

REPORT FROM THE 2015 DUBLIN PLATFORM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



Dublin Castle, 4-6 November 2015

what does front line defenders do?

Front Line, the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) established by charitable deed trust. It was founded in Dublin in 2001 with the specific aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk, people who work, non-violently, for any or all of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Front Line Defenders addresses the protection needs identified by defenders themselves.

Front Line Defenders provides rapid and practical support to at-risk human rights defenders including:

- grants to pay for the practical security needs of human rights defenders;
- provision of training and development of resource materials on security and protection, including digital security;
- international advocacy on behalf of human rights defenders at immediate risk;
- rest and respite, including the Front Line Defenders Fellowship;
- opportunities for networking and exchange between human rights defenders, including at the biennial Dublin Platform;
- the annual Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk;
- an emergency 24 hour phone line for human rights defenders operating in Arabic, English, French, Spanish and Russian;
- temporary relocation of human rights defenders in emergency situations.

Front Line Defenders promotes the protection of human rights defenders through its support for the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and other international and regional mechanisms. Front Line Defenders promotes respect for the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Front Line Defenders has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, partnership status with the Council of Europe and observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Front Line Defenders received the 2007 King Baudouin International Prize for Development.



On the cover: Kenita Placide, human rights defender from Saint Lucia, Mary Lawlor, Front Line Defenders Executive Director, Diane Marie Rodriguez Zambrano, human rights defender from Ecuador at the 2015 Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders.

TRUSTEES



Denis O'Brien (Chairman) is Chairman of the Digicel Group. He is one of Ireland's leading entrepreneurs with extensive investments across several sectors. Mr. O'Brien was voted Ireland's Entrepreneur of the Year in 1998 in the inaugural running of the worldwide competition organised and sponsored by Ernst & Young. Mr. O'Brien is also a director of a number of private companies which hold some of his other business interests including Quinta do Lago SA and Communicorp Group Limited. In 2000 he established The Iris O'Brien Foundation to assist disadvantaged communities in Ireland and internationally. He is co-founder of Front Line Defenders.



Kieran Mulvey is Chief Executive of the Irish Workplace Relations Commission and Consultant with the International Labour Organisation and the European Union.



Noeline Blackwell is outgoing Director of FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) and incoming CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. She is a Vice-President of The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).



David Sykes acts as an investment advisor to Island Capital Ltd and previously held positions in banking and stockbroking which included Trinity Bank Ltd and Dolmen Stockbrokers Ltd.



Jim Conway is the founder and Chairman of the Print & Display Group, one of Ireland's largest print companies. He also has a number of other media interests in Ireland and Eastern Europe.



Maria Mulcahy is the CEO of the Iris O'Brien Foundation and the Irish-based Head of Philanthropy for the Digicel Group. She was involved with "People in Need" from 1988 to 2000. She was responsible for organising the RTÉ telethons, which raised €28 million. She was Director of Fundraising for the 2003 Special Olympics World Games.



Mary Jane N. Real is a founding member and former Coordinator of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. A lawyer by profession, she was part of establishing the Alternative Law Groups network in the Philippines. She is a long-time advocate of women's rights having worked with women's rights and human rights organisations in Asia Pacific and internationally including as Regional Co-ordinator of Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.



Arnold Tsunga is Africa Director of the International Commission of Jurists. He was Executive Secretary of the Law Society of Zimbabwe and Executive Director of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. He was a joint winner of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2006.

ADVISORY COUNCIL



Michel Forst is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Secretary General of the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights. He is a former Board member of Front Line Defenders. He was the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti from 2008 to 2013. He was Secretary General of the Paris Summit of Human Rights Defenders and Director of the French section of Amnesty International.



Hina Jilani is an internationally known human rights lawyer and advocate for human rights defenders. She was the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders from 2000 to 2008. She and her sister Asma Jahangir co-founded the first all female legal practice in Pakistan and she is also one of the founders of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. She is a member of The Elders.



