human Rights Defenders Coalition and the ISHR-led initiative on "Strengthening the Human Rights Council @ 10 years.

Relevance

There was virtually unanimous agreement that ISHR's core program and programmatic objectives are highly relevant in responding to the needs of ISHR's target group, namely human rights defenders. ISHR's training programs, including its signature Human Rights Defenders Training Programme (HRDAP), are seen by all interlocutors as an integral component of its overall support for HRDs and as a highly relevant aspect of its work. HRDs themselves stressed that ISHR's training, as well as its ongoing strategic partnership, makes their work more effective. It also makes defenders more confident and assertive in their engagement with UN, as well as with regional mechanisms. More importantly, it helps their work when they return home and makes them more confident in their interaction with their own government. ISHR has also been successful in strengthening standards and developing tools that are relevant to HRDs. HRDs stressed that the Model Law, for example, gives their work greater visibility and credibility and provides them with a platform for engagement with their own government.

Representatives from international organizations and from the diplomatic community also stressed the relevance of ISHR's work within the UN and regional mechanisms. ISHR is seen as strengthening the work of these institutions by providing its own expert interventions and serving to ensure that the voices of HRDs are always part of the debate. The issues ISHR prioritizes, the recommendations it makes, and the support it offers policymakers is all viewed as highly relevant and supportive of a stronger and more protective human rights framework.

All agreed that ISHR's accomplishments during the first year of the grant are likely to be extremely relevant to the needs of HRDs for the foreseeable future.

Efficiency

External interlocutors praised ISHR as a highly efficient organization and underscored their respect for all that the organization accomplishes with relatively few resources, including a small staff. Interviewees agreed that ISHR creates a “big bang for the buck,” and “punches well above its weight.” Most interviewees were skeptical that the organization could significantly improve its efficiency. Several interviewees questioned whether ISHR might gain some efficiency by cutting back on products such as the Human Rights Monitor. However, there was significant disagreement among interviewees regarding this suggestion. Others were concerned that ISHR staff take on too much and are stretched too thinly. Some questioned whether ISHR might be more efficient if it chose to follow fewer procedures. ISHR is widely respected for its highly collaborative and consultative approach, which many viewed as an organizational strength. ISHR staff are aware of the importance of being efficient in their work, but stressed that efficiency should not be achieved at the expense of other organizational values such as collaboration and consultation. While underscoring the importance of efficiency, ISHR's Executive Director, Phil Lynch, stressed that the organization could not indefinitely try to do more and have staff work harder with relatively few resources, risking staff burn-out and creating an unsustainable situation.

Sustainability

There was general agreement among external interlocutors that the positive outcomes and impact ISHR has helped bring about are, in large part, sustainable. In particular, ISHR's trainings and capacity-building initiatives, as well as its accompanied advocacy and support for HRD networking, were viewed as having fundamentally changed the capacity of human rights defenders to engage with international and regional mechanisms. Human rights defenders also reported that ISHR's capacity-building efforts had made them more confident in addressing their own governments, and the credibility with which their work is viewed.

When asked about the sustainability of ISHR's work, ISHR's partners repeatedly pointed to examples such as The Model Law initiative, which has long-term and lasting impact on human rights defenders' ability to translate international standards into national protection mechanisms. ISHR has also created new mechanisms, as well as helped strengthen standards, that were perceived to be useful both now and for the foreseeable future. These mechanisms will need to be defended and the standards will require ongoing effort to implement, but there was widespread agreement that ISHR has achieved outcomes that will have sustainable impact.

Some external interlocutors viewed sustainability primarily as a question of ISHR's financial security and stability. Although the organization is perceived as very efficient, achieving

significant impact with relatively few resources, interlocutors noted that the organization's limited fundraising capacity threatens its ability to grow and to expand its important and effective programs. Greater fundraising capacity would contribute to ISHR's long-term sustainability.

Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: Key Findings

Planning

ISHR has made significant strides in recent years in developing its planning process, which includes strategic planning and annual activity planning that is reviewed internally at least bi-annually, as well as during bi-annual Board meetings. A significant development during the evaluation period was the introduction of the software platform Smartsheet, a centralized oversight mechanism that is seen especially by Finance and Development staff as a useful tool for planning and financial risk mitigation. It allows staff to see all that has been planned and theoretically to have a real-time overview of the organization's fulfillment of obligations contained in multiple grants, as well as expenditures associated with specific grants. Some Program staff, however, suggested that Smartsheet is too complicated and time-consuming, and were doubtful of the value. Some staff were struggling to keep the information on Smartsheet up-to-date. Smartsheet has only been in use for a little over a year, and it is not clear whether some of the concerns about the complexity of the system may dissipate over time, as staff become more familiar with the system.

ISHR's current planning system is appropriately thorough (and with a good set of indicators) given the size of the organization and the nature of the programs. However, the experience with Smartsheet requires further monitoring. If Program staff continue to find it a significant burden, it may be worth considering whether the information most important to the organization can be captured with fewer key indicators.

The main concerns raised about ISHR's current planning process had to do with whether it results in a realistic assessment of how much staff time is required for each activity, and whether it anticipates the demands on staff, including Finance, Operations, and Communication staff, who do not have line responsibility for a project. Many interlocutors, including multiple staff members, Board, and external interviewees, expressed concern that ISHR staff are overcommitted and overstretched.

Staff, as well as some external interlocutors, also stressed the need for ISHR to "plan less," in part to give staff more time for unanticipated opportunities or emergencies that emerge over the course of a year, but also to build in more time for reflection and exploratory work. ISHR's leadership also considers it vitally important to be able to "plan for unplanned work," but stressed that the organization's ability to do so has been severely constrained by donor policies.

Monitoring and Evaluation

ISHR has a strong culture of monitoring and evaluation. For key programs such as HRDAP or its advocacy at the Human Rights Council, ISHR conducts regular internal assessments and incorporates its conclusions into future planning. During the evaluation period, ISHR adopted the Smartsheet program to gain better oversight of its programmatic activities and expenditures. If used properly, Smartsheet can be valuable for identifying and keeping track of outputs and, perhaps to a lesser extent, outcomes. However, it is not a sufficient tool for monitoring and documenting the impact of ISHR's activities. Staff apparently do not update these details in a sufficiently timely manner. What is more, the mechanism itself does not seem well-suited for capturing the analytical reporting that is so crucial for future program planning. However, ISHR has numerous other mechanisms that combine with Smartsheet to form a strong impact assessment/evaluation system. A key component of the internal and ongoing monitoring and evaluation system is the Director's Report, which is linked to the Strategic Framework, covers key activities and achievements. Board members reported that they typically spend about half a day reviewing and discussing the content of the Director's Report with the Director and relevant staff.

Over the course of 2016, ISHR also developed "a set of indicators for each of its 5 Intervention types, including a range of measures and means of verification. While these were not fully in place throughout the evaluation period, they point to an ongoing effort to manage, monitor, and measure project implementation and impact. Many of these indicators are excellent and likely to provide very useful insights for its future work. Because ISHR is committed to ensuring that its work generates positive outcomes, and is particularly rigorous in assessing the impact of its training programs, the organization might consider adding an additional indicator on the extent to which ISHR trainees avail themselves of UN human rights opportunities in the two years following the training, as well as an indicator on whether and how UN human rights bodies uphold recommendations put forth by ISHR's trainees. What is more, given that ISHR strives ultimately for its work to achieve long-term impact in national contexts, it might be useful to add at least one indicator that compares the advocacy recommendations of the HRDAP alumni to the recommendation, resolution, or position ultimately adopted at the national level. In general, it would be useful to consider ways to add evaluation of HRDAP's impact over a period longer than one year, and to consider ways to supplement the data sources so that impact can be evaluated from sources in addition to the self-evaluation by the HRD. Because it is ultimately important to measure the outcomes that ISHR's efforts are achieving on the ground, it would be important periodically to commission field evaluations, that include a range of methods such as case studies and focus group interviews to supplement the other evaluation tools being used.

Learning

ISHR has good evaluation and learning practices. ISHR has an established practice, for example, of regularly evaluating several of its signature initiatives, including the HRDAP and the advocacy associated with each session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), and incorporating that learning into the next planning process. Without a designated staff person responsible for evaluation and learning or significant other resources, it has been able to incorporate evaluation and learning into the organization's day-to-day operations. There is a sense that staff and Board are genuinely committed to evaluation for purposes of learning, but staff clearly long for more opportunities to reflect on their work and share learning. For ISHR, it seems that the greatest obstacle to effective learning is sufficient time and, except for HRDAP and HRC assessments, several staff suggested that much of ISHR's reflection of its work "is focused very much on the end of the year appraisals."

Although ISHR has a standing agenda item on lessons learned at its bi-monthly staff meeting, staff indicated that it was not regularly used. ISHR's could strengthen its learning system by creating regular opportunities for staff reflection and learning, either during the staff meeting or at a time that is specifically set aside for that purpose. ISHR's evaluation and learning systems could also be improved by strengthening its knowledge management by documenting lessons learned from evaluation mechanisms and making sure that they are centrally available, can be accessed easily and shared with others.

Risk Mitigation: Key Findings

ISHR, as well as its partners and beneficiaries, face various forms of risk inherent in the work, with only limited or no control over many of the risk factors. As part of its submission to Norway, ISHR identified several proposal-specific risks, including that of senior staff attrition, as well as some financial and political risk. ISHR has been very successful in mitigating the risk of senior staff attrition, and the organization took several additional measures during the evaluation period directed at maintaining staff morale. Steps were also taken to ensure that personal contacts and expertise are institutionalized, to mitigate some of the damage if senior staff do leave. Efforts to reduce the concerns raised earlier regarding staff being overstretched and overcommitted could also help mitigate risk of attrition.

The most serious risk ISHR identified was that of "threat, intimidation or reprisal" against HRDs who are cooperating with international and regional mechanisms." ISHR staff are highly cognizant of the risk of reprisals, and very committed to mitigating these risks to the highest extent possible. The organization has developed several security policies intended to mitigate risk both to staff and HRDs, incorporated advice on protection and security into its training modules, as well as developed a response process that involves relevant government stakeholders and the UN. ISHR takes many precautions in its interaction with HRDs before they are invited to Geneva, for example, and follow-up with them once they return home. In addition, ISHR has a focal point on staff that is responsible for coordinating advocacy around reprisals.

During the evaluation period, ISHR adopted a protocol on data/digital security and appointed a staff focal point on digital security, steps intended to mitigate the risks of communicating with

and handling the information of ISHR's partners and beneficiaries, among other things. ISHR also adopted a Travel, Mission and Field Security policy that sets out additional steps to be taken in assessing and mitigating risk and enhancing security. These policies underscore both a heightened attention by the organization to potential risks and a proactive effort to mitigate them. The evaluation does note, however, that ISHR might benefit from a more formal risk assessment protocol for engaging with partners and beneficiaries (that spells out what is likely already staff practice), perhaps with the input of security experts. Furthermore, it would be useful to have a designated security person within the organization who has the expertise to provide security guidance and who has the responsibility for ensuring that all staff are aware of relevant security protocols, provided with the appropriate support and training, and ultimately held accountable for implementation. As with regard to documenting and sharing programmatic lessons, it would be important to ensure that staff have opportunities to share security experiences and successful strategies to mitigate security risks, as well as security breaches. Those lessons should be documented so that they can be shared with and relied on by others in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) is an independent, non-governmental human rights organization that prioritizes supporting and enabling human rights defenders to promote and protect human rights around the world and working in partnership with these defenders and others to strengthen human rights standards and systems internationally, regionally, and nationally. ISHR's secretariat is based in Geneva. It also has offices in New York and Abidjan.

On March 1, 2016, ISHR obtained a 2-year core support grant from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to enable ISHR to pursue key goals, including:

- Supporting human rights defenders to use international and regional human rights standards and systems to contribute to change on the ground (Goal 1)
- Strengthening international and regional human rights standards and systems to make them more accessible, effective and protective for human rights defenders (Goal 2)
- Supporting local actors to promote implementation of international and regional human rights standards on the protection of defenders at the national level (Goal 3)

Norway's core support for ISHR is complemented by earmarked funding to allow ISHR to support the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

Since it was founded in 1984, ISHR has worked to train, building capacity, and provide support for human rights defenders around the world. According to its theory of change: Human rights defenders, the essential agents + International and regional human rights laws and systems, the powerful levers = national-level change.⁴ In its grant submission to Norway, ISHR proposed to:

⁴ Annual Report 2016, ISHR, p.3.

support an improved Human Rights Council resolution on HRDs; lend support for the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs; promote strengthening of the HRC on its 10th anniversary; implement knowledge and skills-based trainings for HRDs; undertake legislative advocacy leading to national laws on HRDs; engage in judicial advocacy with UN treaty bodies, special procedures and others; and produce the monthly Human Rights Monitor and twice-yearly Kumulika.⁵

Scope of Evaluation and Methodology

ISHR commissioned this midterm evaluation of its program. The evaluation is a component of its contractual obligation to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is also part of ISHR's ongoing commitment to program monitoring, evaluation, and institutional learning.

As specified in the Terms of Reference (ToR, see Appendix B), the evaluation covers 2016. However, given the actual start date of the evaluation, as well as the fact that some long-term advocacy in 2016 resulted in positive developments in early 2017, some 2017 outcomes are also covered. According to the ToR, the purpose of the evaluation "is to gain better knowledge and understanding of ISHR's work, to identify possible institutional strengths and weaknesses of the organization, consider progress and identify lessons learned and opportunities or recommendations for enhancement."⁶ The evaluation addressed ISHR's core program for its effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, and sustainability.

Pursuant to the terms of reference, the evaluator conducted a desk review of a wide range of documents provided by ISHR, as well as numerous additional documents, which the evaluator requested during the evaluation and/or sought on ISHR's website. (See Appendix D for list of documents reviewed) Following the desk review, the evaluator conducted 52 interviews with relevant actors: current and former staff⁷ of ISHR, human rights defenders, including former participants of ISHR's training programs, NGO partners, representatives from the international community in Geneva and New York, and other external actors. (See Appendix C for list of interviewees). All interviews were conducted by phone, Skype or email during the period from March to May 2017. Several interviews were carried out with French translation.

