United Nations A/HRC/61/40

General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 January 2026

Original: English

Human Rights Council
Sixty-first session
23 February–2 April 2026
Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Defending dignity and claiming rights: human rights defenders hold firm to universal values as others desert them

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor

Summary

In the present report, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, presents the voices of human rights defenders to the Human Rights Council, against a backdrop of increasing challenges to human rights and the international human rights framework. The 300 submissions from defenders in 82 countries and territories provide an overview of how they are navigating these challenges. The Special Rapporteur explores what motivates people to exercise their right to promote, protect and defend human rights, despite the risks that they face, and examines the effectiveness and efficiency of the international mechanisms designed to provide support to human rights defenders. She concludes the report with recommendations to various international actors based on what defenders themselves see as most necessary in this moment of crisis.

I. Introduction

> "For us, defending human rights is not just a legal or civic activity, but a moral and humanitarian duty and a means of protecting the future of coming generations from falling back into the cycle of violence, marginalization and exclusion."
>
> Human rights defender, Iraq

1. The internationally recognized right to defend human rights, as articulated in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders) of 1998, is under strain. The trend of democratic backsliding over the past decade[1] has narrowed the space in which human rights defenders have to work, while the risks that they face remain severe. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least 625 human rights defenders and media workers were killed or disappeared in 2024,[2] the highest number ever recorded. At the same time, the international system designed to promote, protect and fulfil human rights has been increasingly called into question by human rights defenders themselves over its continued failure to deliver, as States routinely flout and attack international law and undermine the integrity of the human rights framework.[3] Although defenders have always accused States of demonstrating double standards in their approaches to human rights, this situation has been exacerbated in recent years by the particularly blatant displays of such double standards. Added to this are the cataclysmic funding cuts to the human rights ecosystem introduced in 2024 and 2025 by a number of donor countries, most significantly the United States of America.[4] These cuts have left many human rights defenders less safe, less able to do their work and less hopeful in their ability to deliver on the promise of human rights.

2. Given these headwinds, the Special Rapporteur wished to hear directly from human rights defenders and amplify their voices to States whose actions have so profoundly affected them. The present report, submitted to the Human Rights Council in accordance with resolution 52/4, contains a snapshot of how defenders are faring, drawn from 300 submissions from 82 countries and territories.[5] Although their motivations to defend human rights differ, the Special Rapporteur finds a near universal belief in the right of human beings to live with dignity as a key factor, directly echoing article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the words of the Angolan human rights defender organization, Kutakesa: "our motivation for defending and promoting human rights stems from the belief that human dignity must be protected in all circumstances, regardless of social position, gender or political affiliation".[6]

3. The Special Rapporteur discusses the unshakeable motivations of human rights defenders and explores why so many people have been drawn to this work, despite the

[1] A.L. Comstock and S. Kahn-Nisser, "Introduction to symposium: human rights and democratic backsliding", *Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 24, No. 1.

[2] See www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/09/human-rights-healing-our-fractured-world.

[3] See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/us-sanctions-icc-officials-undermine-independence-tribunal-and-justice.

[4] See www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/06/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_e161f0c5/full-report.html.

[5] Submissions came from human rights defenders in or working on: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, China, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Serbia, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, Türkiye, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States, Uzbekistan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe, State of Palestine and Taiwan Province of China. See www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-human-rights-defenders/annual-thematic-reports.

[6] Submission from Kutakesa, Angola.

profound risks that often accompanies it. She also discusses how some of that work is under serious threat, including as a result of funding cuts and legislation adopted that prohibits or heavily taxes foreign funding to defenders, in direct contravention of article 13 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

4. The Special Rapporteur further highlights what is being lost due to the reduced capacity of defenders to protect, defend and promote human rights. Although most individuals exercise their right to defend human rights outside of a structured organizational framework and may rarely, if ever, have received financial support, all defenders are potentially affected by the sweeping budget cuts, because they weaken the networks and organizations that defenders can turn to in moments of crisis.

5. In such a context, the Special Rapporteur articulates how societies are worse off, while risks to human rights defenders escalate. In a confidential submission from Mali, a defender noted: "Funding cuts do not just mean 'doing less', but 'doing less well and in a more risky way'. We have shifted from prevention to emergency response, like 'disaster medicine'."[7] With resources stretched so thin, the Special Rapporteur warns of a potential coming mental health crisis among defenders as a result of burnout and the scrapping of programmes offering psychosocial support.

6. The Special Rapporteur outlines how most, though not all, human rights defenders maintain faith and find relevance in the international standards as laid out in the declarations, covenants and treaties that shape international human rights law. These standards continue to anchor their work and provide them with a moral compass, a legal framework and a common language. She analyses the international mechanisms designed to protect human rights defenders, their effectiveness and their ease of access.

7. The Special Rapporteur closes with recommendations to various international actors based on what defenders themselves see as most necessary in this moment of crisis.

II. Motivations and spirit

> **"**[We are] motivated by the conviction that every person should live in dignity and enjoy the same rights without distinction. Our commitment has been strengthened by the repeated injustices suffered by women, young people, sexual minorities and human rights defenders themselves."
>
> Organisation pour la réflexion et l'action féministe, Côte d'Ivoire

8. Although 2023 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur notes that the rights contained in it remain far from universally recognized, understood or accepted. For advocating for these rights, defenders are routinely accused of "promoting a foreign agenda",[8] "imposing foreign values",[9] or "collaboration with foreign entities",[10] yet as explained by a children's rights defender in Somalia: "I defend human rights because I cannot stand by while children are cut or married off before they even become teenagers. For me, this is not 'Western ideology', as extremists accuse – it is simply love, dignity and the right to a future."[11]

9. A belief in the right of everyone to live in dignity is deeply held by many human rights defenders and drives them in their work. For Nural Amin, a Rohingya activist, seeing his community stripped of this dignity propelled him to human rights advocacy: "I have witnessed my people denied citizenship, freedom of movement, access to education and the right to live in dignity. I was raised in an environment where discrimination was normalized, where entire villages were subjected to collective punishment and where silence meant

[7] Confidential submission from Mali.
[8] Submission from Nazish Saddique and Fazl Ullah, Pakistan.
[9] Submission from Monirul Islam, Bangladesh.
[10] Submission from Mozamul Ali, Chad.
[11] Submission from Somalia.

survival … I promote human rights because I know the price of their absence: statelessness, displacement and generational trauma."[12]

10. In the vast majority of cases, individuals are motivated to begin human rights work for three main reasons, all relating to experiences of injustice. Starting out, they are often unaware of international law or human rights standards but are reacting to an inherent sense that the abuse that they have witnessed is wrong. Only at a later stage does the language of international human rights sometimes help to connect them to a global movement.