Maina Kiai is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. A lawyer trained at Nairobi and Harvard Universities, he has spent the last twenty years campaigning for human rights and constitutional reform in Kenya – notably as founder and Executive Director of the NGO Kenya Human Rights Commission, and then as Chairman of Kenya's National Human Rights Commission (2003-2008).



James L. Cavallaro is the Founding Director of the International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School, where he is also a professor of law. Prior to joining Stanford, he spent nine years on the faculty at Harvard Law School, where he also served as executive director of the Human Rights Programme. In June of 2013 he was elected to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).



Maryam Elahi is President and CEO of the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. For more than 25 years, she has served in positions of leadership in the international human rights community as an advocate, teacher, and grant-maker. She was previously the director of the International Women's Program at the Open Society Foundations.

fi FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

Registered Charity Number CHY 14029

FOREWORD

Established in 2002, the Front Line Defenders Dublin Platform takes place every two years and brings human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk to share experiences, learn from each other, acquire new skills and interact with decision makers from international and intergovernmental organisations. The overall aim of the event is to create a safe space where the voices of the HRDs are central – where their opinions are heard and their struggles and strategies can be shared to inform their peers and the work of Front Line Defenders going forward.

Each Dublin Platform is a unique event, powered by the extraordinary spirit of the HRDs in attendance, and the 2015 Dublin Platform was no exception. We were joined in Dublin by 111 HRDs from 98 different countries. 111 HRDs who refuse to accept injustice and who insist that human rights are non-negotiable. 111 HRDs who are relentless in their pursuit of human rights and who embody a quiet hope and heroism. It is this spirit that is captured so beautifully in these words of Northern Irish poet, Derek Mahon:

*“How should I not be glad to contemplate the clouds clearing
behind the window,
And a high-tide reflected in the ceiling?
There will be dying; there will be dying, but there is no need to
go into that.
The poems flow from the hand unbidden, and the hidden source
is the watchful heart.
The sun rises in spite of everything, and the far cities are beautiful
and bright.
I lie here in a riot of sunlight, watching the day break and the
clouds flying.
Everything is going to be all right.”*

Front Line Defenders endeavours to respond to the ever-changing reality on the ground for HRDs at risk, and with each Dublin Platform we strive to ensure that the agenda and the discussions address the newly emerging issues and challenges. In this 2015 report, for example, you will read about the learnings and outcomes of a panel entitled “Ultimate failure; the ongoing killing of human rights defenders”, which was introduced in response to the growing numbers of killings of HRDs and the ensuing impunity in these cases. Similarly, a panel discussion entitled “Circumvention, Flexibility and Resilience; continuing to work in spite of restrictive legislation” was introduced to the agenda this year to expand on the learnings and limitations which emerged from a 2013 panel entitled “Protecting and expanding an enabling environment for human rights defenders”.

While justice, freedom and human rights may never be easily achieved, as authoritarian regimes continue to invest huge efforts and resources into silencing, restricting and discrediting independent civil society, it is these courageous 111 HRDs and their colleagues who stand steadfast in their commitment to speaking out and defending the rights of others and who will ensure that these goals cannot be denied indefinitely.

To the dear HRDs who attended the 2015 Dublin Platform and all human rights defenders at risk around the world, we thank you for your continued persistence and determination to heal the pain and injustice inflicted on your communities with passion and compassion. You are our inspiration at Front Line Defenders – our *raison d’être*.

Mary Lawlor
Executive Director
Front Line Defenders



WE ARE ATTACKED BECAUSE WE ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK. WE WILL
CONTINUE TO DREAM AND SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER AS HUMAN BEINGS
ACROSS IDEOLOGIES AND RELIGIONS.
HRD. IRAQ

I SPEAK FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT SPEAK.
I WRITE FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT WRITE.
HRD. UGANDA

INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Dublin Platform, held in Dublin Castle from 4-6 November 2015, brought together 111 Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) from 98 countries to share and discuss their experiences and concerns.

The gathering was addressed by Mary Lawlor, Front Line Defenders Executive Director, Seán Sherlock TD, Irish Minister of State for Development, Trade Promotion and North-South Co-operation, Zeid Ra'ad Al-Husseini, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, and Stavros Lambrinidis, EU Special Representative for human rights. A number of international and national human rights organisations, foundations and donor organisations also participated.