Validation/Triangulation

In order to ensure the most reliable and credible data, all findings were cross-checked through targeted interviews or by e-mail with staff and knowledgeable informants and/or additional document review.

⁵ ISHR's Application for grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p. 3.

⁶ Call for proposals: Evaluation of ISHR 2016 activities, (hereafter Terms of Reference or ToR).

⁷ For purposes of this report, no distinction is made between current and former staff and/or Board members to ensure the anonymity of the person(s) being quoted.

ISHR's PROGRAMMATIC WORK: KEY FINDINGS

ISHR is praised by its partners and beneficiaries as a highly-influential non-governmental organization, which often functions as a focal point or facilitator of human rights initiatives, especially those targeting UN human rights mechanisms and special procedures. Partners identified numerous strengths that contribute to ISHR's strong reputation, including a deep understanding of international human rights mechanisms and the functioning of the United Nations architecture, a broad network of human rights activists, and excellent relationships with diplomats and international representatives. Many interviewees spoke of ISHR as a "bridge" between those grassroots activists who are on the frontlines of the most important and often dangerous human rights struggles of our times and those international policymakers who sit in Geneva, New York, or capitals and may have little understanding of defenders' realities and needs. Activists, international diplomats, and representatives of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) stressed that ISHR can play this "bridging" or "linking" role because of its consultative and collaborative approach, as well as the trust and respect with this it is seen. As one partner observed, "ISHR is unique among Geneva-based NGOs. They can bring together a broad coalition to conduct joint advocacy, but are never so attached to ownership, so everyone is willing to work with them.... They are often the glue that holds these groups together, and play a crucial role in building arguments and developing strategies for effective advocacy." Similarly, a diplomat summed up a perspective that was shared by many: "The entire system works far better because of ISHR. They enhance the work of NGOs, push governments to take stronger and more human rights-friendly positions, and drive the conversation."

Logic Model/Theory of Change

ISHR's vision is "the effective implementation of all international and regional human rights instruments in all nations and for all people."⁸ ISHR works to ensure that ultimately all human rights protections are fully implemented at the national level. Thus, ISHR's theory of change states: Human rights defenders, the essential agents + International and regional human rights laws and systems, the powerful levers = national-level change.⁹ As discussed elsewhere, in order to realize its vision, ISHR supports HRDs to use human rights standards and systems, works to strengthen those standards and systems to make them more accessible, effective and protective for HRDs, and supports HRDs to work for national implementation of these standards. ISHR achieves these goals through a range of outcomes and impact, including:

- Better capacitated and more strategic, networked and coordinated HRDs,

⁸ See ISHR's theory of change: How do we achieve and measure impact, April 14, 2016, and Organizational theory of change.

⁹ Annual Report 2016, ISHR, p.3.

- Development and advocacy of proposals to strengthen human rights standards, laws and systems,
- Engagement and influence of key decision makers, policy makers and “inside champions,” and
- Coordination, capacitation and mobilization of coalitions of HRDs and other actors.

In ISHR’s theory of change, human rights defenders are central to the change that is being sought. The vast majority of its activities and intervention strategies, from trainings, advocacy accompaniment, policy development and strategic advocacy, to building and coordinating coalitions, are directly and logically linked to strengthening the capacity of human rights defenders so that they can effect change at the international, regional, and most importantly the national level.

There is also a strong connection between ISHR’s ultimate vision and its work to promote new and stronger international human rights standards and more effective mechanisms at the international level. The accomplishments it made during the evaluation period, which are discussed in more detail below, were unanimously viewed by interlocutors as critical achievements and outcomes logically linked to the pursuit of its vision.

As will be discussed below, ISHR’s outcomes and impacts during the evaluation period were rated highly by virtually all external interlocutors. Its intervention strategies and its outcomes are viewed as relevant and effective by HRDs, as well as representatives in the international community. Despite this positive assessment, however, the situation for HRDs and the protection of human rights is deteriorating in many countries around the world. Thus, while ISHR’s intervention logic is very sound, and widely accepted as the most valid means of achieving lasting results on the ground, there are intervening factors and variables that are not within ISHR’s control.

Effectiveness

In general, ISHR is recognized by interviewees as an effective and influential organization that has contributed in important and concrete ways to achieving its positive outcomes for the benefit of HRDs and the protection of human rights more generally. Its activities and interventions have been largely effective in strengthening the work of human rights defenders by providing training, capacity-building, collaborative advocacy initiatives, and access to international and regional (especially in Africa) mechanisms and policymakers, among other things. It has also been effective in leading efforts to strengthen international standards on the protection of human rights defenders and has created and/or improve mechanisms to ensure that such standards are implemented at the national level. As will be discussed in more detail below, there was widespread agreement among interlocutors that ISHR’s work has been effective in bringing about numerous concrete outcomes, including many of the anticipated outcomes specifically identified in its proposal to Norway.

Performance Assessment Against Program Objectives

According to ISHR's proposal to the Norwegian MFA, the long-term impact it is seeking to achieve is to: "Support and enable human rights defenders to promote and protect human rights worldwide." This includes three project goals:

Goal 1: Support human rights defenders to effectively use international and regional standards and systems to contribute to positive human rights change on the ground;

Goal 2: Make those international and regional standards and systems more accessible, protective and effective for human rights defenders; and

Goal 3: Support human rights defenders to advocate for national implementation.¹⁰

Goal 1: Supporting HRDs to Effectively Use International and Regional Standards and Systems

ISHR's Training and Capacity-Building Programs

Interviewees praised ISHR for the capacity-building and training work it carried out over the evaluation period. Interlocutors, and especially the direct beneficiaries of the trainings, found the work relevant, timely and very effective in helping them strengthen their human rights work. A donor observed, ISHR "excels at supporting and capacitating human rights defenders to engage with international and regional human rights systems." During 2016, ISHR reported providing "expert training and advocacy support to over 200 human rights defenders in Geneva, New York and in the field...."¹¹

Participants, both in Geneva and in regional training workshops, reported that ISHR's training had been "fundamental" to their work. Individuals who had participated in the Human Rights Defenders Advocacy Program (HRDAP), ISHR's annual 2.5-week training program in Geneva, stressed that the intensive training they had received had benefitted 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 energized by their time in Geneva and the networks and contacts they had 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. As a result, participants reported that they were now more likely to target the UN mechanisms, and that they were more effective in their initiatives.

¹⁰ See Grant Agreement Between the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Service on Human Rights Regarding QZA-16/0006, March 1, 2016, p. 5.

¹¹ ISHR Annual Report 2017, p. 11.

Better Understanding of UN Mechanisms/Better Advocacy Skills

There was unanimous agreement among previous participants in ISHR's trainings that their work had become more effective. As one participant stated, "ISHR helped us to better understand how to prepare communications for Special Rapporteurs, how to lobby the ESCR Committee, how the Human Rights Council works, and how to best submit our concerns to these bodies...." A HRD from West Africa observed, "ISHR's capacity-building efforts have had a great impact on our work, especially with the African Commission for Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR). We have learned how to engage with and make use of the Commission, and how to engage and carry out advocacy with businesses. They have helped to strengthen our advocacy both in Geneva and before the Commission. We have been much more active in engaging Special Procedures, and working with key missions and embassies."

For some HRDAP alumni, the training program was their first visit to Geneva and/or to the UN. An activist from Asia reported that "I had no knowledge of the UN system before [the ISHR training], and was intimidated by the thought of initiating advocacy there. But the training made me much more confident about doing advocacy and in my ability to take it forward." A participant from Europe stated that "I had a degree in Human Rights, but no practical experience with using the UN mechanisms.... I learned so much from the training and feel that the systems in Geneva are now so much easier to navigate. As a result of the training, my work is more systematic and I have a more strategic approach. I now know what to do, and what not to do." Similarly, a former HRDAP participant noted, "Learning how to use the system more effectively helped us to broaden our thinking about our strategy. When I returned [home], we changed our organization's strategy to incorporate an international advocacy dimension."

Other alumni reported that they had carried out advocacy with the UN prior to participating in the HRDAP, but that ISHR's training had made them more effective. For example, one activist from Central America reported that "We had been working on advocacy [in Geneva], but with only limited success. After ISHR's training, we understood how to work better with treaty bodies. . . We carried out a big initiative on the UPR for Honduras, as well as shadow reports before [several UN bodies]. Thanks to what we learned from ISHR, we had much better responses from these efforts." Similarly, another former participant commented, "It may sound simple, but one of the most important things to come out of the training for me was to know the most effective timeframe for intervening in UN mechanisms. We were taught which embassies we should approach, but also how to be sure to do so in a timely manner. We had not understood the timeframe before, and I hate to admit, but I think our work had very often missed the key moment to have impact. Now I feel much more confident in our approach."

Members of the international community also reported that ISHR's work to build defenders' capacity has visible results. For example, a representative of an international organization commented that "ISHR's training results in local HRDs taking a much more active role in sessions of the Human Rights Council. They take the floor, especially on HRD issues, and I see a direct link between HRDs taking the floor and the outcomes of the HRC. They have a clear impact on the HRC."

Access to UN Mechanisms

Some participants, especially those from organizations that do not have ECOSOC accreditation, underscored how important it is that ISHR facilitates their access to various UN mechanisms and fora. For example, one activist observed, “There are many barriers to being effective in the UN, and if you don’t have accreditation, it is very helpful to be able to work with ISHR, which gives you access and all the support you could hope for.”

Other activists have come to expect being denied access to their own governments, and were amazed to gain access in the UN. One LGBTI HRD observed, “We had never met anyone from our government other than the Minister of Health, but were brought to Geneva and suddenly had access to the Minister of Justice and others. It was the beginning of access for us.” The activist continued, “I was scared about doing advocacy with my own government. But the UN felt like a safe space, or at least a safer space.... From the training with ISHR, I gained skills on how to talk with governments that I took back to my country and applied.”

Contacts

National activists stressed how valuable they find ISHR’s efforts to introduce them to key actors in the UN system. An activist from South America stressed that “I already knew I could contact the Special Rapporteur, but meeting him personally and having the direct email of his staff, that has tripled the number of times I reach out to him and provide key information on our concerns.... The international mechanisms can feel very distant, and too far off to make a difference. But once you have actual contacts in the system, and they know you as well, there is a relationship of trust that develops and the whole system becomes more useful.”

Energizing HRDs, Building Confidence and Solidarity

A significant number of former participants in ISHR’s training programs underscored that the training had helped them not only to be better advocates, but in many less tangible ways. For many, they emerged from the training not only with a better understanding of the international (or regional) mechanisms and how to interact with them, but they were more confident, more assertive, and less isolated because of the experience. For example, an activist from West Africa noted, “ISHR does a great job of bringing together amazing activists from many different regions and working on different issues. I not only learned a lot from these fellow participants, but I was inspired by their courage and creativity. I have stayed in touch with quite a few of them, and I now feel more of a member of the international movement.” Similarly, an activist from Latin America noted that “After the training, I have stayed in touch with ISHR staff, as well as with many of those I met during the training. It has helped me feel less alone and less isolated in my work, and it has helped me have more energy to continue.” An international

partner also praised the impact of ISHR's training efforts, observing, "I can see the importance and positive impact of these trainings. It is not only the substantive knowledge that is passed on, but they give HRDs a sense that they are not as isolated as before. After such trainings, they tend to develop networks and join forces in ways they never thought of before.... I see the impact of the trainings more in terms of HRDs' confidence. The policymakers in Geneva are given a human face and HRDs learn how to engage them and influence them more effectively. I have also seen this translate into a more confident interaction with their own governments once they are back in their own countries."

Ongoing Partnership and Support

One of the most notable aspects of ISHR's trainings is the follow up with participants after the training and ongoing efforts to serve the needs of the alumni after the training program 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 (estimated one every 2-3 months) 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."

Most alumni from ISHR's trainings were very positive about the ongoing collaboration and support they have. However, as part of its review of successes and failures related to the implementation of the 2013-2016 Framework, ISHR itself concluded that it had failed "to engage alumni or to follow up on HRDAP. It therefore implemented a number of steps, including checking in with HRDAP alumni at regular intervals during the first year after the training to improve communication and support, as well as identifying ways that former trainees can become engaged in shared advocacy initiatives. From the perspective of the former participants, these steps seem to be having a positive impact."

Several external interlocutors noted that ISHR often selects HRDs from countries that are about to come up for Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which was viewed as a useful means by which to engage the defender in practical advocacy and ongoing collaboration. However, several external interlocutors questioned whether ISHR has a strategy for deciding on geographic priorities, including specifically with regard to which HRDs should be trained. A few felt that there was no such strategy, but should be one.

While ISHR is now focusing on categories of the most vulnerable HRDs, including LGBT defenders, ESCR defenders, and women HRDs, some wondered how geographic priorities would be set within this thematic framework, and questioned whether this might affect the organization's ability to develop deep networks and coalitions. One staff person noted that "it is

sometimes a big challenge to figure out how to engage with those who have been trained. It is especially easy to work with alumni who come from regions or countries where ISHR already has strategic objectives. In those cases, we really succeed to work with them and become strategic partners. But when they come from countries where we have no other work, we don't have the capacity to create partnerships.... If we have no strategic objective in that country, it is a big challenge to connect and support the HRD.... Now we are looking at women, LGBT persons, those HRDs who work on corporate accountability.... How will we follow-up? I worry that we don't have the capacity to engage with them at the national level."

