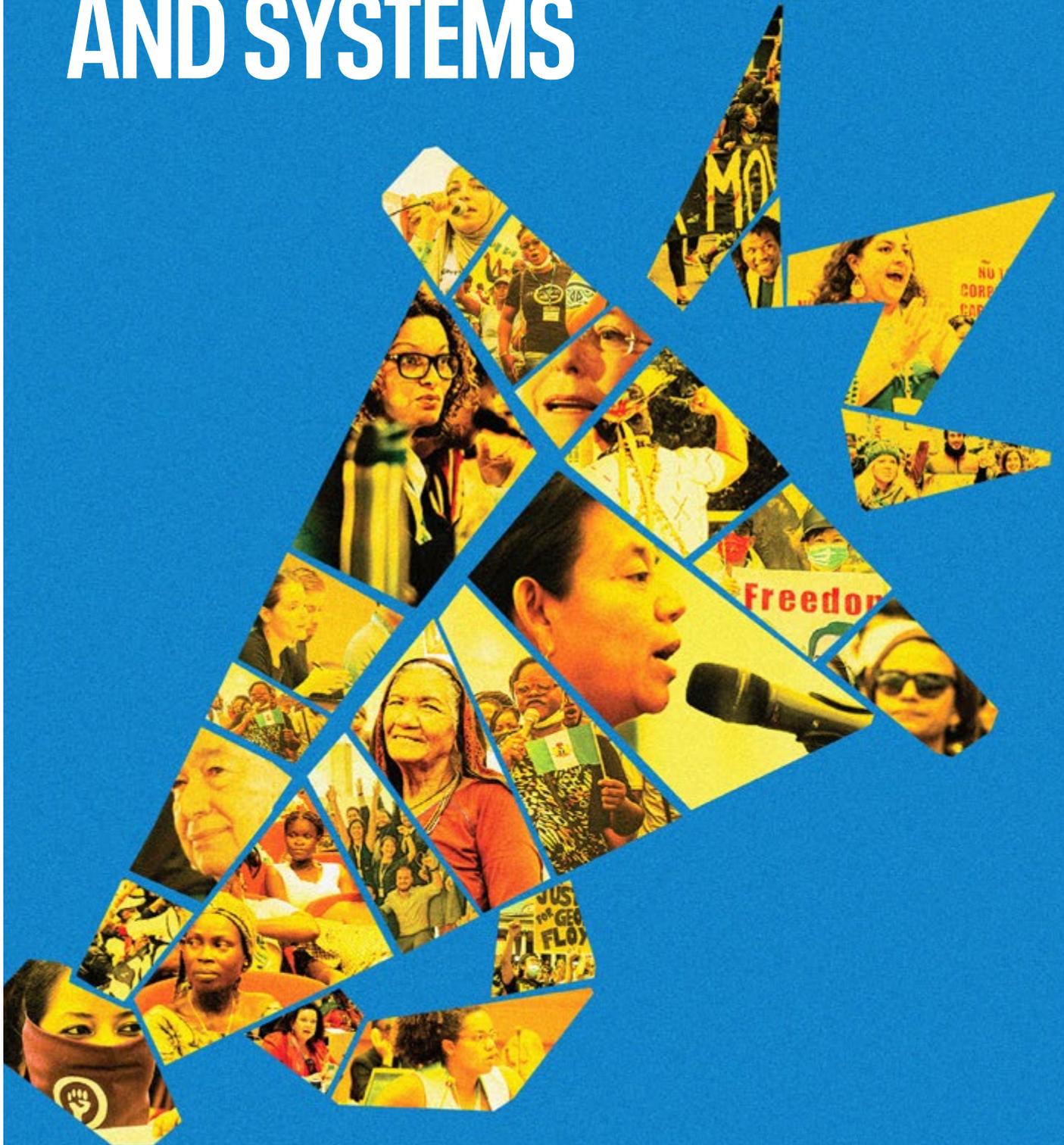
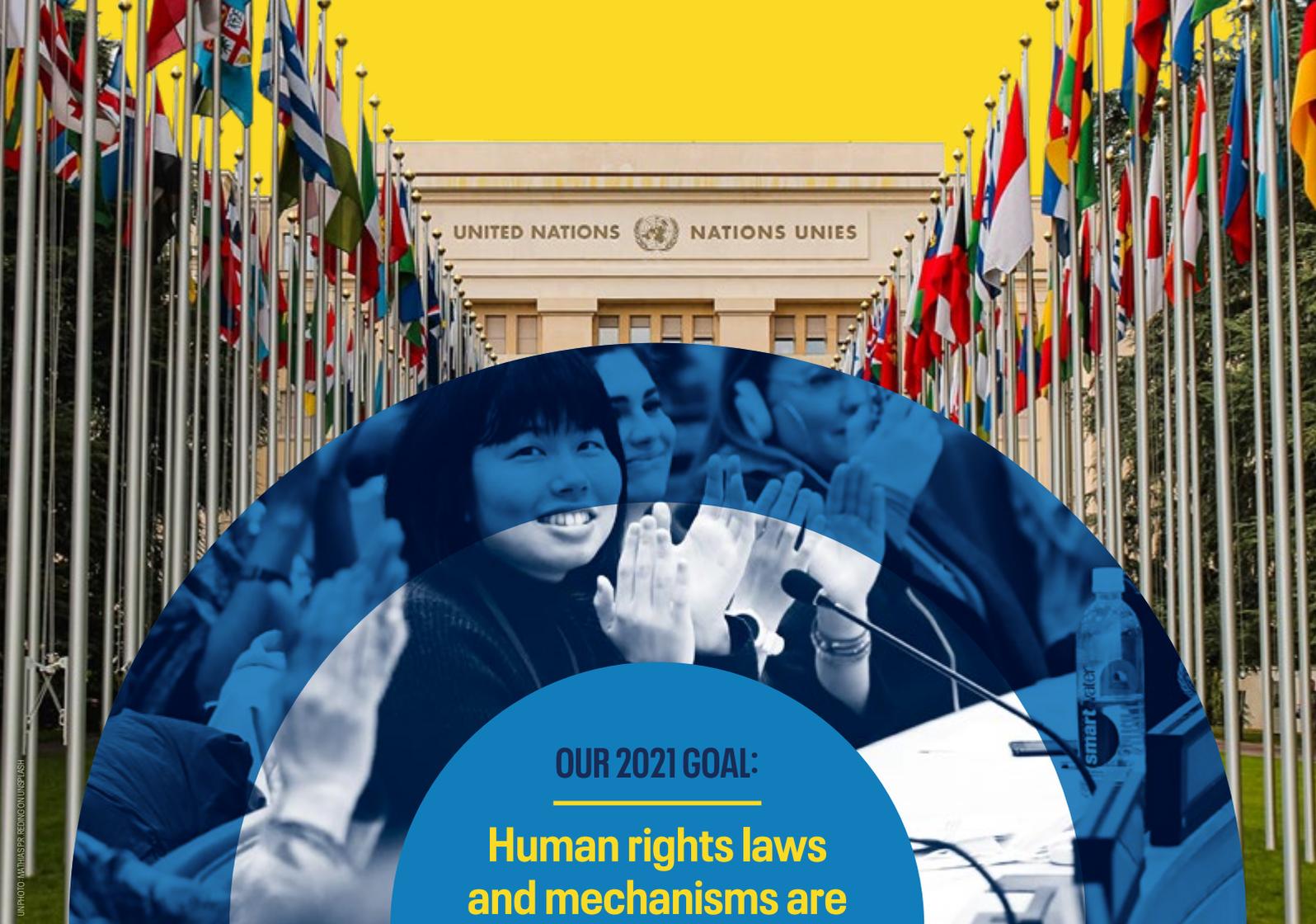