As in previous Platforms, the participants discussed their concerns with the keynote speakers and with members of three thematic panels, which addressed the killing of HRDs, strategies for tackling gender-specific risks faced by women HRDs, and how HRDs can pursue their work despite restrictive legislation. In addition, the participants met in six language groups, on the afternoons of the first and second day, to discuss the challenges they face in different regions and how to manage or resolve them.

During the Platform, numerous HRDs described their experiences. Two whole sessions were given over to their testimonies at the end of the second and third day.

On the evening of 4 November, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) held optional public side events that discussed how HRDs work to realise LGBTI and women's rights respectively. A third side event, hosted by Twitter, considered how HRDs can use Twitter in their work and how Twitter can also be used to harass and monitor HRDs.

The Platform ended with a final dinner at the Old Jameson Distillery in Dublin.

AIMS OF THE 2015 DUBLIN PLATFORM

- To analyse and expose the reality of the repression of human rights defenders and promote their work internationally.
- To prioritise the sharing of experience so that human rights defenders can learn from each other and discuss what strategic lessons can be drawn from the prevention and minimisation of risk.
- To provide an opportunity for participants to relate experiences and make practical recommendations in specific areas and influence thinking at the international level.

Key issues

The keynote speeches, panels, and group discussions highlighted several critical issues. The first of these is the spread, across every continent, of legislation and official practices designed to curb and restrict civil society activities. Organisations are required to meet registration tests, for example, banned from receiving funds from abroad, forbidden to engage in 'political' lobbying, or subjected to administrative investigations and electronic surveillance. This narrowing of civil society space is exacerbated by a second phenomenon: the intensification of harassment, intimidation and violence against human rights defenders – revealed most brutally by the number of defenders who have been murdered because of the work they do.

In many parts of the world, killings and intimidation are intimately entangled with conflicts over economic resources, land disputes, struggles to protect the environment and public commons from mining and other large projects, and protests against public and private corruption.

Overhanging all these is the growing use of emerging technologies to repress human rights work: the use of electronic surveillance to monitor and invade privacy, and the use of social media to harass and intimidate.

None of these trends are novel in themselves. Taken together, however, they create a threatening and increasingly restrictive environment for human rights defenders, to combat which they need to develop new techniques and responses.

IF WE HOLD HANDS WE BECOME
POWERFUL ENOUGH TO BUILD A
HUMANE WORLD.
HRD. IRAN

I HAVEN'T SEEN SO MANY PEOPLE
SMILING AT EACH OTHER FOR A
LONG TIME. I FEEL I AM PART OF A
SINGLE CIVIL SOCIETY.
HRD. RUSSIAN FEDERATION

I WAS ARRESTED AND TORTURED.
THE POLICE ASKED ME: 'ARE YOU
JESUS TO THINK YOU CAN SAVE ALL
THE SLUM DWELLERS?' I WAS
INJURED QUITE SERIOUSLY AND ALL
THAT NIGHT I WONDERED WHETHER I
WAS READY TO GO ON DOING THIS
WORK. BUT THE FOLLOWING
MORNING THE COURT WAS FULL OF
OUR PEOPLE IN RED T-SHIRTS...
THERE WERE DEMONSTRATIONS ON
THE STREET. THIS GAVE ME THE
ANSWER.
HRD. SOUTH AFRICA

THERE IS DOUBT THAT THE OLD METHODS WILL CONTINUE TO WORK IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE GOVERNMENTS HAVE ADAPTED TO OLD PRESSURES AND BECOME 'WATERPROOF'. [...] IT IS IMPORTANT TO FIND NEW NARRATIVES.
HRD, BANGLADESH

ONE STATE ACTS AND OTHER STATES FOLLOW IF NOTHING IS DONE. ABOUT A QUARTER OF THE STATES IN THE OSCE HAVE ADOPTED EXTREMELY RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION. THE CRISIS IS NOT SILENT TO THOSE IN THIS ROOM. THE DEAFENING SILENCE IS IN CAPITALS – IN THE OAS, THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE.
BRIAN GRIFFEY, OSCE

As the plenary discussion with keynote speakers revealed, democratic governments and regional human rights bodies that support the work of HRDs are also underprepared for the above challenges. In many states, economic policies and interests collide with and subdue the commitment of democratic states to human rights, while international organisations have failed to modernise their methods sufficiently and work too slowly. Many speakers emphasised that to protect human rights and human rights defenders, it will be necessary to develop fresh and creative approaches, and to work more closely in new forms of alliance.