Possible Areas for Improvement

The demands of training HRDs and providing support to former alumni of ISHR's training programs, while also trying to develop useful ways to engage alumni in ongoing advocacy, is a big and time-consuming challenge. Although HRDAP alumni are a reservoir of advocacy potential that ISHR can tap into as needed (such as in support of the SOGI resolution, the renewal of the Special Rapporteur on HRDs mandate, and others), some interlocutors noted that it was a significant challenge to fully exploit the potential of this alumni network. Several also questioned whether ISHR has a geographic (as opposed to thematic) strategy for prioritizing which HRDs would be selected for its training programs. One ISHR staff person also stressed the challenges associated with supporting and tapping into the potential of the growing number of HRDs who emerge from its training programs. The staff person observed, "In some cases, we really succeed to work with trainees and join with them as strategic partners. Some trainees come from regions or countries where we have strategic objectives. In those cases, it is fairly easy to connect them to broader work and to support their efforts.... But in other cases, when they come from areas where ISHR has no strategic objective, we don't have the capacity to follow up and create partnerships. Now we decide in terms of thematic priorities – women HRDs, LGBT activists, defenders working on ESC rights – but if one is from Azerbaijan, one from Syria, how do we follow up, and how do we engage them at the national level?"

Several interviewees remarked that ISHR could strengthen its capacity-building efforts by making sure that more trainings and training materials are available in relevant local languages. Although ISHR has conducted regional workshops in languages other than English and has made significant strides in translating training materials, HRDs long for more training in their native languages. For example, one HRD from Latin America commented, "It would be important to develop more training – including HRDAP sessions – in other languages. There was an ISHR training in Spanish in Mexico, but not in Geneva, so the trainees missed the opportunity to build personal contacts with UN special procedures.... For many people from my region, English is a barrier. Since Spanish is one of the UN languages, ISHR should consider holding workshops in Geneva with indigenous people and others who could benefit greatly from such an experience."

Several participants in the HRDAP also noted that the program was so intense that they did not have time to fully process all that was being taught and that they were so exhausted that they may not have taken advantage of all the opportunities that were offered. Other participants, however, noted that they were energized by the intensity of the program and the extent of the learning.

Goal 2: Make International and Regional Mechanisms More Accessible, Protective and Effective

As discussed above, through its trainings, as well as its strategic guidance and advocacy support to HRDs, ISHR has been effective in making UN mechanisms more accessible for national HRDs. Through its own advocacy, as well as its skillful coordination of its network of human rights NGOs, ISHR has also kept the HRDs' security and well-being high on the UN agenda. While the general environment for human rights is one of backtracking and sustained attacks, during the evaluation period, there were several important developments that serve to make international mechanisms more accessible, protective, and effective. The developments highlighted below are not meant to be a comprehensive list, but are those mentioned by multiple interviewees as examples of ISHR's effective interventions and concrete outcomes.

Appointment of UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI)

ISHR played a leading role in bringing about the June 2016 HRC resolution that created the position of Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). This resolution, and the November 2016 appointment of Vitit Muntarbhorn as the first ever mandate holder, was a direct response to civil society's calls for the UN to do more to address the violence and discrimination faced by LGBT people. In December 2016, when hostile governments introduced an amendment in the General Assembly that would have halted indefinitely the work of the recently appointment independent expert, ISHR coordinated an NGO response that successfully led to the amendment being defeated. 870 organizations from 157 countries signed an open letter calling on governments to ensure that the Independent Expert could continue his work.

Numerous interlocutors pointed to the "SOGI Resolution" as an indication of ISHR's effective leadership and influence. As one donor observed, "The SOGI Resolution and the appointment of an Independent Expert are examples of ISHR impact that really stand out for me. There was a big battle in the HRC and then in the General Assembly (GA). ISHR was one of the main organizations in Geneva that did the advocacy work and developed strategies and arguments. They do a good job and accomplish concrete results." Similarly, a Geneva-based diplomat noted, "ISHR had a huge role to play with the ultimate success of the SOGI resolution. They did incredible work to reach out to governments, provided them with arguments and the tools they needed to reach the right policy position. And, after the resolution was adopted, they did fantastic work to ensure that the Independent Expert wasn't prevented from continuing his

work. They reached out to friendly governments, as well as to alumni to generate pressure in support of the resolution. They used their convening power so well, to achieve the successful outcome....”

Greater Legal Protection for Defenders of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

In March 2016, the HRC adopted a resolution expressing concern for HRDs focused on Economic, Social and Cultural (ESC) rights. Building on this momentum, ISHR, together with the International Platform Against Impunity and the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GIESCR), conducted high-level advocacy, and coordinated the efforts of a coalition of over 300 organizations to call on the Committee on ESC Rights (CESCR) to respond to the growing number of attacks on ESCR defenders. Because of this coordinated advocacy, in October the CESCR issued the first-ever statement by a UN treaty body recognizing that States have a legal obligation under the Covenant on ESC Rights to ensure the safety and security of defenders working toward the realization of those rights.

Numerous external interlocutors underscored the important role that ISHR had played in the UN’s greater attention to the increasingly dangerous environment for ESCR defenders. As HRD stressed, “I see ISHR as having played a leading role that ultimately led to the recognition by the Council, as well as by the CESCR, of the dire situation for these defenders and that led ultimately to the adoption of important new standards on their protection.” While this legal recognition is still a long way from the actual protection of HRDs engaged in the defense of ESC rights, it is an important first step.

Appointment of High-ranking Official to Combat Reprisals against HRDs

On October 4, 2016, the Secretary-General of the UN appointed a high-ranking point-person within his office – Assistant Secretary General Andrew Gilmour – to combat reprisals against HRDs who are attempting to engage with the UN. ISHR had been instrumental in coordinating and leading an over-three-year advocacy effort to convince the UN to take stronger action against reprisals. ISHR had played a leading role in the development of and advocacy for the Resolution on Reprisals, which was adopted by the HRC in 2013. That resolution, which called for the establishment of a Reprisals Focal Point, was blocked by a vote of the General Assembly.

Numerous external interlocutors pointed to ISHR’s approach and persistence as having been significant factors that led to the ultimate appointment of the Reprisals point person. A UN representative observed, “ISHR’s work on reprisals was exemplary. They played a leading role among civil society actors in pushing for the Reprisals Resolution, and after it was blocked in the GA, they moved the debate forward, so that the Secretary General could ultimately appoint a person to deal with reprisals in the SG’s office.... They kept pushing and didn’t give up, even when the general sentiment was that the effort was not going anywhere. They were never dogmatic.... I think they can take a lot of the credit for the Secretary General’s ultimate

appointment of Andrew Gilmour to deal with reprisals.” Similarly, an international NGO representative commented, “ISHR is very good at keeping an issue on the table. It was their persistence and work prior to 2016 that ultimately led to the ‘Focal Point’ in the ASG’s office being appointed.... I think it is fair to say that it is in large part due to ISHR’s work that reprisals have been such a high priority issue.”

Greater Transparency in the UN NGO Committee

ISHR has spearheaded a sustained, multi-year campaign to raise awareness about the highly politicized conduct of the ECOSOC NGO Committee, which has responsibility for approving accreditation for NGOs. Instead of facilitating access to UN mechanisms, however, the Committee often obstructs NGO access, especially for HRDs from marginalized groups such as LGBT organizations or indigenous peoples.

Among its efforts to generate pressure for reform, in 2016 ISHR mobilized a coalition of 230 NGOs to advocate for reform of the NGO Committee and delivered the first ever statement in the HRC on the appalling practices of the NGO Committee and the need for reform. Ultimately, in April 2017, ECOSOC adopted a resolution to broadcast all open sessions of the NGO Committee, thereby ensuring greater transparency regarding the Committee’s working methods.

ISHR’s partners praised the organization’s persistence and strong leadership regarding the NGO Committee. One diplomat observed, “ISHR has been providing information and generating pressure within the UN on the failings of the NGO Committee for some time now. It is their work that has made it a crucial issue at this point.” Similarly, a New York-based diplomat commented, “ISHR has done a good job of highlighting the shortcomings of the NGO Committee.... They follow the Committee and are present for every part of every open session. They are well-informed and a good counterpart.... I think there is growing consternation among the diplomatic community regarding the NGO Committee and ISHR has played a leading role drawing attention to the problematic conduct of the Committee and the need for progressive member states to step up and become more active in the work and the critique of the Committee.”

Renewal of Mandate of Special Rapporteur on HRD

On March 23, 2017, the HRC adopted a resolution to extend the mandate of Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on HRDs for another 3 years. The resolution, which was introduced and negotiated by Norway, was adopted by consensus without amendment. The Council rejected hostile amendments introduced by States such as Russia and China. Although technically, this impact did not take place within the evaluation timeframe, numerous interviewees pointed to this important accomplishment having been achieved due to the significant investment of advocacy resources by ISHR during 2016.

ISHR is widely acknowledged to have played a critical role in the renewal of the Special Rapporteur's mandate. As one donor stated, "ISHR was a pivotal actor in making sure the Special Rapporteur's mandate was renewed. The mandate was under real threat from aggressive states. ISHR did a fabulous and creative job opposing those hostile voices and had great sense of timing to bring in a range of voices and reinforce their work with its own efforts." As noted elsewhere in this report, ISHR has earmarked funding from Norway to provide the Special Rapporteur with critical support for his work. As one Board member commented, "ISHR provides direct and indirect support for the SR. OHCHR has limited ability to support the Special Rapporteur due to resource constraints. ISHR has been strategically assisting the mandate to be the best and most effective."

Building Pressure on China

ISHR played a crucial role in mobilizing support for the first ever joint statement by governments at the HRC on the deteriorating human rights situation in China and the crackdown on HRDs. A Geneva-based diplomat Observed, "ISHR is ahead of the curve and really strategic in trying to build pressure within the UN on China. From my experience with them, they have been quite active on China and very on point. They are one of the only NGOs in Geneva trying to figure out how to respond effectively to this complex country problem." An ISHR staff member also stated, "We have worked to create a more sustained diplomatic pressure on China from diplomats based in Geneva. ISHR is a bridge between the Chinese human rights organizations based in the US, UK, or Hong Kong, who have deep country expertise, but no Geneva presence or understanding of how to work, with the Geneva-based human rights mechanisms."

Establishment of a Network of Multinational Corporations Committed to Protection of HRDs

ISHR has collaborated with the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) to enlist businesses as allies in the effort to protect civic space and protect human rights defenders. While it is too early for the network to have shown concrete impact, numerous interlocutors identified ISHR's engagement with businesses and its development of the network together with BHRRC as significant outcomes during the evaluation period.

Regional

ACHPRs Resolution 336 on Measures to Protect and Promote the Work of Women HRDs

In February 2016, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) adopted Resolution 336, which calls on states to protect and promote the rights of women human rights defenders (WHRDs). In April ISHR hosted an Interactive Dialogue with the ACHPR Special Rapporteur on HRDs on the margins of the 58th Session of the Commission to discuss how to

disseminate and advocate for implementation of the Special Rapporteur's report on the situation of WRDs in Africa. Several HRDs from West Africa spoke stressed how much they valued ISHR's role in supporting greater attention to the protection of women HRDs.

Less Effective Initiatives

Initiatives that were considered less effective included ISHR's work with the Women's Human Rights Defenders Coalition and the ISHR-led initiative on "Strengthening the Human Rights Council @ 10 years." It should be noted that these initiatives were identified by ISHR staff as less effective, not by external interlocutors.

Women's Human Rights Defenders

With regard to ISHR's work in 2016 on Women's Human Rights Defenders (WHRD), one staff person described it as "underwhelming." The staff person explained, "The WHRD Coalition, which is 12 years old, was instrumental in its initial work.... But that work has been largely successful, and now there is no collective sense of where to go next.... ISHR has been closely linked to the Coalition and now needs to define where we go." It was clear from the experience with the WHRD Coalition, that ISHR has networks that go well beyond those of the Coalition, and perhaps has a broader perspective on current strategic opportunities. Instead of relying too much on the Coalition and deferring to its leadership, ISHR needs to better define its own strategic objectives even while trying to closely align its work with that of a broader coalition.

Strengthening the Human Rights Council @ 10 years

In June 2016, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Human Rights Council, ISHR spearheaded a civil society coalition to develop a series of concrete steps and proposals to strengthen the impact of the Council's work and make it more accessible, effective and protective. In response to this initiative, a cross-regional group of 32 states pledged to implement one of the key recommendations of the initiative, which was to "strengthen the Council's preventative capacity and response to urgent situations."¹² External interlocutors viewed ISHR's engagement with Ireland, which led the coalition of states making this pledge, as evidence of the organization's influence among governments and diplomatic missions. However, ISHR evaluated this initiative as somewhat disappointing. ISHR had hoped the initiative would lead to a coordinated effort for comprehensive reform of the Council. However, as Lynch described the effort, "We saw the 10th anniversary as an opportunity for a set of comprehensive, but realistic reforms of the Council.... We made the assumption that a range of states would see the wisdom of our recommendations and would take the initiative. We did not bring together a core group of states to push for their implementation. That was a

¹² See ISHR Annual Report 2017, p. 7.

mistake. We should have brought a cross-regional group of states together to take the lead. As it turned out, very few of the recommendations were implemented.”

Goal 3: Advocate for National Implementation

Model National law on the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders

To ensure that the protections included in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders result in concrete improvements in the security and treatment of HRDs on the ground, ISHR developed a Model National Law on the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Model Law), which has become a cornerstone of its efforts to translate international protections into impact at the national level.

The Model law initiative came out of collaboration between ISHR and HRDs in Côte d'Ivoire who joined forces in a multi-year advocacy campaign to improve and strengthen Côte d'Ivoire's 2014 law on the protection of HRDs, the first such law in Africa.¹³ Ivorian civil society then called on the government to adopt a decree setting out the mechanisms it would establish to implement the law. ISHR worked in close consultation and collaboration with the coalition of Ivorian HRDs to support these efforts. As a result of ISHR's support of its partners on the ground, the law was ultimately strengthened to grant specific recognition of women human rights defenders. The implementation decree was adopted in February 2017.