11. Many begin down the path of human rights defence on account of a human rights violation experienced by themselves or their family and subsequent unsuccessful efforts to obtain justice. Hamid Reza Farahani, an Iranian human rights defender forced to seek exile in Türkiye, recounts how he became a children's rights defender: "I am the father of a young girl who was a victim of serious violations of child rights in [the Islamic Republic of] Iran. My efforts to advocate for and defend her not only went unanswered, but [were] also met with threats and severe repression against myself and my family. This bitter experience made me believe that defending human dignity, especially children's rights, is a personal and human duty. Today, I am the voice of my child and children who cannot scream."[13]

12. Ali Awad from Tuba in the South Hebron Hills in the Occupied Palestinian Territory described how defending human rights became the only option for him, driven by the need to protect not only his own rights, but also those of his community in the face of constant oppression: "The motivation is coming from inside the house … Every basic thing is violated, even water, roads, houses, education, safety. As a human, you exist with a circle around you – environment, family, community – and here that circle is under threat of death and erasure … Activism here is not a choice, it is a necessity. I left my childhood dreams and became a full-time activist, doing night shifts, documenting, doing legal work for my own village."[14]

13. For others, witnessing systemic violations and the negative impact that this has on society proves to be a motivating factor. Rida Benotmane, a human rights defender from Morocco, described how his commitment began: "As a teenager, I saw families silenced after arbitrary arrests, young people convicted for simply expressing their opinions and marginalized political movements deprived of their fundamental rights." This experience convinced him that using his voice to speak "can save lives, restore rights and nurture hope for a more just future".[15]

14. Environmental human rights defenders point to systemic violations of the right to a clean and healthy environment, including the degradation of nature by State and non-State actors, and the consequent effect on communities, as a motivation for beginning human rights work. Pablo Lopez Alavez, one such defender who is currently serving a 30-year prison sentence in Mexico for his environmental activism, sees a responsibility towards future generations: "I have no regrets about being a defender of nature. Everything I have done has been for the sake of my children's and grandchildren's future – and my community's future. The water that comes down to the village comes from the hill that we protect. Our grandparents protected it; they died, but we came along. We are just passing through, but our children will be left behind."[16]

15. Another widely attributed motivation is seeing the oppression of a cohort of society discriminated against because of who they are. This is true for those who fight for Indigenous People's rights, as relayed by a Catholic priest in Ecuador, who wrote: "My struggle became much more personal, or more radical, when I arrived in the Amazon and saw the enormous

[12] Submission from Nurul Amin, also known as Saya Win Naing, a Rohingya human rights defender based in Australia.

[13] Submission from Hamid Reza Farahani, Islamic Republic of Iran (based in Türkiye).

[14] Submission from the Human Rights Defender Fund quoting Ali Awad.

[15] Submission from Rida Benotmane, Morocco.

[16] Alejandro Santos Cid, "Dentro de la cárcel con Pablo López Alavez, 13 años preso por un crimen que no cometió: "Espero que mi voz llegue a los oídos de López Obrador", *El Pais*, 31 July 2023, available from https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-07-31/dentro-de-la-carcel-con-pablo-lopez-alavez-preso-politico-espero-que-mi-voz-llegue-a-los-oidos-de-lopez-obrador-y-tome-cartas-en-el-asunto.html.

abuses suffered by Indigenous Peoples and communities as a result of oil spills. I was not aware of this reality before."[17] It is true for women's rights defenders, who, in country after country, describe human rights violations against women as the reason they started to defend human rights. The human rights defenders in the Archana Women's Centre in Kerala, India, saw gender-based violence on a daily basis but: "working with women, youth and families has shown us how defending rights is not abstract – it can transform someone's safety, health and opportunities."[18] It is also true for the many individuals and organizations working for the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. Helena Maleno, one such defender who works to protect migrants' rights at the Spain-Morocco sea border, identified the growing persecution of migrants as a motivator for her work: "Global political trends that criminalize migrants make the work of defending rights essential to safeguarding, first and foremost, the right to life, and [we] demand that States take responsibility for protecting this right."[19]

16. The Special Rapporteur takes this opportunity to remind States that human rights defenders begin their work not as individuals beholden to "Western ideology", or who are "anti-development" or "extremists" or "terrorists", as they are so often accused of being, but as a result of injustice in their own countries and their belief in the dignity of every person. This work tends to continue when injustice festers, as their Governments fail to deliver accountability for or put an end to widespread violations. The Crew Against Torture in the Russian Federation captured this when writing: "Understanding that torture is not only a personal tragedy, but also a systemic problem within law enforcement and detention systems, motivates us to pursue broader reforms."[20]

A. Resilience and risk

17. Exercising the right to defend rights continues to be a highly risky activity in many States. The litany of risks faced by human rights defenders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo exemplifies this. The organization Aide rapide aux victimes des catastrophes lists killing, death threats, physical assault, extortion, kidnapping and torture by all sides of the conflict as risks that they must face in carrying out their human rights work in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The organization persists because their "work is an effective way to contribute to the promotion of women's rights, particularly those of young girls who are victims of early and forced marriage and early pregnancy. The fight for girls' rights in South Kivu is a significant relief for them."[21]

