

# DECLARATION +25: STRENGTHENING PROTECTIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE MODERN ERA

The Declaration +25 supplements and expands on the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders of 1998 by filling gaps and addressing new concerns that have arisen since its implementation. The 1998 Declaration established a core framework for recognising the rights and obligations of human rights defenders (for the purposes of this document, 'defenders' or 'HRDs'). The Declaration +25 expands on this by addressing concerns that were not anticipated at the time, such as corporate abuses, digital harassment, and transnational repression, among others.



The below table outlines a comparison between the UN Declaration on human rights defenders of 1998 (the Declaration or the UN Declaration) and the civil society Declaration +25 of 2024.

Aspect	UN Declaration on human rights defenders (1998)	Declaration +25 (2024)
Definition	Defines HRDs by their actions.  <i>'Art. 1 - Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels'</i>	Takes the same approach as the 1998 Declaration but proposes a clearer and broader definition of HRDs.  <i>'Art. 1. Any person who, individually or in association with others, or any group or organ of society that acts or seeks to act to promote, protect or strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, at the local, national, regional, and international levels.'</i>
Right to defend rights	Only tacitly acknowledged in the preamble and overarching principles of the Declaration.	Articles 2 and 3 explicitly recognise the right to defend rights.

<b>Environment for the defence of human rights</b>	<p>Art. 2.2 makes a <b>general call on States</b> to adopt all necessary steps <i>'to ensure that the rights and freedoms referred to in the present Declaration are effectively guaranteed.'</i></p>	<p>Art. 4 specifically recognises the <b>right to a safe and enabling environment</b> for the defence of human rights. It outlines the key elements of this environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. conducive legal, institutional, and administrative framework</li> <li>2. fight against impunity and access to justice for violations against defenders</li> <li>3. strong, independent, and effective national human rights institutions</li> <li>4. effective protection policies and mechanisms, including public support for the work of defenders</li> <li>5. special attention for risks and challenges faced by women defenders and those working on women's rights and gender issues</li> <li>6. non-state actors' respect and support of the work of defenders</li> <li>7. safe and open access to the united nations and international human rights bodies</li> <li>8. strong, dynamic, and diverse community of human rights defenders</li> </ol>
<b>Relation with other instruments</b>	<p>Arts. 3, 4, 19 and 20 reaffirm that domestic law and the HRD Declaration must be <b>interpreted and applied</b> in line with the UN Charter and other international human rights instruments.</p>	<p>Art. 12 goes further by mandating States to <b>adopt all necessary measures to give effect to the Declaration and Declaration +25</b>.</p>
<b>Coverage of rights</b>	<p>Articles 5-14 enshrine key <b>civil and political rights</b> and freedoms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ freedom of assembly, association, and expression</li> <li>■ to develop and advocate for new human rights ideas</li> <li>■ to participate in public affairs</li> <li>■ to an effective remedy, access to justice and to communicate with international bodies</li> <li>■ to receive and utilise resources</li> <li>■ to work</li> <li>■ to protest and oppose human rights violations</li> </ul>	<p>All rights of the UN Declaration on HRDs are reaffirmed in article 2 of the Declaration +25. Articles 9, 10, 11, 14 and 15 <b>expand on these rights</b> by enshrining the rights to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</li> <li>■ be free from restrictions when accessing resources and enjoying State support to access them</li> <li>■ access and respect for their work in conflict, post-conflict and crisis-affected settings</li> <li>■ diplomatic support</li> <li>■ support to HRDs on the move, displaced or exiled</li> </ul>

<b>Promotion and teaching of human rights</b>	Article 15 calls on States and other actors to <b>promote and facilitate the teaching of human rights.</b>	Article 12 on implementation of the Declaration and Declaration +25 calls on States to <b>take measures to disseminate and inform</b> about these instruments.
<b>Limitations on rights</b>	Article 17 sets out the <b>requirements for limitations on human rights:</b> legality, proportionality and necessity.	Article 5, on <b>protection against stigmatisation and criminalisation</b> , elaborates on the prohibition of States to abuse the law in a way contrary to international law in order to arbitrarily restrict the rights of HRDs.
<b>Role of non-state actors</b>	Article 18 explains in a succinct manner the <b>role of</b> individuals, groups, institutions and other <b>non-state actors</b> in promoting human rights.	Articles 17, 18 and 19 go beyond the original Declaration by <b>outlining specific responsibilities and obligations of non-state actors</b> , related to the defence of human rights.
<b>Digital rights</b>	No mention of digital rights.	Multiple considerations to digital rights, both from the perspective of access to information and communication technologies (art.9) and from the right to protection from digital attacks and violence (arts 7, 16).
<b>Global cooperation</b>	Preamble and Article 18 encourage global cooperation.	Outlining clearer pathways for global cooperation and diplomatic protection of HRDs, particularly in cross-border crises, making international collaboration more actionable.  Specifically outlines the State obligation to address <b>transnational repression</b> and to <b>guarantee the safe movement and passage</b> of HRDs.
<b>Intersectional approach</b>	No mention of intersectionality.	Intersectionality is key to the new document. It emphasises that <b>defenders confront specific risks because of who they are</b> (their gender, race, gender identity, ethnicity, etc...) <b>and what they do</b> (areas of work, such as LGBTQ or women rights). Articles 4, 5 and 6 acknowledge the difficulties that some groups face and call for tailored protection to account for these layered risks, for example, through collective protection for groups and communities of HRDs (such as indigenous peoples) who exercise their rights in a collective manner but also suffer risks and violations in this way.
<b>Enforcement mechanisms</b>	No explicit mention.	Articles 12 and 13 explicitly call for <b>constant monitoring and reporting</b> , as well as enforcement at many levels (national, regional, and international).
<b>Civil Society Engagement</b>	Broadly recognises the role of civil society in articles 10,11 & 18.	Gives civil society a more central role, emphasising its importance in policy development, monitoring, and ensuring the protection of HRDs. Articles 10 and 15 emphasise the importance of States including civil society in <b>policy making, protection measures, and emergencies.</b>