The Ivorian experience convinced ISHR that a Model Law could be a useful tool in bringing about implementation of the UN Declaration on HRDs, which would set out best practices for the protection of HRDs and help build momentum among civil society actors. The Model Law was developed in consultation with over 500 HRDs from all over the world, and adopted in June 2016 by 29 international experts and jurists. ISHR launched the Model Law at high-level events at the Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2016 and at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) in Banjul, The Gambia in October 2016.

Among those interviewed for this evaluation, a couple of individuals -- primarily international INGO representatives -- indicated that they had been initially skeptical of the Model Law initiative as another standard-setting exercise that would not translate into on-the-ground improvements. As one INGO representative stated, “I was skeptical when I first heard about the Model Law project. I thought that those countries that want a good law will get it, and those who don't, won't be convinced by a model. But ... experience has convinced me that ISHR was right. They are generating a lot of debate, and having a Model Law actually does seem to be pushing some countries that might not have made the effort on their own.” Similarly, another INGO representative commented, “On the Model Law, I have to admit that I was a sceptic and didn't think it was worth the investment. But they are really making an impact. It is pretty impressive.” Similarly, a donor commented, “The true measure of [the Model Law's] value will be where and how it is adopted at the national level and whether it is

¹³ ISHR had also played an instrumental role in developing the HRD law in Cote d'Ivoire.

implemented.... But I have already seen how it is being used at the national level, and it is a terrific contribution to taking the standards to the national level.”

HRDs were, by contrast, unanimously positive about the value of having a Model Law on Protection of HRDs, which they see as giving more weight to their work, helping them to carry out advocacy with their own governments, and to hold their governments to account for their obligations under international law. As one defender underscored, “In our countries [in Central America], we need to ensure that national governments apply standards for the protection of human rights defenders properly. But it is not enough to simply hand them the international standards, which are very general and not very like our national standards. Without a model law, governments are less likely to apply the most protective standard, and many judges will not use international standards. The Model Law makes our work and approach much stronger now.” An African defender also stressed that “[ISHR] has provided us with a concrete framework to use in our efforts to gain greater legal recognition and protection for our human rights work. We have learned greatly from their experience and the guidance and support they have offered us in the Model Law process.”

Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders commented on ISHR’s Model Law initiative: “This process has a great deal of momentum, and is generating progress in many countries. I recently learned that members of parliament in the DRC were initially skeptical about a national law for the protection of HRDs. But after national HRDs presented ISHR’s Model Law, members of parliament said they found the Model Law useful and would use it as a tool for modifying their laws. I was also told recently by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Mongolia that they are using ISHR’s model law. People from Mali, Burkina Faso, and many other countries are using the Model Law as a tool to strengthen their own efforts at the national level. ISHR has helped change the debate at the national level.”

The Model Law initiative is being carried out in a context of growing restrictions on HRDs and "closing space" for civil society more broadly. However, at the same time, in parts of Africa, there are governments engaged in or beginning to consider drafting and adopting HRD protection laws, and they are relying on ISHR’s Model Law. These countries include: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, among others. During 2016, ISHR collaborated intensively with the Coalition Malienne des Defenseurs des Droits Humains (COMADDH) to prepare a draft National Law on Human Rights Defenders, which was adopted by the government of Mali on January 4, 2017, and is now being considered by the Malian National Assembly. A Malian HRD described ISHR’s role: “[T]he work done by the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) has had a real impact on the protection of human rights defenders in Mali. In fact, ISHR’s support has made it possible to validate the bill about human rights defenders and to guarantee its solemn submission to the Minister of Justice. This makes Mali the 2nd African country to adopt, at the Council of Ministers level, a bill to protect human rights defenders. Although this bill has not been submitted to a vote, it has allowed the different parties to become aware of the role played by defenders in society.”

The Model Law initiative is an important development that provides HRDs with a concrete tool to advocate for better protection from their governments and provides guidance for governments in the best practices for developing legal standards on the protection of defenders. There was unanimous agreement among interviewees that this process is having a direct impact on the ground, and that it is building momentum that will continue to bear fruit in the months ahead. The Model Law project was praised by almost all interlocutors and identified as one of ISHR's most important accomplishments during the evaluation period. For example, an international NGO partner commented, "ISHR's initiative on the Model Law really stands out as a particularly important effort and shows that they are always thinking about how best to translate international standards into national implementation and protection.... The Model Law gives human rights defenders a tool for campaigning and conducting advocacy with their national authorities. By consulting with so many HRDs, they have helped build momentum for implementation of the standards in the UN Declaration on HRDs."

Relevance

There was virtually unanimous agreement among interlocutors that ISHR's strategy and program are relevant to the needs of human rights defenders. As discussed in detail above, human rights defenders stressed that the access, support, and accompanied advocacy that ISHR provides is important to their work and makes their work more effective. In some cases, it allows activists to add an international advocacy strategy to their work, which they may not have considered before. In other cases, it allows them to improve their advocacy strategy directed at international mechanisms. ISHR initiatives, such as the Model Law, were considered of direct relevance and a significant contribution to the work of HRDs in their home countries. As noted above, HRDs were adamant that the Model Law gives their work greater credibility and visibility and provides them a concrete platform for engaging on protection issues with their government. The extent to which HRDs value ISHR's advocacy support and strategic partnership cannot be overstated. International NGO partners also consider ISHR's programs relevant and timely. For example, one such partner stated, "Their work, their approach, is very good and very relevant. In fact, they are probably needed more today than ever before, and there is a lot of work to do! Although there are more NGOs than was the case 20 years ago, there are more sustained and open attacks on HRDs and human rights mechanisms, including within the UN itself. So, I think that ISHR's niche is more relevant than ever, and very important."

ISHR's trainings, including the HRDAP and regional capacity-building workshops, were considered highly relevant to the work of HRDs. As described in detail above, HRDs value the knowledge and practical experience they acquire, as well as the contacts they make during ISHR training events. What is perhaps more important, the training process gives HRDs more confidence to engage with policymakers, both in the UN and with their own governments. Finally, although perhaps not an explicit goal of ISHR's training, interviewees underscored that the HRDAP was relevant to their psychological needs as well, providing many intangible benefits. National human rights defenders stressed, for example, that they find the support from ISHR especially relevant in linking them to the broader human rights movement, helping

them to feel that they are no longer isolated, and giving them renewed energy and hope for their continued work. As one defender from Latin America stated, “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.” An international representative also underscored, “For national HRDs who are on the front lines in crisis situations, going to Geneva is damn useful. It gives them a chance to regain energy and hope, and perhaps take time for a little self-care.... Never underestimate the value of having a chance to exhale!”

Efficiency

When asked about the efficiency with which ISHR carries out its work – understood as the extent to which outputs were achieved with the lowest possible use of resources/inputs—external interlocutors consider ISHR as very efficient and were “amazed” and “astonished” by how much the organization accomplishes with so little. As one Geneva-based diplomat stated, “I am always shocked at how small they are, because they are everywhere. They use small resources to have a huge impact. They create a big bang for the buck.” Similarly, a representative of an international organization observed, “ISHR punches well above its weight. They accomplish a lot with a very small team.” Finally, a diplomat observed, “ISHR is one of 2 NGOs that is very effective in the UN.... They both have impact, but one organization has hundreds of staff, and ISHR has a hand full. They do a lot with their limited resources.”

When asked whether there was anything they could point to that ISHR should not do or do less of (from an efficiency point of view), most interviewees shared the view that there was nothing ISHR could do to become more efficient and/or that they did not want to see ISHR stop any of its current work. However, a few external interlocutors did question whether ISHR might take on too much, precisely because of the concern for burn-out of its small staff. As one international NGO partner observed, “They take on so much. It is all very useful from my perspective. The only question is whether they could be more efficient if they did not follow so many different processes.” A staff person also stated, “I don’t see any steps we can take that would result any huge efficiency gains, but we should always be careful to think about the opportunities we do take up. The process of streamlining our focus on a few big-ticket resolutions is important. I think we were very disciplined in 2016.”

A couple of interviewees also questioned whether products such as the Human Rights Monitor were the best use of its limited resources. For example, a UN representative stated, “The Human Rights Monitor is a useful tool, but I wonder if the investment is worth the effort.... I would prioritize quicker and shorter pieces, instead of big publications and resource-intensive products.” Similarly, a diplomat commented, “The Human Rights Monitor may be widely read in HRD circles, but I am curious to know if it really is a good use of their time and resources.” It should be noted, however, that most interviewees said they read the Human Rights Monitor regularly and find it very useful.

Staff underscored that efficiency is always on their radar-screen and something that is an important value within the organization. A number of steps were taken during the evaluation

period to improve efficiency, including adopting an online platform – Smartsheet – to allow management and program directors to track progress toward project completion and financial expenditures (see discussion below). However, staff were concerned about placing too much emphasis on efficiency. Lynch, for example, noted that “We are always trying to become more efficient, and Smartsheet has enhanced our efficiency.... But I am concerned that we not become so efficient that we are working unsustainably. We cannot indefinitely do more and more with relatively few resources. People have worked harder and harder and been stretched further and further. But we risk staff burn-out. I place great importance on efficiency, but not by simply pushing people to the point of exhaustion. At times, we have not been far from that point.”

One staff person also expressed concern that efficiency not be viewed as ISHR’s most important value and that an over-emphasis on efficiency might be at the expense of other organizational values such as collaboration and consultation. The staff person stated, “ISHR operates as part of a larger global network.... We are purposefully consultative and collaborative. And that process is important. It is not enough to tick the box on consultation. The affected communities must have ownership. Our work is not just about achieving outcomes, but about national-level change. I do not believe in ISHR going it alone, although that might be more efficient. Efficiency is one goal, but the process and the national-level buy-in are more important. Without these, the best standards will never be implemented.”

Sustainability

There was general agreement among external interlocutors that the positive outcomes and impact ISHR has helped bring about are, in large part, sustainable. Especially ISHR’s trainings and capacity-building initiatives, as well as its accompanied advocacy and support for HRD networking, fundamentally change the capacity of human rights defenders to engage with international and regional mechanisms. As previously noted, human rights defenders also reported that ISHR’s capacity-building efforts have changed the confidence with which they approach their own governments, and the credibility with which their work is viewed. As one HRD stressed, “There is no going back on the skills we have gained and the growth of our capacity. Maybe it is hard to prove or measure, but we see opportunities we did not see before, and this will have an impact on our work now and in the future.”

Although ISHR’s support and strategic guidance in building advocacy plans to press for national human rights protection laws (based on the Model Law) are viewed as extremely important to the work of national coalitions, there was also a general agreement that the Model Law provides a tool that has long-term and lasting impact on human rights defenders’ ability to translate international standards into national protection mechanisms. When asked about the sustainability of ISHR’s work, an international partner responded, “The Model Law is the best example... It is having unanticipated impact on the ground... and this is a tool for national HRDs to use for the long-term. Everyone wants ISHR’s support, but HRDs can and will take the lead on using the Model Law with or without ISHR. I am not saying ISHR is not needed, it definitely is!

But ISHR has put in place a tool that will be taken up and used by national actors. This impact is very sustainable.”

ISHR has also created new mechanisms (independent expert on SOGI, Reprisals focal point etc.), as well as helped strengthen standards (for example, by the CESCR) that were perceived to be useful both now and for the foreseeable future. These mechanisms will need to be defended and the standards will require ongoing effort to implement, but ISHR has achieved outcomes that will have sustainable impact.

Several interlocutors considered the question of sustainability as directly related to ISHR’s funding and fundraising capacity. For example, one external interlocutor stressed that “Given the way human rights funding is going, ISHR has to spend more and more time on fundraising. At the moment, it does not have enough capacity to fundraise so that it can grow.” Similarly, another interviewee noted, “Fundraising for a no-growth budget takes ISHR more and more time. Each year it is harder. It needs support to allow it to grow and not be on life support.” ISHR currently has one fundraiser working at 75% with primary responsibility for raising approximately 3 million Swiss Francs per year and reporting to 25 State and institutional donors. Additional fundraising capacity and support could contribute to the sustainability of the organization and enhance its ability to scale up its relevant, effective and high-impact programs.

PLANNING, MONITORING, EVALUATION and LEARNING SYSTEMS

Planning

ISHR has a developed planning system, which includes strategic planning, as well as annual activity planning, based on 4-year frameworks. The relevant framework for the period covered by this evaluation was 2013-2016. A new strategic plan and framework covering the period 2017-2020 went into effect earlier this year. According to ISHR staff, “activities are planned and reviewed internally at least bi-annually as well as on the occasions of the bi-annual Board meetings.”¹⁴

Long-time staff and Board members reported that ISHR has made significant strides in recent years in developing the planning framework, which was seen as a vast improvement over earlier efforts. One significant change to ISHR’s program planning and oversight system was introduction of the online platform Smartsheet in late 2015/early 2016. As will be discussed below, Smartsheet provides a centralized oversight mechanism of all activities that ISHR has planned for a given timeframe. As one staff person described the system: “Smartsheet is a centralized planning tool of everything that ISHR has going on. Because program activities have

¹⁴ Communication from Vincent Ploton, “A brief intro/overview to ISHR’s PMEL & risk management,” April 10, 2017.

become increasingly complex in recent years, this system provides a central place where you can get an overview of all activities.”

ISHR takes program planning very seriously and devotes significant organizational time and resources to the planning portion of its PMEL efforts. Over all, ISHR has put in place a good and thorough planning system for an organization of its size. There were, however, some concerns or gaps in the current system that emerged during discussions with staff and Board members, which might benefit from further attention.

Is Smartsheet Too Complex?

A good planning system (as well as the monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms) should strike a careful balance, striving for an appropriate level of detail without becoming so burdensome that the system is not implemented. Although ISHR’s planning system captures an appropriate level of detail, and the organization has, in fact, recently developed additional indicators for its intervention types, some staff questioned whether the process was too complex and involved too many indicators. As one program manager observed, “Our current planning process is adequate, but it could be optimized and improved.... We have a biannual, all-staff meeting where we map out our longer-term objectives and set out the details in Smartsheet. But the process is too complex. We are too ambitious about the numbers of indicators we seek to capture in the process.... We should simplify the process to capture a few of the most important indicators.” The staff person continued, “We think Smartsheet captures all significant programmatic developments, but does it really? Smartsheet is not updated thoroughly and not updated quickly enough. The information is therefore not integrated into our work flows.”