18. Continuing to operate in such conditions necessarily means living with fear, yet many human rights defenders draw strength and gain resilience from their belief in human rights as a means to deliver dignity, equality, respect and lasting change. The Special Rapporteur recalls Anna Politkovskaya, shortly before she was murdered, speaking of the duty she felt to report on the massive human rights violations occurring during the second Chechen war: "So each time I go there, people tell me things. They do so in the sincere hope that, if I record what is actually happening, it will lead to change, to peace. Obviously, I am not to blame for what is going on, but the more I think about it, the more I would be betraying these people if I walked away. The only thing to do is to take this to the bitter end, so that no one can say that, when things became difficult, I ran away."[22]

19. In living by their convictions, human rights defenders provide examples to society at large of what a world envisioned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights could look like in practice. Against their better judgment, they walk on air to take a leap of faith. They leave a legacy behind them that continues to inspire new generations of activists and provides vital continuity to the human rights movement more broadly. In the 78 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, defenders have helped to embed

[17] See Caritas Ecuador and FIAN Ecuador, "La lucha por la libertad, la dignidad y la vida: diagnóstico sobre la situación de personas defensoras de derechos en el Ecuador".
[18] Submission from the Archana Women's Centre, Kerala, India.
[19] Submission from Helena Maleno, Spain.
[20] Submission from the Crew Against Torture, Russian Federation.
[21] Submission from Aide rapide aux victimes des catastrophes, Democratic Republic of the Congo.
[22] Anna Politkovskaya, quoted on the Human Rights Defender Memorial Monument, Dublin.

awareness of those rights such that, today, a failure to defend them signifies a failure of humanity. As highlighted by Tbilisi Shelter City in Georgia: "in the context of a human rights crisis and instability not only in the region, but also globally, the protection of rights and freedoms becomes not just a professional task, but an ethical choice."[23]

III. Funding cuts and restrictions: what is being lost

> "For grass-roots communities, funding cuts are not abstract; they translate into lives lost, health deteriorated, and defenders exposed without protection."
>
> Suar Perempuan Lingkar Napza Nusantara, Indonesia

20. The Special Rapporteur acknowledges that a great number of human rights defenders do their work voluntarily, driven by the motivations outlined above. It is also true that others are part of structured organizations which require funding to deliver their vital services, including emergency response to individual defenders at immediate risk. The depth and severity of the funding cuts introduced by a number of States in 2024 and 2025 have delivered a series of shocks to the human rights defender ecosystem and its ability to provide protection. In response to a question in the Special Rapporteur's call for input for the present report, in which she asked human rights defenders if they had been affected by funding cuts over the previous 12 months, 77 per cent of respondents indicated that they had.

21. While such cuts are being implemented, the political environment for human rights defenders to work in many regions is deteriorating. One signifier of this is that access to remaining resources, notably foreign funding, is being made progressively more difficult.

22. So-called "foreign agent laws" continue to proliferate, including in Georgia, where in 2025, the Foreign Agents Registration Act was signed into law. The non-governmental organization Sapari, which advocates for women's rights and runs shelters for victims of gender-based violence in the country, has been left largely unable to operate as a combined result of this legislation, funding cuts, the freezing of bank accounts and a campaign of criminalization that it faces. The organization is "unable to pay staff, sustain operations or provide timely assistance to survivors of violence".[24]

23. In Peru, the 2025 law establishing the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation dramatically increased government control over organizations in receipt of foreign funding. It requires such non-governmental organizations to seek prior authorization from the State in order to carry out projects. Red Muqui, a network of organizations that protects the rights of communities affected by large-scale mining, notes that the consequences of this law are twofold: "on the one hand, it weakens the capacity of organizations to provide effective protection against State aggression and illicit economies; and, on the other hand, it restricts the right of access to justice for communities that depend on [our] support."[25] Over 60 States Members of the United Nations have now reportedly introduced legislation that bans, limits or carries consequences for non-governmental organizations receiving foreign funding.[26]

A. Impact of funding cuts on human rights defenders

24. The consequences of funding cuts and reduced access to funding for human rights defenders are already being deeply felt. This is most evident in five main areas.

1. Reduced emergency assistance

25. Human rights organizations routinely intervene to offer protection when individuals are at immediate risk because of their human rights work. This is often a combination of

[23] Submission from the Tbilisi Shelter City, Georgia.
[24] Submission from Sapari, Georgia.
[25] Submission from Red Muqui and Kené Institute for Forest and Environmental Studies, Peru.
[26] David Ireland, "Known Foreign Contribution Laws 2025", World Habitat, available from https://9ba98c9995b36e2d6fac.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Foreign-Contribution-Laws-Update.pdf.

temporary relocation to a safe house and the provision of solidarity and accompaniment, travel and accommodation costs for an individual defender to leave their area or immediate medical assistance.

26. The Somos Defensores programme in Colombia is a collaboration of three organizations working to support human rights defenders at risk and whose work over the past five years has "has helped save the lives of 189 [defenders] in Colombia through direct protection". The volume of cuts to non-governmental organizations in the country, however, has resulted in a huge increase in requests for support from the programme from organizations which have had their funding cut. This has left Somos Defensores "unable to provide protection assistance to leaders at risk".[27]

27. A defender of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights from Ethiopia, who has established a clandestine support network for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals in the Amhara region describes how, as a human rights defender at risk, the funding crisis is affecting him: "A lack of accessible emergency funds means I cannot access safe housing, relocation options or essential medical care for my mental health. This funding gap is not an abstract concept; it prevents me from surviving and continuing my work. It has forced me to remain in an active conflict zone where I face dual threats from general violence and targeted anti-LGBTQ+ persecution."[28]

2. Reduced provision of psychosocial support

28. Organizations have been forced to limit or cancel their provision of psychosocial support to other defenders, victims of violations and their communities more broadly. This was flagged as a major consequence of the cuts by human rights defenders in numerous countries.

