

MESSAGE FROM CHAIRPERSON AND DIRECTOR

Dear friends

Almost 30 years ago, Black poet, scholar and woman human rights defender **Sonia Sanchez** alluded to the preamble and promise of the United Nations Charter, when she wrote:

if **we the people** work, organize, resist, come together for peace, racial, social and sexual justice
it'll get better
it'll get better.

Invoking the metaphor of fire, and recalling torch bearers from Queen Nzingha to Fannie Lou Hamer to Nelson Mandela, she urged us to 'catch the fire', 'be the fire' and 'pass it on'.

Three decades on, Sanchez's hope and resolve were reflected in the words of **22-year-old Youth Laureate poet Amanda Gorman** at the US presidential inauguration. Calling for solidarity and ambition following the defeat of a despotic candidate and attempted insurrection, Gorman reminded us:



There is
always light,
if only we're
brave enough
to see it.

If only we're
brave enough
to be it.

Read together, Sanchez and Gorman help us to understand that to defend human rights is an act of bravery and solidarity and, above all, an act of hope and resolve. Hope for a future in which all peoples and communities enjoy freedom, dignity, justice and peace. And resolve to work, individually and collectively, to realise that vision.

Continued

It's been challenging to see Gorman's light at times over the last two years, obscured as it's been by the fog of the pandemic and continued violations against defenders in all regions.

But it's also been a period over which sparks were lit on key issues which we must now nurture and ensure fires of progress that long burn bright.

A spark was lit under the issue of racial justice, with the establishment of a historic expert mechanism to advance racial justice and equality in law enforcement, as well as a commission to inquire into the root causes of conflict and violence against the Palestinian people.

A spark was lit under the issue of sexual justice, with widespread mobilisation and calls for accountability in cases of sexual harassment and assault, as well as the release from arbitrary detention of a number of prominent women human rights defenders.

A spark was lit under the issue of climate justice, with the landmark recognition under international human rights law of the right to a healthy and sustainable environment, as well as the mandating of a new UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change.

And a spark was lit under the issue of social justice, with an increased number and diversity of persons prepared to speak up and take action against widespread and systemic violations in States including China, Egypt, Nicaragua, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, while in other States in Africa, Asia and Latin America progress was made in the legal recognition and protection of defenders.



Philip Lynch
Executive Director

Vrinda Grover
Chair of the ISHR Board



Here at ISHR we pledge to support defenders and to organise and work with them this year – and for many years ahead – to nurture and fuel these hopeful sparks for human rights and justice.

In solidarity with defenders, and with you.