Smartsheet appears to be a useful tool for finance and development staff, as well as for some aspects of planning. As already mentioned above, it is a useful central mechanism for viewing progress toward project completion, fulfillment of grant obligations, and the corresponding expenditures. As one Finance staff person commented, “From the finance perspective, I think that Smartsheet proved to be very useful because all staff have access to the platform, a global view on approved grants, earmarked budgets and other relevant operational collaboration.” Finance staff also consider Smartsheet useful in terms of monitoring expenditures closely and thereby mitigating financial risk.

Programmatic staff, however, tended to view Smartsheet as very time-consuming, and they were doubtful of the value. Several staff reported that they don’t complete all the reporting required by Smartsheet. For example, one staff person commented, “I fill out 50-70% of the Smartsheet. It is very time-consuming, and there is no consequence for not doing it.... It is just not a priority to fill out the additional 10 columns.” Similarly, another third staff person stated, “I only look at Smartsheet when I am told I have to. I find them more cumbersome than helpful....” One Finance staff person agreed, commenting, “I had to remind staff to fill in relevant information. About 10-15% of staff don’t take it seriously.”

Some staff thought that, because the system is complex, further training might be helpful. As one staff person commented, “We need greater guidance on how to use [Smartsheet] effectively.... I think the value of whatever programme we may have lies in effective training and commitment across the organization to use it.”

As noted above, the evaluator considers ISHR’s current planning system to be appropriately thorough (with a very good set of indicators) given the size of the organization and the nature of the programs. However, the system is not being fully used by staff – being ignored or only used partially – which may be an indication that it is overly burdensome and/or that management has not underscored that its effective implementation is an institutional priority and a staff obligation.

As of this writing, ISHR had only been using the Smartsheet system for a little over a year, so some of the concerns may be related to staff members needing to adjust to the demands of the new system and/or staff needing additional support and training. It would be worthwhile to monitor the extent to which staff are putting information in Smartsheet in a timely manner and finding it a useful tool. In this respect, there may be significant differences in perspective between Program staff and Finance/Development staff. If program staff continue to find it a burden and of little value to their work, it may be worth considering whether the information most important to the organization can be captured with fewer key indicators.

[Anticipating Staff Time Requirements/Overcommitting](#)

Some ISHR staff expressed concern that the current planning process does not result in a realistic assessment of how much staff time is required for each activity, resulting in an annual plan in which staff have overcommitted themselves. As one staff person stated, “We need to get better at identifying what we want to achieve and realistically assessing what is required.” Similarly, another staff person stressed, “We do a good job at activity planning, but it is not effectively used. We do not have a mechanism to identify when we are overcommitting staff and creating potential conflicts. The grant is written, but we don’t realistically identify staff obligations over time. Each individually created Smartsheet may create overlapping obligations that add up to more than 100% of a single staff person’s time.” Similarly, another staff person observed, “One problem we have with Smartsheet is that we’ve used it for planning purposes – including rough estimates of the time we’ve committed ourselves to – and then promptly ignored the fact we can see that we have some people down for up to 150% of their time.”

Lynch acknowledged that “Smartsheet is only useful to a degree, and only if used effectively, to estimate staff time.” He continued, “By far the most effective way to determine if staff are overcommitting themselves is through face-to-face management, with the line manager being available to discuss timeframes and proactively inquiring from time to time....” While line managers surely have an important role to play in checking on staff workloads and, where needed, carrying out triage, staff are indicating that the organization sometimes starts the year with “planned” over-commitment. It is not clear that this is a problem of ISHR’s planning mechanisms, as opposed to its programmatic ambitions, at the very least, it would be useful to

institute a practice of reviewing annual plans for obvious over-commitment or unrealistic time estimates. (See discussion below re planning for unplanned work).

Staff were also concerned that the planning process does not adequately anticipate the demands for input from staff other than those with direct programmatic responsibility. While the planning process is able to anticipate somewhat the time commitments for each staff person assigned to a specific project or program area, it does not appear to anticipate sufficiently the extent to which staff from other programs, as well as administrative, finance, and communications staff, may also need to contribute to specific initiatives. As one staff person reported, “There is very little capacity within the organization when it comes to planning. I focus most of my efforts on working with external partners and building relationships. I make sure to arrange time for work with partners. But I do not do enough to ensure that others in the organization have a clear role. Operations, Finance, and Communications staff don’t necessarily know what amount of their time will be needed to work on any given project.” Another staff member suggested that the organization needs to review the work of “foundation/support” staff and determine “what we need from them and what we can expect from them.” Finally, a staff person observed, “We have a positive culture in the organization of having staff define their own brief. But people work on and plan their projects without the slightest bit of space for reactive work or to contribute to the work of others. Things occur [in the UN] and there is a need to react both to crises and to opportunities.... But there is also an autonomous streak and a sense that each person has his or her distinct brief for which only he/she is responsible.”

Anticipating precisely how much staff time is required for an initiative is an inherently difficult challenge for any human rights organization, especially one engaged simultaneously in multiple advocacy initiatives. It is also an enormous challenge to predict realistically how much staff time will be needed for advocacy initiatives that are dependent on many variables outside the organization’s control. ISHR’s ability to make more realistic calculations is complicated further by a well-intentioned desire by staff to accomplish more and more. Under such circumstances, the process will always be imperfect. Nevertheless, there are real costs associated with failing to estimate staff commitments more accurately. There is, of course, a risk that programmatic obligations will not be fulfilled in a timely manner. Instead, staff may simply work more and harder to ensure that they fulfill the organization’s obligations, no matter how overstretched they may be. This raises several concerns, including potential staff burn-out, as well as a lack of sufficient space and time for reflection and learning.

Planning for Reflection, Emergencies and Opportunities

As will be discussed more below, ISHR staff are serious about monitoring and evaluating their impact and continually improving their work. However, several staff acknowledged that there is not sufficient time built in to reflect on their work and think creatively about how best to incorporate lessons learned into future initiatives. Staff were unanimously enthusiastic about the July 2016 staff retreat and felt that the retreat had been a very valuable opportunity for reflection. As one staff person stressed, “The July staff retreat was truly amazing. It was the most useful retreat I have ever been to.... We really took time to reflect on our work, and it was

very outcome oriented. All staff have been craving time and space to reflect.” Because of the positive response to the retreat, a decision was made to hold an annual retreat. However, this will depend on available funding.

What is more, some staff suggested that they do not have adequate time to respond effectively to emergencies or opportunities, while still fulfilling all work commitments included in the annual plan. As one staff person noted, “We plan way too much.... To be effective, we need to keep space for emergencies, especially related to our core work, which is HRDs.” Lynch stressed that “It is vital that human rights organizations have the capacity to plan for unplanned work, and that there is residual capacity to respond to new and emerging issues and opportunities....” Lynch pointed out, however, that “our ability to take up new exploratory areas is substantially constrained by our donors. In every instance in which we tried to leave space open (unplanned) in the proposal to respond to opportunities and threats, it was cut by the funder. They simply will not fund unplanned work.”

While the retreat went a long way toward responding to staff members’ longing for time to reflect on their work, more needs to be done to incorporate space for reflection throughout the year. Planning less in order to free up time for more responsive work would be beneficial for ISHR’s programmatic planning and ability to continue to develop cutting-edge initiatives without stretching its staff to the breaking point. Many of ISHR’s donors have a long-term and trusted partnership with the organization. In such circumstances, donors should be willing to support unplanned work that is intended to be responsive to emergencies and/or significant opportunities. ISHR’s funders should fund an annual staff retreat to ensure that this kind of time for staff reflection and learning can take place.

Monitoring and Evaluation

ISHR has a strong culture of monitoring and evaluation. For key programs such as HRDAP or its advocacy at the Human Rights Council, ISHR conducts internal assessments of impact. With regard to HRDAP, ISHR routinely conducts pre- and post-training questionnaires, as well as surveys of graduates at regular intervals. As discussed in more detail below, the feedback from participants is then incorporated into planning and preparations for the next training. More generally, ISHR staff report that its “work is reviewed both internally and externally, both randomly and at regular lapses.... Internal reviews are formally undertaken at least once per year by our Board, as well as in donor reports. We also often undertake specific evaluations such as an assessment of our communications recently.”¹⁵

As noted above, ISHR adopted the Smartsheet program to gain better oversight of its programmatic activities and expenditures, and it appears to be a useful tool for project management and for monitoring progress toward completion of grant commitments. Although most staff also spoke of Smartsheet as the primary tool for the organization’s monitoring and evaluation, it became clear over the course of the evaluation that Smartsheet is not well-suited, at least not as currently used, for monitoring and evaluation of the impact achieved from ISHR’s

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 1-2.

activities. As discussed in the above section on Planning, some staff find Smartsheet too complicated and burdensome, and fail to put in all required information. As one Finance staff person commented, “As of April, all the programme sheets were filled out and about ½ of the information was included. The activities, timing, and purpose had been put into Smartsheet, but staff are a little lazy about putting in information on monitoring, and evaluation.”

ISHR has numerous other tools and mechanisms, however, that combine with Smartsheet to form a strong impact assessment/evaluation system. A key component of the internal and ongoing monitoring and evaluation system is the Director’s Report to the ISHR Board at its bi-annual meetings. The report, which is linked to the Strategic Framework, covers key activities and achievements. Board members reported that they typically spend about half a day reviewing and discussing the content of the Director’s Report with the Director and relevant staff. Board members stressed that the Board takes seriously its responsibility to evaluate and assess the impact and achievements of the program and that their in-depth programmatic discussions are based on honest assessments by staff of what is working and what is less successful. As one Board member stated, “Staff do not try to put on a show for the Board. I always have the impression that they are honestly evaluating their own work and very open to the questions and assessments of others.”

Over the course of 2016, ISHR also developed “a comprehensive suite of 5-6 indicators” for each of its 5 Intervention types, including a range of measures and means of verification, including, among other things, the demand for ISHR services, completion of pre- and post-training questionnaires, adoption of international and regional resolutions, longitudinal surveys of beneficiaries regarding achievement of advocacy objectives, etc. (See Appendix E) These indicators have been integrated into Smartsheet. While these were not fully in place throughout the evaluation period, they point to an ongoing effort to manage, monitor and measure project implementation and impact. Many of these indicators are excellent. The indicators and means of measurement associated with Intervention Type 2 (Policy research, development, lobbying and advocacy) and with Intervention Type 4 (Strategic advocacy, communications and litigation at the international and regional levels) are especially interesting because they compare ISHR’s recommendations to the language that is ultimately included in resolutions, statements and government positions. These indicators are strong and likely to provide very useful insights for its future work.

The indicators related to Intervention Type 1 (Consultation, training, capacity building, advocacy accompaniment and strategic partnering) provide useful ways of measuring interest in the program both before and after the training, but only one indicator looks at the actual impact of the training on the HRDs future work, and it is a quantitative measurement. Indicator 3 looks at the “percentage of trainees who engage further with UN regional mechanisms or relevant actors within a year of training,” with the source of this information coming from a one year follow-up evaluation. It would be useful to add at least one indicator to Intervention Type 1 that compares the advocacy recommendations of the HRDAP alumni to the recommendation, resolution or position ultimately adopted. While this would likely be too complicated on a large scale, it should be possible to ask in the evaluation for details on such policy changes that could then be confirmed.

In general, it would be useful to consider ways to add evaluation of HRDAP's impact over a period longer than one year. It would also be important to consider ways to supplement the data sources so that impact can be evaluated from sources in addition to the self-evaluation by the HRD. Because it is ultimately important to measure the outcomes that ISHR's efforts are achieving on the ground, it would be important periodically to measure and document changes that have occurred (and may have been brought about in part by the efforts of ISHR and its partners), such as changes in HRDAP alumni's access to and influence with their governments, more effective and successful advocacy initiatives etc. These are not easy to measure, but important information for future efforts would be garnered from occasional field evaluations, that include a range of methods such as case studies and focus group interviews to supplement the other evaluation tools being used. Such evaluations are time-consuming and costly, so it may not be possible to incorporate them into the regular monitoring and evaluation work of the organization. However, incorporating in-field evaluations on an occasional basis is likely to provide enormously useful information related to the specific question of national level impact.

Learning

There was widespread agreement among external interlocutors, as well as Board and staff, that ISHR is "constantly trying to learn from past experiences how to improve its work." As one Board member underscored, "ISHR is very strategic and always adapting. It is not static, rigid, but always looking at what factors influence its success or contributed to failure and making the necessary changes to incorporate that learning into future programming." Similarly, another Board member stated, "I always get the sense that there is a learning culture, with everyone open to innovation and to new ideas.... Management is very open and signals to staff that it is receptive to new tools"

As discussed above, ISHR routinely evaluates its work, and this is particularly true regarding its HRDAP training. Surveys are conducted at regular intervals during and after the training. The findings are discussed in a post-HRDAP evaluation meeting and are incorporated into planning for the next year's training, creating a complete feedback loop. Similarly, the organization regularly assesses its advocacy work and impact after each session of the Human Rights Council.

ISHR has good evaluation and learning practices. Without a designated staff person responsible for evaluation and learning or significant other resources, it has been able to incorporate evaluation and learning into the organization's day-to-day operations. There is a sense that staff and Board are genuinely committed to evaluation for purposes of learning, but staff clearly long for more opportunities to reflect on their work and share learning. For ISHR, it seems that the greatest obstacle to effective learning is sufficient time, and with the exception of HRDAP and HRC assessments, several staff suggested that much of ISHR's reflection of its work "is focused very much on the end of the year appraisals."