29. Women in Afghanistan have been subjected to multiple and systematic human rights violations and indignities since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, leading to a situation characterized as "gender apartheid" by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan.[29] A women-led Afghan non-governmental organization had been providing psychological services to women and children in Afghanistan "who are under severe psychological pressure due to deprivation, violence, discrimination and social crises". Budget cuts have resulted in these services being suspended or limited at a time when "the need for these services is greater than ever".[30]

3. Reduced capacity to provide legal aid

30. Efforts to achieve accountability and obtain justice have been badly affected by funding cuts, which have manifested in a much-reduced ability of defenders to offer free legal aid to other human rights defenders, victims of human rights violations or to marginalized communities seeking to assert their rights.

31. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM) in Serbia had to shut down a major free legal aid project which was making steps towards systemic change by creating a platform "for long-overdue reforms to the Law on Free Legal Aid". In contrast to previous efforts, for this project, the organization was working constructively with the Ministry of Justice "moving the system closer to its promise of equal access to justice for all".[31]

4. Reduced capacity for outreach, monitoring and documentation, particularly in isolated, remote and rural contexts

32. In her 2025 report to the Human Rights Council,[32] the Special Rapporteur highlighted the protection gaps and additional risks faced by human rights defenders working in isolated, remote and rural contexts. She noted that such defenders often suffered from a lack of support

[27] Submission from the Somos Defensores programme, Colombia.
[28] Submission from Ethiopia.
[29] See A/HRC/59/25.
[30] Submission from Afghanistan.
[31] Submission from Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM), Serbia.
[32] A/HRC/58/53.

mechanisms, transportation links, media coverage, local police presence, Internet access and appropriate service providers. Some of these gaps are now being widened by the reduced capacity of defenders and organizations to conduct field visits, engage in monitoring and documentation and carry out training outside of major cities.

33. A human rights defender whose organization monitors human rights violations in Mali writes that one of the biggest impacts has been the deterioration in the quality of their data: "Without the means to travel to the field, we are dependent on the telephone. Our reports contain fewer direct testimonies and are therefore less effective for advocacy. This weakens our credibility. The greatest risk is organized silence due to a lack of resources."[33]

5. Reduced capacity to promote women's rights

34. Human rights defenders working on women's rights have also reported a significant knock-on effect on their ability to continue empowerment and awareness-raising activities. This impact is particularly concerning given the escalating backlash against women's rights globally.[34]

35. The Kawish Resource Centre, an organization in Lahore, Pakistan, working on the protection of the rights of women, children and marginalized communities, among other areas, has been forced to cut its work on women's empowerment, "particularly in rural areas".[35] In Cameroon, the non-governmental organization Sourires de Femmes, which provides refuge to women and children who are victims of violence and promotes women's rights, had received confirmation of a grant to fund a project supporting women's political participation in the countryside, before the donor contacted the organization to announce that the funding was being withdrawn.[36] Women's empowerment initiatives have also had to be scaled back in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, as a result of funding cuts.[37]

B. How human rights defenders mitigate impacts

36. Human rights defenders have shown considerable resilience, innovation and creativity in their attempts to overcome the significant challenges caused by such a huge withdrawal of funding from the human rights ecosystem. Many noted their use of free online tools, including artificial intelligence,[38] to assist with the workload, including organizing and campaigning, while others have transformed in-person workshops into online clinics which can be recorded for later reuse.

37. There is consensus among human rights defenders, however, that the efforts they are making are stopgap, short-term measures which are not sustainable. In human rights organizations, staff layoffs have been widespread. Furthermore, as so many defenders report taking on largely increased workloads to cover gaps – often on reduced or no salaries – the Special Rapporteur is concerned that the community faces serious risk of exhaustion and stress-related mental health difficulties. Kelsey Brookes, a woman human rights defender in Nigeria, remarks: "We are doing more with less, burning ourselves out in the process."[39] Even more worrying is the situation cited by the Kené Institute for Forest and Environmental Studies in Peru, which noted that, because of the cuts: "In many cases, we have had to sacrifice protection measures for the institution's staff in order to continue with cases."[40]

[33] Submission from Mali.
[34] See www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2025/03/one-in-four-countries-report-backlash-on-womens-rights-in-2024.
[35] Submission from Kawish Resource Centre, Pakistan.
[36] Submission from Sourires de Femmes, Cameroon.
[37] Submission from Nurul Amin.
[38] Submission from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, Zimbabwe.
[39] Submission from the Stag Initiative, Nigeria.
[40] Submission from the Kené Institute for Forest and Environmental Studies, Peru.

1. Prioritization of the most essential programmes

38. One of the most common responses to the funding cuts has been a reduction in the levels of support offered by defenders and organizations. Non-governmental organizations have been forced to focus on the most critical or most urgent work.

39. The Belarusian Lithuania-based organization Respect Protect and Fulfil, which uses international legal mechanisms to pursue accountability for human rights violations in Belarus, has undertaken "a rigorous prioritization of our workload and a necessary reduction in operational scope. We are concentrating our severely limited resources exclusively on mission-critical tasks and core projects."[41]

40. The Equal Rights for All Movement in Namibia is prioritizing work that has "the most immediate impact on marginalized communities, such as health service access, legal literacy and empowerment initiatives for key populations".[42]

2. Building solidarity and expanding social outreach

41. A silver lining that has emerged from the funding cuts has been an increased engagement by human rights defenders and organizations across thematic lines, resulting in broader-based alliances. Henry Muzuwandile Sakala, a human rights defender in Zambia, highlights how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights organizations have reached out to feminist, youth and disability rights groups, among others. This has allowed them to "pool resources and align advocacy agendas", while reducing "duplication and amplifying collective impact".[43]

42. Human rights defenders have also viewed the funding cuts as a motivation to more deeply engage with their communities and supporters. The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey emphasizes that, although many sacrifices were required by its staff and volunteers, it sees this moment as an "opportunity for Human Rights Foundation of Turkey to stretch its muscles for further organizing solidarity and volunteerism".[44]

3. Diversification of funding sources

43. Many defenders have tried to make up for the loss of longer-term core support by applying for emergency funding, significantly smaller amounts of money designed to help human rights defenders to face immediate security challenges. The number of individuals and organizations doing this, however, has meant that there is a low success rate. A woman human rights defender from Yemen says that she has "applied for emergency and protection funds and tried to build a mix of small flexible grants and project-based funding. Unfortunately, nearly all applications were rejected."[45]