This report describes the different discussions that took place over the three days of the Platform and summarises the proposals that emerged for protecting HRDs from the threats they face, increasing the space for their work and advancing the human rights of all.

SESSION ONE

Presentations by Mary Lawlor, Executive Director of Front Line Defenders, Seán Sherlock TD, Irish Minister of State for Development, Trade Promotion and North South Co-operation, and Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

In her opening speech, **Mary Lawlor** emphasised that human rights defenders 'have been targeted because you are effective'. Authoritarian governments 'are investing huge efforts and resources to close down, silence, restrict and discredit independent civil society – especially those critical of government policies'.

She said that democratic governments should actively respond by widening the space for human rights defenders. 'Too many brave people working non-violently and legitimately for the rights of their communities are being targeted because they struggle to uphold the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which all member states of the UN have agreed. They are being sacrificed to the corrupt power of autocrats, the violence of armed groups, the greed of extractive industries and illegal mining, and the might and influence of big business.' And too often 'those governments that proclaim themselves democratic seemingly see human rights as a desirable but unimportant extra – subordinate to economic and strategic interests. There is no red line beyond which they will not go, in order to protect these interests.'

Mary Lawlor highlighted the failure of the international community to provide sustained support for HRDs who have been sentenced unjustly to long terms of imprisonment. She mourned the fact that after a while 'only their loved ones continue to keep up systematic action to attempt to secure their release' and recalled the names of **Abdulahdi Al-Khawaja** (Bahrain, life imprisonment), **Atena Daemi** (Iran, 14 years), **David Rabelo Crespo** (Colombia, 18 years), **Azimjan Askarov** (Kyrgyzstan, life imprisonment), and **Dawit Isaak** (Eritrea, detained without charge since 2001).

Many HRDs are also killed for their work. In the first ten months of 2015, Mary Lawlor reported that Front Line Defenders recorded the murders of 115 HRDs in 23 countries.¹ She described the killing of **Chai Bunthongiek** (Thailand), **Sabeen Mahmud** (Pakistan), **Francela Mendez** (El Salvador), and **Emerito Samarco, Dionel Campos, Bello Sinzo** (Philippines)... 'Tragically, once a human rights defender is killed, they are very soon forgotten. How often do you hear the names of those murdered after their deaths, and in how many cases are perpetrators brought to justice?'

She announced that Front Line Defenders hopes with other organisations to create an international memorial to human rights defenders who have been murdered since the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted in 1998. She said that the memorial must be more than a list of names: it should celebrate their lives and work and represent something tangible that families and colleagues can contribute to.

By creating an International Memorial, we would collectively create a powerful testament to the sacrifice of those we have lost and an enduring indictment of pervasive impunity.

Seán Sherlock, Minister of State for Development, Trade Promotion and North South Co-operation, saluted human rights defenders and the work of Front Line Defenders. In his speech, he emphasised that 'criticism cannot be seen as a crime'.

We hear governments insisting on the need for defenders to be responsible and for defenders to be accountable, when justifying restrictions or repression. In doing so, they fail to remember one of the most fundamental principles of democracy; that the State is accountable to its citizens and that the primary responsibility to promote and protect human rights lies with the State.

Describing Ireland's contributions to the UN Human Rights Council, the Minister emphasised two resolutions that Ireland helped draft and negotiate in 2013 and 2014. These 'underline the importance of the contribution of civil society in so many aspects of our lives, and call on States to create and maintain, in law and practice, a safe and enabling environment in which civil society can operate effectively'. The Human Rights Council subsequently asked the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare recommendations in 2016 on the creation of a safe and enabling environment for civil society. Mr Sherlock reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to human rights defenders. 'All of us are indebted to your courage and conviction. It is unacceptable that you are subjected to great personal risk and danger for exercising your basic rights and freedoms and for trying to ensure the rights of all. Ireland will continue to use our voice to support your work and ensure your protection.'