ISHR has a standing item on institutional learning at its bi-monthly staff meeting, which is a good way to incorporate learning into its work without creating complicated or time-consuming

new mechanisms. However, some staff suggested that the meeting is mainly for “coordination purposes” and not functioning very well as a time for learning. As one staff person commented, “The standing item on the staff meeting agenda is a good start – it’s informal but good for that reason (it’s not another ‘requirement’ to fill out a form), but it isn’t really used.” The staff person suggested that at “each staff meeting a different staff member is encouraged to be constructively critical of a piece of work they have done....”

ISHR’s evaluation and learning systems could also be improved by strengthening its knowledge management. Because of its relatively small size, staff members are, for the most part, able to learn from each other in relatively informal ways. As noted above, lessons learned from monitoring and evaluation processes are shared in post-advocacy or post-training discussions, in informal conversations among staff, and at least theoretically during bi-monthly staff meetings. However, that learning is not documented or captured in any systematic way. As one staff person described, “The evaluation and learning mechanisms are fairly ad hoc within the organization. When there is a success, it is shared informally among staff, but the learning is not captured anywhere centrally.” Similarly, another staff person commented, “We don’t do a very good job on anything related to knowledge management.”

There was some disagreement among interviewees as to whether it would be worthwhile to document lessons learned in a more systematic way. One staff person, for example, stated that “Most of our activities involve human capital. With 15 staff, we don’t need to document learning. It happens naturally among staff.” Similarly, one Board member commented, “Given the nature and size of the organization, and the fact that it is very horizontal in structure, I think there is sufficient documentation of learning.”

The suggestion that ISHR does not need to improve its knowledge management systems because of the organization’s size and structure assumes that ISHR will always stay the way it is today. However, the organization is likely to change over time; staff are likely to leave and be replaced by others, and people forget. ISHR would likely benefit from a more systematic effort to document and collate information that emerges from staff meeting discussions, HRDAP evaluations, annual retreats, and other learning discussions so that its most important lessons can be shared, for example, with staff who are absent at the time of the learning discussion or more broadly across the organization. What is more, such an effort would preserve institutional memory and help mitigate the risk associated with the departure of experienced staff. * * *

The fact that ISHR’s staff members are stretched so thin is one of the greatest impediments to further improvements in the organization’s PMEL systems and perhaps to the implementation of some of the recommendations included in this report. As noted previously, several external interlocutors expressed both admiration and concern for how much staff do with so few resources (including human resources). As one external interviewee observed, “I admire them [ISHR staff] very much and all they accomplish, but I do wonder how much more can be asked of them. I work closely with [ISHR staff members], and they are always pulled in a hundred different directions. It is hard to imagine that anything could be added to their workload, given how overstretched they are.” Under such circumstances, increased logistical support for

program managers in the implementation of ISHR activities is a prerequisite for creating the capacity for those managers to devote more time to strategy, planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning, which would optimally leverage their experience and expertise.

RISK MITIGATION

The evaluation also looked at the steps ISHR takes to mitigate various forms of risk inherent to its work. These include staff attrition, political risks, digital risk, risk of reprisals, and financial risk. As ISHR noted, “The risks faced by ISHR, our partners and beneficiaries are diverse and often far-reaching, meaning that managing some of these risks is in some cases entirely beyond our reach.”¹⁶ This section looks briefly at ISHR’s risk strategies and the extent to which there are strategies within its control that may help reduce these risks.

Programmatic Risk/Proposal-specific risks

In its proposal to the Norwegian MFA, ISHR identified several risks that could affect the successful achievement of its project goals, including reprisals against HRDs, attrition of senior staff, and political risks associated both with its field activities and its work in the UN.

Risk of Reprisals

With regard to the risk of reprisals, ISHR has a number of important mitigation strategies in place, including several preventative measures. In the evaluation period, it developed security policies intended to mitigate risk both to staff and HRDs, and has taken the important step of providing online access to training and other materials (through Chinese social media, for example) to mitigate risk to HRDs in highly sensitive situations. It has a response process “involving a number of relevant government stakeholders as well as the UN,” which ensures quick action when a reprisal occurs or is threatened, and a designated reprisals focal point – Tess McEvoy – who is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the organization’s advocacy response to reprisals.

The factors that contribute to reprisals are largely out of ISHR’s control, but staff are conscious of the potential risks to HRDAP participants and other partners, and focused on avoiding risk wherever possible. They are also very conscientious about making sure that any person invited to Geneva, for example to participate in the HRC, is fully aware of the potential risks involved. There is no doubt that staff are committed to the safety and security of their partners, but staff may not always have the expertise or information they need. While individual staff may deal with risk to partners in a thorough and systematic way, the organizational response has been somewhat ad hoc. For example, staff reported that there is no standardized risk assessment protocol. As will be discussed below, there may be a gap both in terms of mitigation strategies for staff security and that of partners.

¹⁶ Staff e-mail, April 10, 2017.

Staff Attrition

With regard to staff attrition, ISHR appears to be quite successful in mitigating this risk. There was no change in the number of staff during the timeframe covered by this evaluation.¹⁷ Two staff members – Michael Ineichen and Clement Voule – both celebrated 10 years with ISHR during the evaluation period. Staff, Board, and external interlocutors all reported that ISHR has “excellent staff morale” and “a strong and positive working environment.” As one interviewee stressed, “ISHR invests in its staff. They are so talented they could go anywhere and earn much more. But they choose to stay because it is a vocation for them, and they really like their jobs. That says a lot about the organizational culture and environment.”

In addition to the deployment of staff to cover positions that were open (such as Tess McEvoy being seconded to New York to cover for Madeline Sinclair’s maternity leave) and the speedy recruitment for open positions, ISHR management conveyed its concern for staff well-being through several additional steps that could also be viewed as mitigation strategies. For example, during the evaluation timeframe, it reviewed and revised Human Resource policies related to remuneration and benefits, flexible work, equal opportunity etc. It also asked staff, as part of their performance appraisals, to provide information on their sense of safety and well-being. Although staff indicated they feel the organization is providing a workspace that safeguards staff members’ “physical, psychological and digital safety and welfare,”¹⁸ the discussion led to the development of several policies on staff security (see below). The Director is committed to maintaining high staff morale and has taken several steps during the review period that were intended to further enhance staff well-being. In addition, he is thoughtful about the risks associated with the potential departure of senior staff and stressed, among other things, that “It is important to ensure that personal contacts and expertise are institutionalized and to build up other staff to work with and learn from the most senior people in the organization.”

Although ISHR has been very successful in retaining staff, some of the concerns discussed earlier regarding staff being overworked and overstretched may ultimately be risk factors for the organization. Further mitigation steps, including improved planning mechanisms to anticipate staff demands, should be taken to address this concern. Similarly, recommendations contained in this report related to knowledge management are also relevant to risk mitigation should there be staff attrition.

Political Risks

There are a number of political risks associated with ISHR’s core work, including most notably the erosion of the influence of the Human Rights Council and HRDs access to the Council and other mechanisms. This is especially true given that the new President is perceived as weak on

¹⁷ Total staff headcount was reported as “stable” at 14.6 in the Director’s Report for period 1.4.2016 to 31.10.2016. Similarly, total staff headcount was reported as “stable” at 14.6 in the Director’s Report for period 1.11.2016 to 30.04.2017.

¹⁸ Director’s Report for period 1.11.2016 to 30.04.2017.

priority concerns such as reprisals and the United States government could abandon its leadership role in the Council or withdraw altogether. ISHR is working on multiple levels to mitigate these risks, including by collaborating with a broader coalition of governments to engage with the Council and support its work, by engaging with the new UN Secretary General and the newly appointed point person on reprisals in the SG's office, and by continuing to press for reform of the ECOSOC NGO Committee that functions as an obstacle to NGO access. The appointment of ASG Andrew Gilmour, which is discussed elsewhere in this report, as well as numerous other initiatives that are part of ISHR's core program, are important efforts to mitigate political risk. The evaluator is not able to comment on whether there are additional and/or other strategies that would be realistically available to mitigate risks.

In addition, ISHR's proposal to the Norwegian MFA pointed to the risk that its "field activities can sometimes be exposed to some moderate political risk due to election cycles in countries where the political situation is particularly troubled." The organization seeks to mitigate this risk by "constantly monitor[ing] the national political situation while weighing risk." It also relies heavily on its local partners in this process. While risks related to domestic political developments are largely out of ISHR's control, all staff showed significant awareness of potential threats and were committed to avoiding risks wherever possible. Most importantly, the organization has formally adopted a policy (discussed below), which spells out risk assessment and mitigation steps that staff (including consultants and fellows) are to take before any travel or mission.

Financial Risk

As already noted, ISHR introduced Smartsheet software to provide a better overview of, among other things, its financial situation and the status of grant expenditures, and ISHR's Finance staff consider it a significant step toward mitigating financial risk. As one Finance staff person stated, "Smartsheet reduced financial risk.... With an operating budget of 2.5 million Swiss francs (CHF), we must monitor expenditures very closely. Smartsheet is the go-to-place... to have an overview of:

- The different activities that are taking place according to their programme priorities & monitoring,
- Ongoing grants and their relevant attribution and currency risks, and
- All earmarked budgets and their monthly tracking of expenditures using specified analytical coding."

The Finance staff person continued, "[Smartsheet] tells us when expenditures took place and which grants & programme they relate to. This is a key piece of information for risk management"

The evaluator does not have expertise in financial management and is therefore in no position to assess whether ISHR's financial risk mitigation strategies are adequate. It should be noted,

however, that ISHR had a deficit in 2016 of CHF 137,452, which was taken from its reserve funds. This was the first time the organization had had a deficit in 4 years. Factors that contributed to the deficit included the devaluation of the British pound and a failure to obtain certain grants that had been expected; factors that were likely beyond ISHR's control. However, other reasons for the deficit included a) the "failure to budget sufficiently in earmarked proposals for human resources and administrative overheads," and b) "delayed implementation of some activities," which meant the organization was not able "to recognize income (including salary) from relevant grants."¹⁹ Since Smartsheet was only introduced in 2016, it is difficult to assess whether the mechanism will help mitigate such financial risk in the future. It is also unclear whether the challenges ISHR faces in predicting staff time required for specific projects and/or over-planning staff time is relevant to attempts to mitigate these financial risks. It would be worth considering whether there are additional program planning tools that might enhance the financial mitigation strategies that are already in place.

Physical and Digital Security

When it comes to the physical safety and digital security of ISHR's partners and beneficiaries, the organization is very focused on avoiding risk whenever possible. Staff members are very conscientious about taking all possible steps to mitigate risks associated with their interaction with national HRDs, and the organization is seen by external interlocutors as prioritizing the security of its partners. As one NGO partner commented, "ISHR staff are very careful about physical and digital security and handle the information of HRDs with great care. They use encryption and pay a lot of attention to the security concerns of their partners." Staff and Board members underscored the significant progress ISHR had taken to strengthen its security mitigation strategies during the past months.

In recognition of the potential and possibly growing risk to its partners and beneficiaries, ISHR has taken a number of important steps to enhance physical and digital security and mitigate risks. ISHR has adopted a protocol on data/digital security, which is seen by Staff and Board alike as an important step toward mitigating the potential risks of communicating with and handling the information of its partners and beneficiaries. Sarah Brooks was designated the staff focal point on digital security. Recently, ISHR also adopted a Travel, Mission and Field Security Policy (March 17, 2017), which sets out steps to be taken in assessing and mitigating risk, and enhancing security, both for its own staff and with regard to its contact with others. Staff also "liaise with all trainees both prior to and during the training on preventing and responding to reprisals..." and "...check in on the safe return of all trainees following all trainings."²⁰ It should also be noted that security is a regular item about which the Director reports to the Board during its bi-annual meetings.

There is no doubt that ISHR staff consider the security of their partners and HRDs a high priority. However, it is not clear that they have all the tools and resources that might enhance their mitigation efforts. As one staff person stressed, "The staff is very aware of risk and carries

¹⁹ Director's Report for period 1.11.2016 to 30.04.2017.

²⁰ E-mail from Board member, May 10, 2017.

out due diligence before inviting HRDs to prevent reprisals. Each staff member is committed to avoiding reprisals in their work, and we are all somewhat obsessed with security. But ISHR's approach assumes individual commitment. There is no risk mitigation protocol." Similarly, another staff person noted, "We have done a lot of work recently regarding digital security. It has been discussed in staff meetings, and we devoted time to digital security during our annual planning. Sarah and Michael lead on this, but there is no oversight mechanism or checks. We have great intentions, but then people take short-cuts. There is little in the way of keeping to task." Finally, a third staff person observed, "We do not have a standardized risk assessment. It works reasonably well as is, but it depends on individual staff. There is a clear understanding among staff that HRDS need to be aware of risks, and they need to seek to mitigate risks related to visa and accreditation etc..... In theory, staff are aware, but it is not clear who is checking to see that staff are complying."

These staff comments raise concern that ISHR is relying too heavily on the conscientiousness and awareness of its individual staff members. ISHR is a relatively small organization, and to date its strategies have worked, but they may not always be adequate, especially if senior staff leave the organization and/or new staff are hired who are not familiar with assessing risk. The organization needs to anticipate a time when staffing changes may make more formal processes useful. In particular, it should consider whether it might be useful to develop a more detailed risk assessment protocol (that spells out what is likely already the practice for most staff), and regularly updated, perhaps with the input of security experts. It would also be useful to have a point person in the organization who is responsible for making sure that all staff are aware of relevant security protocols, and are provided with the support and training they may need to conduct their due diligence in the most effective and protective manner. Such a focal point should also be responsible for staying up-to-date on security developments, for suggesting updates to security protocols, and regularly updating and improving training materials. Someone in the organization, whether a point person or the Director, should see it as his/her responsibility to ensure that all staff are following organizational protocols and not taking short-cuts that may inadvertently increase risk.