44. Others have turned to crowdfunding efforts[46] or community-based fundraising.[47] To try to mitigate the impact on the above-mentioned Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation Law, woman human rights defender, Milgaros Samilan, sister of a protesting medical student killed by the police in the 2023 protests, organizes "various self-help activities, such as chicken dinners, raffles and other fundraising initiatives" to sustain their movement for accountability.[48]

4. Income-generating projects

45. Another measure that some human rights defenders have adopted is the trialling of income-generating initiatives. A human rights defender organization in Kenya has "invested

[41] Submission from Respect, Protect, Fulfil, Belarus (based in Lithuania).
[42] Submission from Equal Rights for All Movement, Namibia.
[43] Submission from Latu Human Rights Foundation and the Center for Public Health Promotion, Zambia.
[44] Submission from Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, Türkiye.
[45] Submission from Yemen.
[46] Submission from Afghanistan.
[47] Submission from Yayasan Pesona Bumi Pasundan, Indonesia.
[48] Submission from Milagros Samilan, Peru.

in ecological farming" as a means of raising funds while also helping to secure the right to food for the communities that they work with.[49]

46. One Future Collective, a human rights and community-building organization in India, has developed online training courses on a wide variety of human rights issues, which can be purchased and followed at one's own pace.[50] Modules include "Introduction to feminist lawyering", "Introduction to business and human rights" and "Introduction to transformative justice".[51]

47. Woman human rights defender, Danilova R. Molintas, in the Philippines has drawn from the practice of lawyers in the country who mix pro bono work on human rights cases with corporate work. After losing a salaried position with an environmental network, she has continued to work in a voluntary capacity for local organizations while taking on paid work as a freelancer for clients in the United States and Europe. She says that, although these jobs are modest: "they are paid in dollars. The exchange rate allows me to get by almost comfortably, especially since I live simply and intentionally as a minimalist."[52]

IV. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights standards and mechanisms

> International human rights standards remain highly relevant. They provide a clear and universally recognized framework for protecting the rights and dignity of all individuals, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender [and] intersex people. These standards guide national advocacy, inform legal and policy reforms and offer a basis for holding States accountable when human rights are violated. They serve as both a reference point and a tool to ensure that our work aligns with internationally recognized principles of equality, non-discrimination and human dignity.
>
> Bilitis Resource Centre Foundation, Bulgaria

48. Despite the shocks to the international system, the proliferation of conflicts around the world and the de-prioritization of human rights by some States, human rights defenders from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe maintain a fundamental belief in, and adherence to, international human rights standards.

49. The standards set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the nine core human rights treaties remain a guiding light for human rights defenders, and many see it, in the words of Andrew Mafundo from Uganda, as one of their key tasks to "interpret these standards into practical rights that communities can claim, such as the right to clean water, to health and to a safe environment".[53] They provide a vital reference point to defenders whose legitimacy is often challenged, while also offering a basis for advocacy, a common language for dialogue with governments and avenues for accountability and justice. In the face of discrimination suffered by Dalits in Nepal, the Feminist Dalit Organisation draws on international standards to "give communities like ours a language to frame our struggles and a platform to hold the State accountable in both national and global arenas".[54]

50. Notwithstanding the broad support expressed for international human rights standards, a number of submissions questioned their credibility in the light of the mass crimes committed by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza, which have been found by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel to constitute genocide.[55] SHOAA for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization focusing on Algeria, reiterated a sentiment which the Special

[49] Submission from Madre, Inc., quoting a partner organization in Kenya.
[50] Submission from ILGA World Asia.
[51] See www.onefuturecollective.org/self-paced-courses/.
[52] Submission from Danilova R. Monlintas, Philippines.
[53] Submission from Andrew Mafundo, Executive Director, Citizens' Concern Africa, Uganda.
[54] Submission from the Feminist Dalit Organisation, Nepal.
[55] See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds.

Rapporteur has heard from numerous human rights defenders over the past two years. It says that: "the credibility of these standards is further undermined by the international community's inconsistent responses to major crises, most visibly in the context of ongoing wars, such as in Palestine. When grave violations are met with silence, double standards or political compromise, defenders begin to question whether the principles of universality and accountability truly apply to all."[56]

A. International mechanisms

> International mechanisms established to protect human rights defenders have, at times, provided meaningful support and visibility. Yet, their impact varies widely, depending on the political will of individual States. In some contexts, these mechanisms succeed in offering protection, but in others, governments disregard them, leaving defenders vulnerable to intimidation, harassment and serious threats. For these reasons, it is crucial to strengthen and adapt the current framework so that it can offer more consistent and effective protection for those who risk their safety to defend the rights of others.[57]
>
> Human rights defender, Myanmar

51. The primary responsibility to protect human rights defenders lies with States. However, as States increasingly abdicate this responsibility, defenders have looked more and more to international mechanisms for support. Their experiences suggest that, while some believe such mechanisms can be – and have been – effective in providing them with some protection and advocacy opportunities, many highlight shortcomings and express dissatisfaction.

52. The Special Rapporteur takes this opportunity to highlight that international mechanisms should never be regarded as a "one-stop shop" solution to human rights violations. Numerous human rights defenders recounted in their submissions episodes where they were at immediate risk and failed to get the intervention they were hoping for from international mechanisms. For the vast majority of international mechanisms, immediate protection is not within their mandate or capacity to deliver.

53. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that international mechanisms should be seen as one tool in a wider advocacy and protection toolbox that human rights defenders can deploy. As highlighted by multiple defenders, such mechanisms are most effective when combined with a variety of other strategies. In the words of the human rights organization Groupement La Vie pour tous in Benin, to give mechanisms the greatest chance of success: "they must be complemented by local initiatives: community solidarity, citizen mobilization, early warning systems, digital security and coordinated regional alliances".[58]

54. In urgent cases, it is defenders' local communities who are best placed to provide rapid response, as outlined by the Ghanian non-governmental organization Songtaba: "protection is often more immediate when local alliances, such as networks of civil society, [the] media and community leaders stand in solidarity."[59] International mechanisms can add to this response, but mechanisms cannot and should not be relied upon to protect human rights defenders "the way, say, a functioning national law or protective police force could".[60]

B. Positive experiences

55. In contexts where the space to work is extremely constricted, the capacity of international mechanisms to monitor human rights violations and abuses was welcomed. In a confidential submission from Nicaragua, the human rights defender noted that such

[56] Submission from SHOAA for Human Rights, Algeria.
[57] Submission from Myanmar.
[58] Submission from Groupement La Vie pour tous, Benin.
[59] Submission from Songtaba, Ghana.
[60] Submission from the Stag Initiative, Nigeria.

mechanisms: “have made it possible to highlight the serious human rights violations faced by defenders in Nicaragua. In a country where there is no freedom of expression, these bodies have been key in enabling defenders to raise their voices on behalf of victims of murder, kidnapping, imprisonment, exile and threats.”[61]

56. In Hong Kong, China, the deteriorating rule of law conditions and the narrowing of avenues to seek domestic accountability have meant that defenders are turning to international mechanisms. The Hong Kong Centre for Human Rights points out that “United Nations human rights mechanisms hold a unique position, because the treaties they monitor, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, [the] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [and the] Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, are legally binding on Hong Kong. Their findings not only carry moral authority, but can also influence local courts and advocacy strategies.”[62]

57. Raising cases of targeted human rights defenders in reports, communications to Governments or other actors or public statements can lead to a reduction in harassment or attacks against them. The Hungarian Helsinki Committee noted that: “inclusion of incidents in the [Secretary-General’s] annual reprisals report or the public statement of the Special Rapporteur on [the situation of] human rights defenders have led to an end to concerted attacks or reprisal in at least two accounts.”[63]

58. Human rights defenders also say that they have benefited from the credibility bestowed on them when a United Nations actor takes up their case. One such example is from the Philippines, where woman human rights defender Casselle Ton of the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance notes that: “a joint communication by special rapporteurs when colleagues were charged with rebellion, increased our legitimacy. We managed to fundraise to pay for bail and the campaign.”[64]

59. The use of mechanisms to increase the legitimacy of human rights defenders was highlighted by numerous submissions, including Maria Cal Xol, a Q’eqchi’ Mayan defender from Guatemala, who wrote that a 2018 visit by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and separate visits by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to her community had had this effect, in addition to linking her up with international actors.[65] A similar sentiment was expressed by Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil following the official visit to Brazil by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders in 2024 and subsequent report submitted to the Human Rights Council in 2025.[66] The Indigenous Peoples’ rights organization indicated that the recognition in the report of the connection between land rights and violence experienced by Indigenous communities was “significant and intensely used in national advocacy efforts in defence of Indigenous Peoples”. It further wrote that statements by the special procedures of the Human Rights Council had “contributed greatly to curbing anti-Indigenous rights initiatives” in the country.[67]

60. The use by the special procedures of social media to highlight more urgent risks faced by human rights defenders was welcomed and further encouraged. Aleida Quintana, a woman human rights defender working with Red Nacional de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos en México, recounted that: “social media posts prompting authorities to act are usually effective, so they need to do more of this.”[68]

[61] Submission from Nicaragua.
[62] Submission from Hong Kong Centre for Human Rights, Hong Kong.
[63] Submission from the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Hungary.
[64] Submission from Amnesty International quoting Casselle Ton, Philippines.
[65] Submission from Amnesty International quoting Maria Cal Xol, Guatemala.
[66] A/HRC/58/53/Add.2.
[67] Submission from Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil, Brazil.
[68] Submission from Amnesty International quoting Aleida Quintana, Mexico.

C. Shortcomings

1. Accessibility and speed

61. While some improvements have taken place in recent years, human rights defenders broadly agreed that, for those who are not connected to larger national, regional or international organizations, it was difficult to gain access to international human rights mechanisms. Numerous submissions described the process as technical and bureaucratic and called for the simplification of procedures to make the mechanisms more inclusive.[69] Alfred Ocen, a human rights defender in Uganda remarked: "these systems are designed for diplomats and international non-governmental organizations not for front-line defenders."[70] A non-governmental organization in Greece indicated that, while: "these mechanisms are in principle open to civil society, in practice they are highly complex, resource-intensive and require legal expertise that we often lack. As a result, our participation has been limited: while we have occasionally made submissions, most of the time we lack the capacity to draft them."[71]

62. Others were highly critical of the limited number of languages in which complaints were accepted and called for the use of secure online translation services, while many also highlighted the lack of knowledge among human rights defenders or training provided on how to engage with the mechanisms. The feminist organization Sisma Mujer in Colombia indicated that: "many women human rights defenders in Colombia do not know how such mechanisms work, and they are also unclear about what type of complaints they can file and what the requirements are, a situation that is more evident in rural, Indigenous or impoverished contexts with limited access to education."[72] This lack of knowledge was demonstrated in submissions in which authors assumed that there was an obligation to exhaust domestic remedies before making a submission to special procedures.

63. Challenges were noted in gaining access to the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and in gaining accreditation at the Economic and Social Council. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has had its application deferred seven times over the past five years,[73] while the Lebanese organization SMEX received a response to its application 10 months after its 2024 submission, informing it that it would be considered in 2026.[74]

64. Delays in, or the absence of, a response or action by mechanisms were commonly cited as a major shortcoming, with some attributing them to the mechanisms' "lack of resources and infrastructure".[75] A number of human rights defenders reported failing to receive an acknowledgement or response after submitting a complaint, including Caiying Yang, who wrote: "From January to September 2024, I repeatedly sent emails to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reporting China's human rights violations and denial of medical treatment, but have not received any response. On 31 January 2024 and 15 August 2025, I submitted two urgent complaints to the United Nations special procedures, detailing the life-threatening conditions of my mother and sister in detention, but to this day, there has been no response."[76]

65. The Special Rapporteur understands the frustration of human rights defenders and others who commit time and resources to making a complaint but who receive no, or a much delayed, response. Although she has implemented the sending of an automatic response to all complaints received, she does note that, given the capacity constraints among the special procedures – a result of States cutting funding to the United Nations human rights budget allocations – it is impossible to respond to every submission.