Speaking by live video link from Geneva, **Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**, also underlined the threats posed by efforts to narrow civil society space.

I HAVE ALWAYS FELT YOU ARE MADE OF FIRE AND AIR. FIRE BECAUSE YOU BURN WITH A PASSION TO RIGHT WRONGS. AND AIR BECAUSE YOU WALK ON AIR AGAINST YOUR BETTER JUDGEMENT'.
MARY LAWLOR, FRONT LINE DEFENDERS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I RUN AN ASSOCIATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SAUDI ARABIA. IN 2015 MASKED MEN CAME TO MY HOME. FRIGHTENING MY FAMILY AND THREATENING ME. THEY HUNG ME FROM THE CEILING, FORCED ME TO UNDERGO SHAM DROWNING, DEPRIVED ME OF SLEEP, OBLIGED ME TO SIGN A STATEMENT WITHOUT A LAWYER PRESENT. I STILL BEAR SIGNS OF TORTURE. I WAS SENTENCED TO 15 YEARS OF PRISON AND REFUSED HEALTH CARE FOR MY TORTURE INJURIES. AFTER A RIOT IN THE PRISON, I NOW FACE A NEW TRIAL. BUT I KNOW: WE WILL SURVIVE.
HRD, SAUDI ARABIA

1. Front Line Defenders *Annual Report 2016* (January 2016) reported that 156 human rights defenders were killed or died in detention in 25 countries in the first 11 months of 2015. At: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/annual-reports>.

Across the globe, laws forbid access to foreign funds; there are bans on travel and other attempts to restrict the work of civil society organisations. We are seeing spurious prosecutions, smear campaigns, destruction of property, disappearances and even killings of civil society actors. Measures to block or limit the democratic space online and mass surveillance. Attempts to crush the free press – particularly if it investigates human rights violations, corruption and malfeasance by officials. These are massive, and deadly, steps backward. They undermine the strongest antidote against violent extremism, which is a healthy civil society space.

The High Commissioner called for new forms of alliance to protect freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. 'At the global level, this will mean continuing to work towards a broader and more diverse coalition of States and organisations to protect and hold the line against shrinking arenas for public participation. We need to better align our voices and actions to bear down locally, to ensure that limitations, intimidation and retaliation against civil society actors will incur reputational, political and economic impact.'

At the same time, he expressed optimism. 'The democratic space is not shrinking everywhere. Every day, in every corner of the world, people are coming together and organising in creative ways to induce change. We must seek them out, champion their work, and share these experiences too.'

After his presentation, the High Commissioner answered questions from the floor: on land rights and land grabbing by corporations; on protection of LGBTI persons; on the legal status and future of the Western Sahara; on the imprisonment in Mauritania of Biram Dah Abeid; on the election of Saudi Arabia to the Human Rights Council; on the protection of Mexican human rights defenders; and on privacy rights.

The High Commissioner responded that in many instances his Office knows what needs to be said but cannot always ensure that words have effect. It is particularly important to strategise in a period when human rights defenders are under pressure.

On appropriation of land, he stated that abusive investments and conduct should be denounced, but that a broad campaign may be required because lone voices, or the voices of minorities, may be unsuccessful. He suggested there are many good examples of effective broad campaigns, drew the meeting's attention to the value of the UN Guidelines on Business and Human Rights, and said that his Office is considering the possibility of taking legal action in certain cases through amicus briefs.

On the backlash against LGBTI rights in Europe, the High Commissioner declared that his Office defends all persons who are disadvantaged or suffer discrimination, whether they are LGBTI persons or migrants. Recognising the importance of the Western Sahara issue, the High Commissioner said that his Office had sent two missions this year to the territory to meet Sahrawi communities. Affirming that all the rights of the territory's people should be honoured, he observed that it is problematic that MINURSO (the UN office responsible for the territory) has no human rights component.