# GOAL AND IMPACT STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS LAWS AND SYSTEMS





UNPHOTO/ANTHONY PR. REDING/ONLINEFLASH

### OUR 2021 GOAL:

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

### WHAT WE ACHIEVED:

**Our deep understanding of the needs and priorities of defenders**, our expert policy research and advocacy, and our access to high-level decision-makers and diplomats within the UN and regional systems, combined to make those systems more accessible, effective and protective for defenders and victims. Our work contributed significantly to ensure that:

- **human rights mechanisms are effective and fit for purpose**, respond to the calls and demands of defenders, and establish appropriate mechanisms and mandates to promote accountability and justice.
- **human rights mechanisms are accessible and safe**, with policies and processes to enable safe and meaningful participation for defenders online and offline.
- **cases of intimidation and reprisals are properly investigated** and perpetrators held accountable.

# SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

 In line with the calls of families and organisations actively engaged in the struggles against racism and police violence, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a **landmark resolution establishing an independent expert mechanism to address systemic racism and promote racial justice and equality for Africans and people of African descent**. The adoption of this resolution is a testament to the resilience, bravery and commitment of victims, their families, their representatives and anti-racism defenders globally. ISHR is proud to now support and host the secretariat of a global coalition of anti-racism activists and organisations dedicated to pursuing a transformative agenda for racial justice.