[69] See, for example, the submission from Abdou Hassane Yacouba, Niger.
[70] Submission from Alfred Ocen, Uganda.
[71] Submission from Greece.
[72] Submission from Sisma Mujer, Colombia.
[73] Submission from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.
[74] Submission from SMEX, Lebanon.
[75] Submission from Human Rights Foundation.
[76] Submission from Caiying Yang, China.

66. The Special Rapporteur shares the frustration of the defenders who complained about the time that it takes for a communication to be sent. In an internal analysis that she undertook recently, she found that, of the 120 communications for which she led the drafting between January and October 2025, the median number of days that it took from the Special Rapporteur deciding to work on a case to the communication being sent to the permanent mission of the relevant State in Geneva or other relevant actors was 28 working days, or nearly six weeks. This is disappointing. The multiple layers of approval that communications of the special procedures must undergo delay the process. She attributes some of the delay to the practice which dictates that multiple mandate holders, who are all in different time zones, should join communications – thereby holding up the process to allow additional time for their input and analysis.

67. Delays are also caused by the failure of individuals and organizations making complaints to provide, at the time of sending, the explicit consent of the human rights defender who has been subjected to the alleged violation or that of their representative. Without such consent, no work on preparing a communication can commence. Furthermore, submissions which do not contain all the relevant information and evidence relating to the alleged violation also significantly slow things down. In the experience of the Special Rapporteur, receiving a response to follow-up questions to the source of a submission can be a lengthy process. This is frequently the case due to challenges communicating with defenders based in rural or isolated contexts who may not have reliable Internet access.

68. Such delays may not greatly affect mandates which focus mostly on laws and policies, and some of the impediments could be addressed by increased awareness of and training on how to interact with the special procedures.

69. However, the system as it is currently designed is not suitable for dealing with cases of human rights defenders who are at immediate risk.

2. Lack of binding power and follow-up

70. Many defenders believe that the utility of international mechanisms is severely undermined by the lack of enforcement measures. This is particularly noticeable in conflict, post-conflict and crisis contexts. Fadel Issam al-Muzaini, a human rights defender in Gaza, noted that: “My personal experience over the course of 23 months has revealed the ineffectiveness of these mechanisms, given Israel’s refusal to implement their decisions or recommendations.”[77] Huda al-Sarari, a woman human rights defender in Yemen, remarked that communications were “met with neglect” without consequence by the authorities,[78] while, in the Sudan, according to the human rights organization AWAFY, the continued litany of grave violations revealed the “lack of effective rapid intervention mechanisms”.[79]

71. Once an action by a mechanism is taken, failure to provide feedback to the victims of the violation or to follow up with the relevant government has also been criticised. The Nyakach Social Justice Centre in Kenya noted that, while communications from the special procedures could provide “temporary shielding through visibility”, that impact could “vanish without systematic follow-up”. Furthermore, the non-governmental organization lamented the 60-day confidentiality period before a communication was made public, which could mean that “defenders remain exposed while paperwork circulates”.[80]

72. In a submission from Oman, a defender complained of “radio silence” after having sent follow-up emails to a number of mechanisms, leading to a sense of “procedural abandonment”. The author urged United Nations agencies to “consider developing a publicly accessible (anonymized) complaint-tracking system, so defenders can verify whether their cases have been received, reviewed or acted upon”. Without such a system, trust is damaged and defenders are left in limbo.[81] The Special Rapporteur has tried to address these shortcomings by systematically returning to the source of a complaint 60 days after a

[77] Submission from Dr Fadel Issam al-Muzaini, State of Palestine.
[78] Submission from Huda Al-Sarari, Yemen.
[79] Submission from AWAFY, Sudan.
[80] Submission from Nyakach Social Justice Centre, Kenya.
[81] Submission from Oman.

communication has been issued to seek information on whether the situation for the human rights defender has improved, deteriorated or stayed the same since the government received the communication. She encourages her successor and other mandate holders to continue or begin this practice.

3. Lack of linkages with local civil society

73. As noted above, local networks routinely provide the most immediate and practical support when human rights defenders are in danger. There continues to be a disconnect, however, between international mechanisms and local networks. Human rights defenders urged these networks and mechanisms to develop closer links and greater collaboration between them.

74. Observatoire pour la défense des droits des personnes handicapées in the Democratic Republic of the Congo asserts that international mechanisms "struggle to produce tangible results" in Goma, where armed groups control parts of the territory. The organization described the need for the mechanisms to be "connected to local realities through local protection networks" and to ensure "enhanced follow-up on reported cases".

75. The distance between Geneva-based mechanisms and local human rights defenders is lengthened by the limited capacity that the mechanisms have to conduct outreach. Razafiarisoa Marie Nathassa, a woman human rights defender in Madagascar, wrote that: "Information, training and institutional support are needed to enable local actors to use these mechanisms."[82] While the Special Rapporteur applauds the efforts of a number of country and regional offices of OHCHR and international non-governmental organizations to provide training courses to defenders on the international mechanisms, she believes that more could be done by United Nations entities in countries with no OHCHR office but which have a United Nations presence, in keeping with the Secretary-General's call to action on human rights.

4. Intimidation and reprisals for cooperation with the United Nations in the field of human rights

76. Fear of intimidation and reprisals continues to dissuade human rights defenders from interacting with international mechanisms. Although there was no question about reprisals in the Special Rapporteur's call for input for the present report, this fear was specifically highlighted by defenders in a dozen countries. In one such submission, Mozamul Ali, a human rights defender from Chad, noted that contacting the United Nations was often interpreted by local authorities as "collaboration with foreign entities", thereby increasing the risks local defenders faced.[83] From the Secretary-General's annual reports on reprisals, it is evident that retaliation for interaction with the United Nations occurs in numerous States, in addition to those mentioned above.