It is also important to designate time for staff to share security experiences and the lessons learned related to mitigation of security risks. As one staff person commented, "I feel that our approach to physical security is ad hoc. We are all concerned about it, especially regarding HRDs, but we have no time set aside to learn about the different approaches people have used in different contexts to mitigate risk and/or mistakes they have made that have compromised security." It would be important to create more opportunities for staff to share such experiences and for those lessons to be documented and collated so that they can be shared with and relied upon by others in the future.

While physical security risks may not be as likely for ISHR staff, they are occasionally exposed to heightened security risk, especially when they travel. While ISHR staff reported that they "agree" or "strongly agree" with the proposition that "ISHR provides a safe workplace which appropriately safeguards my physical, psychological and digital safety and welfare," some interviewees expressed concern that staff security may not receive the attention it deserves. For example, one Board member commented, "We have become more conscious of risks

related to cyber-attacks because of work on China, but there is a gap in terms of physical security of staff. Staff do not take their own personal safety seriously enough.” Two Board members mentioned a specific incident when staff had traveled to Venezuela without the proper visa (only used a tourist visa), as an example of how staff may sometimes fail to consider the potential risks – including reputational risk to the organization – of their actions. The development of the Travel, Mission and Field Security Policy, mentioned above, is therefore a welcome step toward articulating necessary mitigation measures and enhancing staff awareness of security concerns for themselves, as well as their partners. It may also be useful to consider creating a Staff-Board Security subcommittee to periodically review and update security practices and protocols, as well as to provide advice and share responsibility for decisions that have significant security implications.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ISHR is well respected among human rights defenders, international NGO partners, UN representatives, and diplomatic missions. It has a reputation for effectiveness both in its support and capacity-building for HRDs and in its work to strengthen international, regional and national standards for the protection of human rights defenders. As one donor stated, “It has been effective in empowering defenders, strengthening human rights laws and systems through advocacy, promoting accountability for violations, pushing for implementation of international norms at the national level, and building strong partnerships for change.”

Although ISHR carries out its work in an environment that is increasingly hostile to human rights, including within the United Nations, it achieved several significant outcomes during the evaluation period, including the appointment of an Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, the appointment of a high-ranking official in the UN Secretary General’s office to combat reprisals, and the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on HRDs. ISHR has made significant progress toward achieving many of the outputs and outcomes identified in its proposal to the Norwegian MFA. Initiatives that were considered less effective included its work with the Women’s Human Rights Defenders Coalition and the ISHR-led initiative on “Strengthening the Human Rights Council @ 10 years.”

The evaluation found ISHR’s work to be effective and relevant in responding to the needs of human rights defenders, its target group. The vast majority of its initiatives are directly and logically linked to the pursuit of its long-term objectives and vision. ISHR is viewed as highly efficient in its work, accomplishing a great deal with a small staff. Its accomplishments were widely viewed as outsized in comparison with the resources at its disposal.

Interlocutors, and especially HRDs, consider ISHR’s work to be highly sustainable, in that the training of defenders creates capacities, new approaches and new strategies that will continue to have positive impact long after the training. While ISHR’s ongoing involvement with HRDs and especially its efforts to link them to broader efforts in the UN will continue to be important, HRDs reported that they go back to their home countries and put into practice what they have learned. Furthermore, some HRDs noted that they had trained others in their organizations and in their communities after they returned from an ISHR training, creating a ripple effect that will have long-term benefits. Furthermore, ISHR initiatives such as the Model Law project, provide tools that are being taken up by national HRDs and used in many exciting campaigns. Again, ISHR’s leadership and strategic guidance will continue to be very valuable to national HRDs, but defenders believe that they will be able to use tools such as the Model Law even without ISHR direct involvement and that the positive outcomes and impact are largely sustainable. ISHR’s lack of adequate fundraising capacity was highlighted as a concern for the sustainability of its programs, and interlocutors called on ISHR’s donors to provide additional support to enhance its fundraising capacity.

ISHR’s intervention strategies and outcomes were rated highly by virtually all external interlocutors and viewed as logically connected to its long-term programmatic objectives. Despite this positive assessment, however, the situation for HRDs and the protection of human rights is deteriorating in many countries around the world. Thus, while ISHR’s intervention logic

is sound, and widely accepted as the most valid means of achieving lasting results on the ground, there are intervening factors and variables that are not within ISHR's control.

The evaluation also looked at ISHR's planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning mechanisms. ISHR has made significant strides in terms of its planning processes in recent years. ISHR's planning system is appropriately thorough, and the set of indicators is good. The organization also introduced a new software platform – Smartsheet – which provides an overview of all grant obligations and expenditures. As such, it is a useful tool for project management and some aspects of planning, but at least some program staff find Smartsheet too complicated and of little value to their work. The challenges identified with the use of Smartsheet should be monitored, and ISHR should reflect on whether steps can be taken to improve its usefulness, including by additional training for staff and/or a review of the number of indicators the organization is attempting to capture through Smartsheet.

The main concern regarding ISHR's planning process is its apparent inability to produce a realistic assessment of the amount of staff time required for specific initiatives. In addition, ISHR apparently does not adequately anticipate the potential demands on staff who do not have line responsibility for specific pieces of work, such as Finance, Operations, and Communications. ISHR will need to reflect on whether the over-planning of staff time is a problem with the planning mechanisms themselves, or reflects staff being unrealistically ambitious and always ready to take on more. Anticipating precisely how much staff time is required for an initiative is an inherently difficult challenge for any human rights organization, especially one engaged simultaneously in multiple advocacy initiatives. It is also an enormous challenge to predict realistically how much staff time will be needed for advocacy initiatives that are dependent on many variables outside the organization's control. It may nevertheless be worthwhile to look back at planning documents and staff time assessments from previous years to see if the organization can identify whether there are reasons for the unrealistic time planning that are within its control.

Staff members, Board members, and numerous external interlocutors expressed concern that ISHR staff are stretched too thin, and are over-committed. The passion and dedication of ISHR's staff is greatly admired and respected. In a context in which ISHR is providing such important support to frontline human rights defenders, it is understandable that staff would prioritize service to others over more time and space for themselves. However, international NGO partners, and representatives from international agencies and the diplomatic community expressed concern that the level of work was not sustainable over the long-term and that they risk staff burn-out, as well as inadequate time for reflection and learning, among other things.

ISHR is committed to evaluation and learning, and has an established practice of regularly evaluating some of its signature initiatives, such as the HRDAP and its work at the HRC. However, staff suggested that most of the reflection and learning takes place in the context of planning for the next year's activities. The organization could strengthen its learning system by incorporating more opportunities for staff to share lessons learned, as well as improve its ability to document and share learning.

Finally, the evaluation looked at a number of ISHR's risk mitigation mechanisms related to staff attrition, financial risk, political risk and physical and digital security risks. The most serious proposal-specific risk is that of reprisals against ISHR's partners and beneficiaries. While many of the risk factors are outside ISHR's control, the organization is very serious about mitigating the risk of reprisals, and took several important steps during the evaluation period to further enhance its mitigation strategies. In particular, it adopted a policy on data/digital security and appointed a staff focal point on digital security to mitigate risks of communicating with and handling the information of ISHR's partners and beneficiaries. ISHR also adopted a policy on Travel, Mission and Field Security that is an important step toward standardizing risk assessment and enhancing security for staff and its partners. There are, however, several steps the organization might consider to further strengthen its efforts in this regard.

Recommendations for Consideration

Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

- **Consider whether current evaluation practices can be applied more broadly.** A significant amount of real-time or near-time evaluation already occurs within the organization, especially with regard to HRDAP and other training programs, as well as after sessions of the HRC. Consider whether this approach can be adapted in whole or part to incorporate more evaluation and learning for other advocacy initiatives. In particular, make it a practice to take time to review and document lessons learned at the end of all significant advocacy campaigns or when there has been a significant change in the advocacy environment;
- **Monitor the use of Smartsheet** by Program staff and reflect on whether steps can be taken to improve its usefulness, including by additional training and/or possibly streamlining the number of indicators the organization attempts to capture through Smartsheet;
- **Improve the organization's knowledge management systems.** Without adding unduly burdensome reporting requirements, ISHR's PMEL system could be strengthened by a more systematic effort to document and collate information that emerges from staff meeting discussions, HRDAP evaluations, annual retreats, and other learning discussions so that important lessons can be shared, more broadly across the organization;
- **Review all annual work plans to determine whether they include over-commitments** or unrealistic time estimates and make sure that no staff person has planned for more than 100% of his/her time (see below);
- **Consider reviewing planning documents** and staff time assessments from previous years to identify whether some of the reasons for unrealistic time assessments may be within ISHR's control;

- **Consider intentionally planning less** than 100% of staff time each year, to create more opportunity for unplanned work such as emergencies and programmatic opportunities (Recognizing that this recommendation may be dependent on ISHR's funders, see recommendation to funders below);
- **Build in time for reflection**, both in terms of annual staff retreats whenever possible, but also at key moments throughout the year. Ensure that the standing agenda item on learning at bi-monthly staff meetings is made more effective and intentional. Consider having a different staff member at each meeting speak in a constructively critical way about a piece of their work (a staff suggestion);
- **Add at least one indicator** to Intervention Type 1 that compares the advocacy recommendations of the HRDAP alumni to the recommendation, resolution or position ultimately adopted;
- **Consider evaluating HRDAP's impact over a period longer than one year**, and add data sources to supplement the self-evaluation of the HRD.

Security and Risk Assessment

- **Develop a standardized risk assessment protocol** (that spells out what is likely already the practice for most staff) for discussing risk and mitigation strategies with all HRDs being invited to ISHR events or whose travel is being arranged or facilitated by ISHR, and regularly update, perhaps with the input of security experts;
- **Designate a security point person** responsible for making sure that all staff are aware of relevant security protocols and have the support and training they need. Such a focal point should also be responsible for staying up-to-date on security developments, for suggesting updates to security protocols, and regularly updating and improving training materials. Someone in the organization, whether the point person or the Executive Director, should ensure that all staff are following organizational protocols;
- **Create specific opportunities for staff to share security experiences** (including security breaches) and the lessons learned related to mitigation of security risks. It would be important for those lessons to be documented and collated so that they can be shared;
- **Consider creating a Staff-Board Security subcommittee** to periodically review and update security practices and protocols, as well as to provide advice and share responsibility for decisions that have significant security implications.

To ISHR's Donors

Given the long-standing relationship of support and trust between ISHR and its donors, and to support and enhance ISHR's efforts to monitor and evaluate its work and learn from its initiatives, donors should:

- **Consider supporting in-field evaluations** to document the incremental change over time of ISHR's work to implement international standards at the national level and have concrete impact on the ground;
- **Support PMEL processes:** Approve grants that include time for unplanned work and ISHR's PMEL processes;
- **Provide designated funding for an annual staff retreat** to ensure that all staff have the opportunity at least once a year to come together for reflection and learning;
- **Consider providing funding to increase logistical support for program managers** in their implementation of ISHR activities, in order to create the capacity for those managers to devote more time to strategy, planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning, which would optimally leverage their experience and expertise;
- **Consider providing support to increase ISHR's fundraising capacity,** to contribute to the organization's sustainability and its ability to scale up its high-impact programs.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: ISHR's Funding Proposal to the Norwegian MFA

Appendix B: Evaluation Terms of Reference

Call for proposals: evaluation of ISHR 2016 activities



Organisation

The International Service for Human Rights is an independent, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights. We achieve this by supporting human rights defenders, strengthening human rights systems, and leading and participating in coalitions for human rights change.

Background information

ISHR seeks to engage an expert to conduct an independent evaluation of our work in 2016, with a particular focus on our internal system for planning, monitoring & evaluation and learning (PMEL) and risk management.

ISHR and the human rights defenders with whom we work have received significant financial and political support from the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) for more than 10 years. This core support has enabled ISHR to pursue key goals which align with Norway's own foreign policy priorities, including:

- Supporting human rights defenders to use international and regional human rights standards and systems to contribute to change on the ground (Goal 1)
- Strengthening international and regional human rights standards and systems to make them more accessible, effective and protective for human rights defenders (Goal 2)
- Supporting local actors to promote implementation of international and regional human rights standards on the protection of defenders at the national level (Goal 3)

Since 2015, Norway's core support for ISHR has been complemented by earmarked funding to enable ISHR to support the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

On 1 March 2016, the Norwegian MFA approved a 2 year core grant to ISHR, running from January 2016 to December 2017, for an amount of NOK 9,400,000. Art.9 of the grant agreement specifies that "a mid-term review focusing on progress to date shall be carried out." The purpose of the present evaluation is to comply with this requirement; assessing progress and identifying lessons learned and opportunities for enhancement, notably with regards to our PMEL and risk management. The evaluation is expected to focus on the activities undertaken during the first year of the grant (2016).

Objectives of the evaluation

The objective of the evaluation is to gain better knowledge and understanding of how ISHR's work, to identify possible institutional strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, consider progress and identify lessons learned and opportunities or recommendations for enhancement.

This will involve consideration of:

- The *logic* of ISHR's theory of change;
- The *relevance* and *logic* of ISHR's goals at different levels (output, outcome, impact), as well as indicators identified to measure progress under each institutional goal;
- Output, outcome and progress towards impact of ISHR's core activities, notably at the national level;

- The *efficiency* with which the core activities were implemented and the *sustainability* of outputs.

The evaluation should also consider either specifically or transversally ISHR's PMEL system and our risk management.

- How/if ISHR's PMEL system, including the established internal programme management and monitoring tool in 2015-2016, contributes to efficiency and effectiveness.
- ISHR's risk management, how ISHR deals with the various forms of risks inherent to our work (political, programmatic, risks to beneficiaries and defenders, financial risks)

The evaluation report is intended for ISHR staff and Board, the Norwegian MFA and other ISHR donors, and the stakeholders consulted for the purpose of the evaluation.

Scope and methodology of the evaluation

This is a desk-based evaluation combined with interviews with, and solicitation of inputs from, key beneficiaries, targets and stakeholders.