 Building on advocacy efforts over the last decade, we substantially strengthened protections from reprisals against those who cooperate and provide vital evidence and testimony to the UN. This work included in-depth **consultations and research to better understand what victims need** and a **major report** showing that **public statements and solidarity actions work**. In addition to successfully **litigating a landmark case** enshrining the rights of defenders and victims to communicate with international bodies, we also **campaignned successfully** to secure a **consensus resolution to condemn reprisals and mandate action** at the UN Human Rights Council. Our advocacy in both New York and Geneva has now put the issue of reprisals firmly on the **agenda of the UN General Assembly**, thereby **raising the political costs for perpetrators** and deterring future violations.



**ISHR**  
 @ISHRGlobal

We need to listen & learn from women defenders about solutions for global & local challenges. The UN must open the door to women's rights organisations!  
[#OpenTheDoors2NGOs](#)  
[#WHRDDay](#)



 Throughout 2021, we lobbied and **advocated to ensure that human rights defenders and other civil society actors could access and participate in the work of the UN**. This work included a **campaign to strengthen the UN's NGO Committee** so that its members comprise more States which support diverse and independent civil society participation at the UN, and engagement with the President and Bureau of the Human Rights Council to ensure that initiatives to make the Council more 'efficient' do not restrict civil society access and participation and thereby result in a Council which is less effective. Building on our efforts for more than 30 years, including as reflected in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action to which ISHR substantially contributed, we also worked to safeguard and provide national-level activists with direct access to the Council, ensuring their rightful seat at a key human rights decision-making table.



**ISHR**  
@ISHRGlobal

Ten years after the first SOGI resolution was passed at the UN Human Rights Council, today 27 States launched the Group of Friends of the #IESOGI mandate. More in this joint article by

ISHR's  
@Tess\_L\_McEvoy and  
@ILGAWORLD's  
@GalilGabriel



Throughout 2021, we also worked with TB-net and other NGO partners to **secure the resumption of periodic reviews** of States parties by UN treaty bodies despite the pandemic. Over the coming year we will work closely with treaty bodies to strengthen jurisprudential recognition and protection of women human rights defenders and land rights defenders through general comments.

Our work on **Human Rights Council membership and elections**, undertaken together with Amnesty International and HRCnet, helped to increase transparency, promote accountability, strengthen the commitments, pledges and actions of various candidates, and improve the potential composition of the Presidency and Bureau, including by ensuring that neither Bahrain nor Uzbekistan served on the Bureau.

In New York, ISHR worked with both civil society and State partners to secure the second ever **resolution of the UN General Assembly** recognising the **prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity**. The resolution was adopted by consensus and builds on a **decade of progress** in the recognition of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people at the UN.

Thanks to the coordinated advocacy and campaigning of over 1300 civil society organisations – together with the principled leadership of the governments of Costa Rica, Maldives, Morocco, Slovenia and Switzerland – the world’s peak multilateral human rights body recognised the **right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment**.

Complementing its recognition of the right to a healthy environment, the Council’s 48th session also established **a new position of Special Rapporteur on Climate Change**. The mandate will provide expert advice to governments and help hold them accountable for their obligations to uphold human rights and address the climate crisis. **Consistent with ISHR advocacy**, both Human Rights Council resolutions on the environment and climate change recognise the vital role of human rights defenders in environmental protection and sustainable development, as well as the obligations of States and business actors to protect and respect their work.

## RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY ISHR

**79%**

WERE TAKEN UP BY **STATES IN THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**, WITH EACH ISHR RECOMMENDATION MADE BY AN AVERAGE OF 6 STATES

**60%**

WERE ADOPTED BY THE **UN TREATY BODY** TO WHICH THEY WERE DIRECTED





“ The comprehensive defeat of **Bahrain and Uzbekistan** demonstrates that there should be no place among the Council’s president or vice presidents for representatives of States that restrict, criminalise and commit reprisals against rights defenders. ”

ISHR DIRECTOR PHIL LYNCH QUOTED IN DEUTSCHE WELLE, 15 JANUARY 2021

“ The Council can reinforce civil society participation or hinder it by renewing the so-called efficiency measures. We must be part of the negotiations. We want any actions undertaken to be informed by and answer our demands and concerns. Civil society participation can’t be an afterthought. The Council must not sacrifice civil society engagement to meet budget and cash flow shortfalls. ”

ISHR HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL PROGRAMME MANAGER SALMA EL HOSSEINY QUOTED IN *THE EUROPEAN TIMES*, 19 NOVEMBER 2021

# IN DEPTH:

## SUCSESSES, FAILURES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL IN 2021

With three regular sessions and five special sessions, 2021 was the busiest year in the history of the UN Human Rights Council, producing a range of highlights and lowlights, together with insights and lessons for the year ahead.