77. A particularly egregious example occurred in 2025, when the Government of the United States sanctioned three widely-respected Palestinian human rights organizations – Al-Haq, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights – because of their work seeking accountability for the conduct of Israel in Gaza before the International Criminal Court. This followed earlier sanctions placed on the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, judges and prosecutors of the International Criminal Court judges and the Palestinian human rights organization Addameer.[84]

78. That such a blatant assault on the integrity of the International Criminal Court, a key pillar of the international accountability system, was met with a relatively weak response by the States which support that system demonstrates to human rights defenders that protection from reprisals remains distant. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, one of the sanctioned organizations, in State of Palestine argued that: "European Governments have barely reacted

[82] Submission from Razafiarisoa Marie Nathassa, Madagascar.

[83] Submission from Mozamul Ali, Chad.

[84] See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/un-experts-dismayed-us-sanctions-against-palestinian-human-rights.

to these sanctions … It is clear that European and Western States have a clear double standard when it comes to human rights defenders advocating for Palestinian human rights. International human rights standards should be applied equally across the board."[85]

79. Other human rights defenders similarly expressed a frustration that responses to reprisals were too often confined to statements or inclusion in the Secretary-General's annual reprisals report,[86] but without further specific action. A non-governmental organization in India, People's Watch, wrote that, although India had been named in multiple reports on reprisals, nothing had changed on the ground in terms of human rights defenders being targeted. Furthermore, the non-governmental organization wrote of its disappointment that, when the Secretary-General visited India in 2022, the issue of reprisals was reportedly not discussed. "This raises the question of what is the point of featuring in the Secretary-General's report on reprisals."[87]

V. Conclusions and recommendations

80. **The international system designed to protect and support human rights and human rights defenders is in crisis. The right to defend human rights, as articulated in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, is increasingly under threat. Despite great challenges – personal, financial and political – however, human rights defenders are continuing to deliver on the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but they are being let down by Member States. The Special Rapporteur calls upon Member States to renew their commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to recognize the vital role played by defenders in helping to make the rights contained therein a reality. In order to do this, they need support.**

81. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that Member States:**

(a) **Recommit to the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the integrity of international human rights law;**

(b) **Ensure that the nature of the response to violations of international human rights law is not dependent on the identity of the actor engaging in violations;**

(c) **Commit to strengthening the mechanisms designed to monitor and implement international human rights law, including by increasing accountability for violations and reprisals against human rights defenders for engaging with United Nations mechanisms;**

(d) **Revisit the extent of cuts to official development assistance budgets, following an assessment of how they are affecting human rights defenders, and make funding available for flexible core support to human rights organizations and for emergency response and psychosocial support for human rights defenders;**

(e) **Support efforts to develop local and national protection networks for human rights defenders;**

(f) **Introduce laws, policies and procedures to protect and support human rights defenders;**

(g) **Ensure adequate funding to the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, so that the mechanisms can faithfully fulfil the mandates given to them by the Council, and ensure that United Nations dues are paid on time;**

(h) **Refrain from introducing, or abolish, legislation criminalizing or curtailing the ability of human rights defenders to receive financial resources from abroad.**

[85] Submission from Al-Mezan, Palestine.
[86] See, for example, A/HRC/60/62.
[87] Submission from People's Watch, India.

82. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that the United Nations:**

(a) **Invest in, strengthen or expand local protection networks of human rights defenders in States where there is a United Nations presence;**

(b) **Increase outreach and awareness-raising activities on United Nations human rights mechanisms targeted at local civil society and human rights defenders;**

(c) **Make greater use of social media in condemning urgent threats to human rights;**

(d) **Strengthen accountability for intimidation and reprisals by Member States against human rights defenders for cooperating with the United Nations in the field of human rights.**

83. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that OHCHR:**

(a) **Simplify the procedure for submitting complaints to the human rights mechanisms and consider using secure translation tools to increase the number of languages in which complaints are accepted;**

(b) **For special procedure mandate holders dealing with individuals at risk, introduce shorter systemic deadlines for additional mandates to join a communication and streamline approval processes so as to ensure a faster response;**

(c) **Consider introducing a formal follow-up process for the special procedures whereby, once a period of time has passed, complainants can apply for an update on the status of their complaint;**

(d) **Strengthen the formal follow-up process with States whereby OHCHR country offices or field presences, where they exist, engage with the relevant State on the concerns expressed by special procedure mandate holders or other mechanisms;**

(e) **In States where OHCHR has a field presence, continue to conduct training for human rights defenders on how to gain access to international human rights mechanisms and engage with them on how to localize these instruments for their context.**

84. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that human rights defenders:**

(a) **Before submitting a complaint to a special procedure or another international human rights mechanism, be aware of what is realistic to expect from the mechanism;**

(b) **Ensure that the information provided, when making a submission, is targeted, specific, succinct and evidence-based;**

(c) **Ensure that the explicit consent of the human rights defender concerned is provided, when making a submission;**

(d) **Prepare a local advocacy and distribution plan for use, where the context allows for it, when a communication of a special procedure or the findings of another United Nations mechanism related to your situation is made public;**

(e) **Do not rely solely on an international human rights mechanisms to provide rapid practical support or funding in situations of immediate risk.**

85. **As this is her final report as mandate holder, the Special Rapporteur wishes to thank the thousands of human rights defenders who have generously given their time to meet with her since May 2020. She remains as inspired as ever by their dedicated service, persistence, compassion and humanity and believes that it is these qualities which will see them emerge and rise out of the human rights crisis that the international system is currently experiencing.**

86. **In closing, the Special Rapporteur would like to quote the words of imprisoned Emirati human rights defender, Mohamed al-Roken, who typifies for her the resilience of human rights defenders: "I am an optimist by nature. I imagine that the future is built on this idea of human rights and its culture. He who does not feel that he lives in a free society that makes him feel equal to others will feel that his humanity is incomplete. There is a saying that, in a confrontation between the river and the rock, the river always wins. Not because of its strength, but because of its perseverance. Those working for human rights … are not strong, but they have perseverance."**