The external evaluator will be provided with all data and information relevant to the implementation of ISHR's 2016 activities, including internal reviews (e.g. for the ISHR Board), trip reports, project documents, reports from partners, agreements with partners, etc. The evaluator will also be provided with contact details for relevant partners and trainees.

At minimum, the evaluator will be required:

- To undertake a review of all relevant documents
- Discuss with ISHR staff, including the Director and Senior managers in Geneva, New York and Abidjan
- Organise interviews/questionnaires with key stakeholders, notably partners, trainees and diplomats (notably Norwegian diplomats)

Interviewees should include but not be limited to:

- Participants in ISHR training programmes and consultations at the international, regional and national levels
- Civil society partners at the international, regional and national levels, including members of coalitions and networks of which ISHR is a part
- Diplomatic interlocutors and policy makers in Geneva, New York and at capital level, including the Norwegian Mission in Geneva and MFA
- Experts and secretariat members of within the UN and African human rights systems
- ISHR staff and Board

The evaluator will be provided with contact details for relevant project stakeholders and beneficiaries, including the above mentioned stakeholders.

The evaluation will be based on both qualitative and quantitative measures, and recognise that:

- much human rights change is long-term, non-linear and multi-factorial, meaning that it is crucial to monitor and report on steps along the journey (while not losing sight of the bigger goal);
- progress may include not only progress but the prevention or mitigation of regress;
- progress may also include keeping an issue alive or on the agenda until conditions are conducive to change;

- in light of its sensitivity, ISHR is unable to report publicly on all of its work or impact; and
- the complex, multi-actor, multi-factorial nature of most human rights change means that it may only be possible or appropriate to claim contribution to change rather than causation

Applicants are encouraged to propose different or additional evaluation methodologies, including details on the methods for the verification of information.

Timeframe and budget

The evaluation should be completed within a two month timeframe. Candidates should include an estimate of the time required and their suggested dates in the proposal.

The budget should specify daily or hourly rates, and other costs.

Governance and accountability

The evaluator will report to the ISHR Director of Development. They may also contact other relevant members of staff, including to solicit contacts with partners and trainees. The evaluator may seek support from the ISHR in order to get introduced to relevant stakeholders, although they are expected to work independently.

Professional qualifications and experience

The evaluator should have the following qualifications and experience:

- Postgraduate degrees or higher in human rights, law, public policy, management and administration, or a related field;
- Professional experience in project design, implementation, and evaluation;
- Previous experience in evaluations of human rights projects;
- Knowledge of UN human rights bodies, including the Human Rights Council;
- Demonstrable report writing competencies; and
- Fluency in English, and ideally good working knowledge of French or Spanish.

Procurement compliance note

In compliance with Norwegian procurement requirements, all applicants must provide a note as part of their applications to confirm whether:

- a) They are bankrupt or being wound up, are having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities, are subject of proceedings concerning those matters, or are in any analogous situation arising from a similar procedure provided for in national legislation or regulations.
- b) They or persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control over them have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a final judgment;
- c) They have been guilty of grave professional misconduct;
- d) They have not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or the payment of taxes in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which they are established, or with those of Switzerland;

- e) They or persons having powers of representation, decision-making or of control over them have been convicted for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organisation, or money laundering by a final judgment;
- f) They make use of child labour or forced labour and/or practise discrimination, and/or do not respect the right to freedom of association and the right to organise and engage in collective bargaining pursuant to the core conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Applicants must also disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest.

Deliverables and schedule

The evaluator is expected to initiate the review during the first quarter of 2017, and to submit a first draft evaluation report to ISHR by 10 April 2017. The final report should be submitted by 12 May 2017. The report should include at least the following sections:

- Background and introduction
- Methodology
- Main findings with regards to the evaluation criteria of logic, relevance, progress, efficiency, effectiveness, ability to handle risks, and sustainability.
- Lessons learned
- Recommendations to ISHR, and to the Norwegian MFA on their cooperation with ISHR
- Relevant annexes, including questionnaires, persons and institutions interviewed, relevant documents related to ISHR activities, etc

Where and when to send applications

Applicants should send a description of their experience and skills to undertake the evaluation, a CV, copies of previous evaluation reports or writing sample, 2 references, procurement compliance note and an estimate of costs (budget).

Applications should be emailed to v.ploton@ishr.ch quoting the following reference "Evaluation of ISHR 2016 core activities", at the latest by 10 February 2017.

Appendix C: List of Interviewees

ISHR staff²¹

1. Sarah Brooks
2. Marina Dailly²²
3. Chris Duckett
4. Michael Ineichen
5. Phil Lynch
6. Eleanor Openshaw
7. Pooja Patel
8. Clément Voulé

Human Rights Defenders & ISHR partners/beneficiaries

1. Kanni Abdoulaye, Collectif des Organisations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie
2. Marthe Coulibaly, Human Rights Defenders Coalition from Côte d'Ivoire, (Coalition Ivoirienne des défenseurs des droits humains -CIDDH)
3. Luana Xavier Pinto Coelho, Terra de Direitos (Brazil)
4. Sukhgerel Dugersuren , OT Watch, Mongolia
5. B.M. Gbanie, West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network
6. Micah Grzywnowicz, RFSL
7. Karen Hudlet, Business and Human Rights Resource Center (BHRRC) (Mexico)
8. Harpreet Kaur, BHRRC (India)
9. Melanie Kombate, West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network
10. Mauricio Lazala, BHRRC (London)
11. Laila Matar, Human Rights Watch
12. Guadalupe Marengo, Amnesty International
13. Nathalie Margi, International Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders/Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
14. Mahamar Moctar (by e-mail)
15. Alexandra Montgomery
16. Clementine De Montjoye, Defend Defenders
17. Angela Mudukuti, South African Litigation Centre
18. Florence Ouattara, CBBDH
19. André du Plessis, ILGA
20. Anabella Sibrian, International Platform against Impunity
21. Jeremie Smith, Cairo Institute

ISHR Board (current & past)

²¹ For purposes of this report, ISHR staff and former staff are referred to as staff. Tess McEvoy, Helen Nolan and Vincent Ploton also provided information for the evaluation.

²² And other Finance staff, by email.

1. Maryam Al-Khawaja
2. Rosemary McCreery
3. Lucia Nader
4. Chris Sidoti

UN experts/staff

1. Paulo David, OHCHR
2. Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs
3. Peggy Hicks, OHCHR
4. Maina Kiai, former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association
5. Valentine Sebile, Assistant to the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs
6. Eric Tistounet, OHCHR

Donors

1. Claire Hubert Annette, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2. Adrian Coman, Arcus
3. Iva Dobochina, Open Society Foundations
4. Bob Last, United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth Office
5. Nathalie Losekoot, Sigrid Rausing Trust
6. Mattis Raustol , Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
7. James Savage, Fund for Global Human Rights

Others

8. Robert Kirkness, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer
9. Peter Splinter, former Amnesty

Diplomatic interlocutors

Geneva-based²³

1. Keith Harper (United States)
2. Leigh McCumber (Canada)

New York

3. Penny Norton (Australia)
4. Jorge Dotta (Uruguay)
5. Martin Torbergesen (Norway)

²³ Geneva- and formerly Geneva-based are treated as Geneva-based for purposes of this report.

Appendix D: List of Documents Reviewed

ISHR Program Documents

Organisational development strategy – Summary of key insights and issues, 10 April 2015
ISHR Annual Report 2016 (Covering period 1 January to 31 December 2015)
Document 3C - ISHR's Theory of Change: How do we achieve and measure impact? 14 April 2016
Strategic vision and development action plan/New Initiatives, projects and approaches, 20 April 2016
ISHR Strategic Framework – 2013-2016, Executive Summary
Document 6A – Success and lessons learned from Strategic Framework 2013-2016, 11 August 2016
Human Rights Defenders Advocacy Programme, Geneva, September 2016
Document 3 – Director's Report for period 1.4.2016 to 31.10.2016
Document 3A – Director's Report for period 1.11.2016 to 30.04.2017
ISHR Strategic Framework 2017-2020, December 2016
ISHR 2017 plan of activities as of 5 December 2016
ISHR Intervention Types 1-5
ISHR Annual Report 2017 (Covering period 1 January to 31 December 2016)
ISHR results framework 2017-2020
ISHR report on results & planned activities, November 2016-April 2017
Yogyakarta + 10 SmartSheet
Grant Management Overview (2017)
Project-Related Risks of ISHR's proposed activities
Travel, Mission and Field Security Policy, 17 March 2017
Additionally: Reviewed numerous reports and press releases related to ISHR's programmatic initiatives

Documents Related to Norwegian MFA Grant

Application for grants from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 8 March 2016
Grant Agreement Between the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Service on Human Rights Regarding QZA-16-0006, 1.3.2016, Part I, Part II and Part III.

Appendix E: Indicators for ISHR'S Intervention Types

INTERVENTION TYPE 1

Consultation, training, capacity building, advocacy accompaniment and strategic partnering
with and for HRDs

	Indicator	Measurement	Data source
1)	Number of HRDs trained	<i>Number of defenders</i>	End of training report
2)	Qualitative and quantitative feedback from the beneficiaries on relevance and value of training and achievement of advocacy objectives	<i>% of satisfaction and % attainment of objectives Qualitative feedback</i>	End of training evaluation
3)	% of trainees who engage further with UN, regional mechanisms or relevant actors within a year of training	<i>% of trainees</i>	One year follow-up evaluation
4)	Number of former trainees or their organisations who become ISHR partners or join in ISHR activities within a year of training	<i>Number of trainees or organisations</i>	One year follow-up evaluation
5)	Level of demand for training	<i>Number of HRDs supported compared to number of HRDs requesting support</i>	Number of HRDAP and other training applications compared to number of HRDAP and other training participants

INTERVENTION TYPE 2

Policy research, development, lobbying and advocacy

	Indicator	Measurement	Data source
1)	Incorporation of ISHR policy position in a relevant resolution, recommendation, report or publication	<i>Comparison of ISHR recommendation, resolution or position with adopted recommendation, resolution or position</i>	Relevant resolution, report or publication
2)	National level implementation of an ISHR recommendation, including enactment or implementation of progressive law or policy or repeal or amendment of regressive law or policy	<i>Comparison of ISHR recommendation or position with adopted recommendation, law, policy or position</i>	Adopted national law, policy or practice
3)	Number and profile of States signing a joint statement, or cosponsoring or supporting a resolution, as advocated by ISHR	<i>Number and profile of states</i>	Statement, resolution or report
4)	Establishment of, or action by, monitoring or accountability mechanisms	<i>Action taken</i>	Public record or private feedback
5)	Adoption of policy position by key decision maker or influential actor	<i>Policy position adopted</i>	Public record or private feedback

INTERVENTION TYPE 3

Information products and advocacy materials

Indicator	Measurement	Data source
1) Number of website visits and publication downloads within a period of time	<i>Number of downloads and / or visits</i>	Google Analytics
2) Number of subscribers / followers to ISHR's Monthly Monitor, publications and social media channels	<i>Number of followers or subscribers</i>	Mail Chimp / Facebook / Twitter
3) Demand for ISHR publications during trainings or events	<i>Number of publications taken or request for publications</i>	End of event evaluation
4) Citation of ISHR materials in reputable publications or by key stakeholders	<i>Quotes / Citation of references</i>	Relevant publications
5) Demographic profile of ISHR audience	<i>% of audience from Global South</i> <i>% of audience from States</i> <i>% of HRDs audience</i> <i>Gender composition of audience</i>	A) Google Analytics B) CRM
6) Unsolicited feedback from target audiences	<i>Qualitative feedback</i>	Emails / face to face feedback

INTERVENTION TYPE 4

Strategic advocacy, communications and litigation at international and regional levels

Indicator	Measurement	Date source
1) Release of HRD from detention / dropping of persecution or charge	<i>Outcome consistent or partially consistent with ISHR position</i>	Public record / private feedback
2) Encouraging public statement from state authorities or key actor(s) on HRDs or HR issues	<i>Statement consistent or partially consistent with ISHR advocacy position</i>	Public record / private feedback
3) Specific case referred to in UPR, Special Procedure reports or Treaty Body deliberations or recommendations	<i>Reference to individual cases</i>	Report or document of UPR, Special Procedures or Treaty Body
4) Advance in jurisprudential recognition and protection of HRDs rights or invalidation / repeal of restrictive law, politic or practice	<i>Outcome consistent or partially consistent with ISHR advocacy position</i>	Relevant judicial or quasi-judicial decision or view
5) Adoption or implementation of ISHR influenced recommendation by international or regional mechanism	<i>% of ISHR influenced recommendations made by experts or states</i> <i>% of acceptance of ISHR influenced recommendations by states</i>	UPR, Treaty Body or Special Procedures reports UPR Info database
6) Investigation, remedy or accountability in response to violation against HRDs	<i>Action / outcome consistent or partially consistent with ISHR advocacy position</i>	Public record / private feedback

INTERVENTION TYPE 5

Convening, coordinating and resourcing coalitions, networks and campaigns

	Indicator	Measurement	Data source
1)	Creation of strategic coalition, network or campaign	<i>Number and size of networks or campaigns initiated or jointly initiated by ISHR</i>	ISHR Programme Managers
2)	Number and % of joint or coordinated advocacy actions (including joint submissions, reports, statements, press releases etc.)	<i>Number and % of joint advocacy actions</i>	ISHR Programme Managers Reports, submissions, statements etc.
3)	Value and impact of ISHR participation in coalitions, networks and campaigns	<i>Number of requests for ISHR to join a coalition, network or campaign</i>	ISHR Programme Managers and private feedback
4)	Adoption or pursuit of ISHR advocacy or policy position by coalition or network of which ISHR is a member	<i>Policy or advocacy position of network</i>	Public record or private feedback
5)	Establishment, membership of and action by a coalition or group of which ISHR is not part but which advocates ISHR consistent position	<i>Number and profile of members, number and impact of actions</i>	Public record or private feedback