### Let's start with the highlights:

1. The establishment of an Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement tasked with developing a transformative racial justice agenda.
2. The mandating of a standing commission of inquiry on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories addressing root causes of the conflict. Former ISHR Director Chris Sidoti and former ISHR Board member Navi Pillay are two of the international experts appointed to this historic commission.
3. An unprecedented number of national-level human rights defenders, as well as victims of violations and their families and representatives, addressing the Council directly through video statements. This practice must be maintained, even as the Council returns to in-person meetings.
4. The adoption of resolutions recognising the right to a healthy environment and mandating a new Special Rapporteur on Climate Change, with both resolutions recognising the vital role of environmental human rights defenders and the need for their protection.
5. The adoption of a consensus resolution on reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN, inviting the General Assembly to also consider the issue, thereby raising political costs for perpetrators of acts of intimidation and reprisals.
6. Joint statements condemning the deteriorating human rights situations and repression of human rights defenders in Egypt and Russia, ending the Council's long silence on those grave situations.

*Continued*

7. The convening of five special sessions – the highest number in the Council’s history – showing that the Council can be responsive to grave situations like Myanmar, Sudan, Ethiopia, Israeli apartheid and Afghanistan.

**There were also a decent number of lowlights at the Human Rights Council over the course of the year. Three, in particular, stand out:**

1. Scandalous vote buying efforts and threats by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and allies to end the mandate of an eminent group of experts tasked with monitoring and reporting on the continuing humanitarian crisis in Yemen.
2. The failure of regional groups to put forward competitive slates for Human Rights Council elections, and the election of a number of States which manifestly fail membership criteria of upholding high human rights standards and cooperating with the UN.
3. The continued failure of the Council, and of the High Commissioner herself, to respond in a meaningful way to prima facie evidence of crimes against humanity in the Uyghur region and other widespread and systematic human rights violations in China.

**Together, these highlights and lowlights provide a number of lessons which should inform engagement and initiatives at the Council in 2022 and beyond:**

1. The importance and impact of civil society participation and coalitions at the Council, especially that of rights holders, victims and representatives of affected communities. Their mobilisation, testimony and powerful stories were critical to action on systemic racism, Israel/OPT, and the recognition of the right to a healthy environment, among others.
2. The importance of strategy, ambition and commitment, even in the face of setbacks. While the special session on Afghanistan did not result in the establishment of an international accountability mechanism such as required by the gravity and urgency of the situation, progressive States and civil society were able to regroup, strategise and mobilise to secure the establishment of a new Special Rapporteur’s mandate at the next ordinary session of the Council. In a similar vein, the bitter defeat of the resolution on Yemen and betrayal of the Yemeni people must be used as motivation to strengthen resolve and pursue further action rather than a reason to diminish ambition and accept impunity.
3. The need for and value of institutional work to ensure that the Human Rights Council is safe, accessible, responsive and effective for national-level rights holders and defenders, and equally to ensure that, in addition to maintaining effective modalities for virtual participation, NGOs are able to access and participate in meetings and negotiations in person on equal terms with diplomats and other stakeholders.



**Adélaïde ETONG**  
@Adelaide\_ISHR

The @UN\_HRC must take bold action and address past and present gross human rights violations against black people in the USA, Latin America and the 🌍. It’s past time to adopt a mechanism to enhance accountability, justice & redress to victims & survivors  
#BlackLivesMatter  
#HRC47



4. Without whitewashing the Council, the importance of propagating a narrative that contributes to the Human Rights Council being, and being perceived to be, legitimate, influential and effective, rather than a self-defeating and self-fulfilling narrative of human rights institutions as polarised, divided or ineffectual.
5. The power and potential of small States, especially working collaboratively with civil society coalitions. The resolution on the environment was led by Costa Rica and a cross-regional group, the climate change resolution was led by the Marshall Islands and a cross-regional group, and the joint statement on Egypt was led by Finland, in each instance in close partnership with civil society. The leadership of such States can assist to ensure that issues are dealt with on their merits rather than on the basis of political or ideological alignments.

“ What is needed from the international community in general, and from the UN in particular, is a **concrete, coherent and unified voice in favour of the protection of human rights defenders, and the safeguarding of fundamental liberties, civic space and human dignity.** ”

ROSANA LEZAMA SANCHEZ, VENEZUELAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER, CENTRO PARA LOS DEFENSORES Y LA JUSTICIA (CDJ) / OBSERVATORIO VENEZOLANO DE CONFLICTIVIDAD SOCIAL (OVCS) / CENTRO DE DERECHOS HUMANOS DE LA UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA ANDRÉS BELLO (CDH-UCAB).