With respect to Saudi Arabia, the High Commissioner noted that states, rather than his Office, determine who sits on the Human Rights Council. The OHCHR has criticised a number of practices in Saudi Arabia and has condemned aspects of its bombing of Yemen. He said that his Office does not distinguish between countries and that all governments have the same responsibilities with respect to human rights, though governments often fail to meet them. He added that the Office is currently reviewing its coverage of countries to assess whether any gaps in coverage need to be remedied.

In Mexico and Latin America more generally, the High Commissioner said that civil society organisations should campaign together with his Office and other actors to protect human rights and enlarge civil society space. He observed that, whereas the UN is quite vocal on such issues, the diplomatic community is sometimes unduly discreet in expressing support for HRDs and the essential principles they defend. In response to the question on privacy, finally, the High Commissioner observed that modern communications assist HRDs but can also obstruct their work and facilitate oppression. It will be important to see what can be done to strengthen judicial oversight, and to regulate trade in this area.

The world is complicated. We do our best to highlight the pressure on HRDs and the work they do. But we will only succeed, and will only achieve our global goals, if civil society has the space to hold governments to account for any crimes or misdemeanours that officials commit. If human rights are to be realised and our planet is to survive, HRDs must be placed at the top of our agenda.

SESSION TWO

Presentations by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the EU Special Representative for human rights, and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Geneva.

Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, reported on the first 18 months of his mandate, during which he has organised seven regional consultations with over 500 HRDs from 111 countries. He presented his report and findings to the UN General Assembly in October 2015.

I was appalled by the number of human rights defenders who are the target of smear campaigns, who are threatened, arbitrarily detained, tortured or killed... [and] struck by the risks faced by certain groups of defenders: women human rights defenders, defenders working in conflict zones, land rights defenders, journalists and bloggers, defenders of LGBTI rights among others.

He promised to extend the boundaries of his mandate to achieve more impact, and to be 'the voice for defenders' concerns and aspirations' and 'a bridge between activists and their critics'. To achieve these aims, he said that his office will respond more quickly to urgent situations, strengthen communications, publish reports on critical issues such as human rights in areas of conflict, and link international and national protection mechanisms more closely, using unofficial as well as official visits, social media and the mandate's website. He argued that it will also be crucial 'to engage with all stakeholders', including cities, firms and religious leaders. 'I am convinced that we must strike a balance between exposing despicable violations against defenders and showcasing reputable practices to support them. I wish to demonstrate to sceptical governments that there are encouraging and supportive practices to promote and protect defenders' which can be duplicated and have a multiplier effect.

To that end, the Special Rapporteur announced that he will launch a worldwide online survey to identify good practices 'by all actors – states, non-states, national human rights institutions, civil society, donors, intergovernmental organisations, foreign embassies, and especially defenders themselves'. It will cover legal and policy frameworks, protection programmes, and national and regional networks of peer protection, as well as the particular risks faced by specific HRDs, including women, LGBTI workers, lawyers, land rights and ESCR defenders. The Special Rapporteur, who will prepare an official report on the basis of the survey in March 2016, invited all the participants to contribute their ideas and experience.

I remain optimistic. I believe there are still many things that have not been fully explored or tried. [...] I am also optimistic because I see that civil society organisations and human rights activists are more active than ever before... Let us take time to be together, talk together and share together so we can all feel stronger to continue the fight.

Stavros Lambrinidis, EU Special Representative for Human Rights, pointed out that HRDs are feared because their denunciations of abuse often antagonise powerful people and throw light on societal injustices (such as judicial corruption and criminal behaviour by the state). They threaten unjust power structures. 'Women HRDs destroy patriarchy, changing societies. Independent judiciaries prevent government abuse. Companies held to account are forced to change their business practices.'

