

The background features a collage of stylized images. On the left, there are large, overlapping silhouettes of hands in shades of blue and black, some appearing to hold or support each other. On the right, there is a faded, purple-tinted image of a large crowd of people, possibly at a protest or public gathering. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of blue, purple, and black.

# POWER IN COALITION

ANNUAL REPORT 2023 FOR YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2022

 International Service  
for Human Rights



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International Service  
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# MESSAGE FROM CHAIRPERSON AND DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

Human rights and multilateralism are making a remarkable comeback.

Whether it's in their work to address the climate crisis or systemic discrimination, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine or China's repression of Uyghurs, activists around the world are coming together in powerful coalitions and turning to international human rights laws and systems to achieve justice and accountability. And while the threats and challenges remain enormous, **we're starting to win!**

In July 2022, a coalition of more than 1200 NGOs from almost 150 countries secured a **win for equality** with the renewal of a vital international mechanism to combat violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.



**Vrinda Grover**  
Chair of the  
ISHR Board



**Philip Lynch**  
Executive  
Director

Just a few weeks later, land, environment and indigenous rights defenders secured a **win for climate justice** with the landmark recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment at the UN General Assembly. Building on this momentum, international and national environmental and human rights organisations collaborated in an unprecedented way to use the COP27 climate change conference in Egypt to highlight repression in the country and put the protection of human rights defenders at the centre of the environmental justice agenda.

**Wins for accountability** were achieved in April and October when international, regional and national civil society organisations coordinated successful campaigns to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council and establish an independent international expert monitoring mechanism on the human rights situation in the country. The new Special Rapporteur on Russia – the first ever focused on a permanent member of the Security Council – provides a vital bridge between embattled domestic civil society and the global community.

International human rights organisations and Uyghur communities came together to score a **win against impunity** in August by securing the release of a landmark UN Rights Office report on the human rights crisis in Xinjiang, as well as the first ever formal initiative on China at the Human Rights Council just weeks later in September. This initiative demonstrated solidarity with Uyghur victims and communities, dispelled the dogma that China is inscrutable, and substantially increased international awareness and pressure to respond to the crimes against humanity for which Chinese authorities are responsible.

Finally, in November, civil society activists, UN Special Rapporteurs and progressive States came together in **solidarity with women human rights defenders** to call for a Special Session of the Human Rights Council to address the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran, particularly with respect to women and children. The subsequently mandated independent international fact finding mission is the first all-women commission of inquiry in the Council's history.

There are at least three factors that are common to each of these wins: the vital work of human rights defenders; the building of dynamic coalitions; and the strategic leveraging of international human rights law and mechanisms. With 2023 marking both the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR75) and the 25th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (HRD25), it is opportune to emphasise that **the work of defenders is integral to the realisation of human rights**. The promise of human rights will only ever be fulfilled when we work in coalition to ensure that both standards are respected and that defenders are protected.



Of course, none of the wins was a complete response to the violations suffered. Many egregious perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity and many victims of violations continue to be denied justice. Taken together, however, with the defeat of populist candidates from Brazil to Slovenia, brave protests for women's rights from Afghanistan to Iran, demands and initiatives to address systemic racism and the legacies of colonialism from Australia to the Netherlands, and communities coming together to support refugees from Ukraine or across the Mediterranean, they do suggest that this human rights comeback has a certain momentum. They certainly confirm that human rights defenders will never, ever give up.

With so much of the world's attention focused on Russia's war on Ukraine in 2022, it is perhaps important to reflect on some of the insights it has generated for ISHR. First and foremost, it has affirmed to us the indispensable role of human rights defenders in protecting rights, preventing conflict, pursuing accountability, and building a sustainable and inclusive peace. It has further affirmed that a genuine commitment to human rights requires dealing with situations on their merits; adopting a consistent, principled and non-discriminatory approach, which treats human rights considerations rather than economic or political interests as paramount, prioritises the protection of rights holders, defenders and victims of violations, underpinned by values of dignity, equality and solidarity. Positive aspects of the response to Russia's aggression which should be consistently adopted in other situations of conflict and occupation include: support for self-determination; international solidarity and resource mobilisation; targeted sanctions against those responsible for mass atrocities; support for refugees, **without discrimination**; and coordinated efforts at the international, regional and national levels to promote accountability and combat impunity. Finally, as Europe and other regions are afflicted by an energy crisis and food insecurity associated with Russia's war, it has become starkly clear that there are major risks and costs associated with doing business and developing dependencies on authoritarian regimes. The short-term costs associated with reducing these dependencies – whether on Russia's oil and gas or China's forced labour cotton from Xinjiang – can be mitigated by both States and businesses acting in coalition to share the burden.

In a recent conversation with Björk, environmental activist Greta Thunberg reflected that hope is not something you feel, but something you do. 'When people act,' she said, 'they create hope'. As we enter 2023, fueled by indignation and sustained by hope, ISHR's commitment is to provide solidarity to defenders, contribute to positive momentum and, with your support, achieve even more significant human rights wins!

**IN  
SOLIDARITY  
WITH  
DEFENDERS  
AND WITH  
YOU.**

**UDHR75+  
HRD25=  
100%  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS!**