This is why there has been a backlash against civil society. To counter it, he said, the EU is putting more resources into protecting HRDs. 'We are doing more and spending more, we are more active diplomatically, and we are better coordinated.' The EU is currently financing more cases in court; supporting the families of more persecuted HRDs; and increasing the budget for HRD and civil society programmes. It is running some 40 human rights dialogues and more of these include preparatory NGO workshops, giving NGOs recognition. In the UN too, political diplomacy on behalf of civil society has been increasingly explicit: a range of initiatives have supported freedoms of expression and association and sought to enlarge civil society space.

The challenge is always to defend rights when they are contested – not when there is agreement. That is why human rights focus on minorities. Human rights have never been a battle about religion, identity or political systems. They have been a battle within religions, identities and political systems.

Mr Lambrinidis argued that 'we need to change the way civil society is described' in order to counter claims that civil society organisations are subversive, unrepresentative or sponsored by the West. The Arab Spring did not happen because people were manipulated from abroad or by civil society. In fact, civil society is frequently a crucial ally of public interest and government itself. It is often the first messenger of human rights crimes, corruption and environmental abuse. Independent groups and individuals who champion tolerance and respect for human rights are often also the most effective critics of terrorism.

We have to work together. What you do is lonely, and often unpopular. Governments try to isolate you. So you have enemies. But, boy, you have some powerful friends.

DESTINY NEVER SENT US CHALLENGES WE CANNOT OVERCOME. WE ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE: TO BE DECENT PEOPLE OR SCOUNDRELS.
HRD. BELARUS

I HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN THREATENED AND ARRESTED FOR USING THE LAW TO CHARGE OFFICIALS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE CRIMES AND CORRUPTION. THOUGH MANY OF MY LAWSUITS DO NOT END IN VICTORY. THE NUMBER OF LAWYERS THROWN INTO BLACK DETENTION CENTRES HAS FALLEN AND THE SPACE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WORK HAS GROWN. BECAUSE OF OUR USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW TO CHALLENGE CRIMES AND MISDEMEANOURS.
HRD. CHINA

WE ARE ACCUSED OF BEING FOREIGN AGENTS. IN FACT WE ARE THE PATRIOTS IN OUR COUNTRY.
HRD. RUSSIAN FEDERATION

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS IS NOT A HEROIC EFFORT. IT IS A TASK. FOR CITIZENS. FOR JOURNALISTS. FOR CIVIL SERVANTS. WHY DO WE DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS? BECAUSE LIFE REQUIRES US TO DO IT.
HRD. COSTA RICA

EVERY POWER IS RELATIVE. THERE IS NO ABSOLUTE POWER. AS HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND WAYS TO WORK ROUND. AND SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER.
HRD. ETHIOPIA

Mr Lambrinidis then answered points and questions from the floor.

- Officials fail to protect women who challenge patriarchy because the officials themselves have patriarchal values.
- It is difficult to agree a shared narrative because the narratives of states and HRDs are very different; states support human rights out of economic interest.
- What can the EU do about violations of human rights in southern Thailand?
- How can the EU overcome the obstacle of state sovereignty, to prevent HRDs from being imprisoned unjustly by corrupt national judicial systems?
- Why did the Iran nuclear agreement not consider human rights?
- Would the EU support the creation of an international day for HRDs?

Noting that women's rights are sensitive because they challenge deep-seated attitudes, Mr Lambrinidis suggested that two approaches have been effective in reducing FGM: winning male support because this opened the door for change; and bringing international principles and norms into the discussion because this empowered women.

Acknowledging that states and HRDs have different narratives, he repeated that we need to engage larger numbers of people, because many do not understand what HRDs do. Even in repressive societies, there comes a moment when people recognise that repression will not work; the EU must be ready to seize those moments.

On torture in southern Thailand, Mr Lambrinidis observed that, pending the restoration of democracy, the EU has suspended talks with Thailand on a range of subjects, including torture.

On Iran, he said that this particular treaty exclusively addressed the nuclear question: however, the EU has consistently raised human rights issues in its discussions with Iran.

On sovereignty, Mr Lambrinidis said that this issue arises in many areas, not only human rights. The key idea to underline is that the sovereignty of every country is enhanced if states actively participate in the international community, across trade, environment, human rights and other areas.

Michel Forst added that his office shares HRD cases that are brought to its attention with the EU, so that the EU can raise those cases with relevant governments. As to sovereignty, he remarked that states unanimously approved the Special Rapporteur's mandate, and that he therefore acts on the assumption that all states approve of his work.

Closing the session, **Signe Hjelde**, an Adviser at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reported on the annual resolution on human rights defenders, which Norway has traditionally sponsored. Ms. Hjelde indicated that a final text was expected on 26 November. The resolution would highlight the rights to freedom of expression, organisation and association, and the importance of protecting civil society space. Norway had opened consultations with all states to find agreement on the resolution and welcomed input from human rights defenders.

SESSION THREE

Ultimate failure, the ongoing killing of human rights defenders. Panel with Donald Hernandez Palma (Honduras), Tanveer Jahan (Pakistan), Zahra Mohamed Ahmed (Somalia), and Wadih Al-Asmar (Lebanon).

The panellists began by describing the situation in their countries. In Honduras, some 20 people die violently every day. 54 journalists and 102 lawyers have been murdered since 2003, 174 LGBTI persons were murdered between 2009 and 2014, and 109 environmental activists were murdered between 2000 and 2013.

In Pakistan, HRDs are very exposed to violence by landowners, religious extremist groups, officials and the police. The government's 'anti-terrorist' policies have further increased their vulnerability. Very few killers are brought to justice because powerful forces support them.

In Somalia, killings are frequent, the courts are corrupt and the police are unpaid. Many journalists have been killed, and it is especially dangerous to be a woman. Many women who have been internally displaced (IDPs) have been raped and killed, though women's rights have received more attention since 2014.

Before the Arab Spring, HRDs in the Middle East were sometimes killed, but disappearances and torture were more frequent risks. Now, state and non-state actors are simply killing HRDs in Syria, Turkey and Iraq as well as harassing them in other ways. Killings are tolerated by the states concerned but not by public opinion. Unfortunately, public opinion has little influence in the very complex regional situation that has emerged.

Panel members described a range of responses to the threats they face. In Honduras one problem is that people have become accustomed to the violence as well as disempowered by it.

We believe we need to go to the communities, to explain their rights and explain how they can object. But this creates new dangers because interests attack people when they stand up. When this happens, we publicise the attacks, assist people to take their cases to court, and also 'shame' internationally the people responsible.

In Pakistan, after surveying civil society organisations, the Democratic Commission for Human Development discovered that very few knew how to manage their risks; it has since trained more than one thousand HRDs. Realising that trust was also a problem, the Commission also brought organisations together to discuss cooperation and increase security, and set up an early warning system which alerts local, regional and international organisations to threats.

Action in Somalia is limited by judicial corruption and the general insecurity, which persists despite the presence of UN and international forces. It is vital to increase official accountability and access to real justice.

Echoing and enlarging this point, Wadih Al-Asmah argued that ending impunity and prosecuting killers is key to ending killings and violence in the Middle East.

HRDs are not killed arbitrarily but to prevent them from bearing witness or investigating crimes. In addition, those who kill have impunity, as the governments do. Protecting HRDs merely delays their assassination. We need to create conditions in which those responsible will pay a very high price. Every death must be investigated, every perpetrator prosecuted. It must become less costly to leave HRDs alone than to kill them.

In discussion, participants made a variety of suggestions.

- The international community must act more effectively to sanction tyrants. Issuing an arrest warrant against the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir but then allowing him to continue in office has strengthened the impunity of other leaders.
- We should shame and embarrass prominent abusers by organising welcoming protests outside their hotels when they travel. HRD, Swaziland
- Many journalists are murdered to stop information getting out. To counter such repression it is vital to publish those stories, because where this has been done killings have fallen away. Killing the messenger should never silence the truth. HRD, Guatemala
- Anti-terrorism legislation often worsens abuse of rights. We should analyse this.
- The World Bank and other donors have financed judicial reforms which irresponsibly multiplied the number of Mongolia's courts, creating a dysfunctional system.
- In many cases, the investments of multinationals create conditions in which violations occur. HRD, Argentina
- Where killers have impunity and courts are not independent, the international community should be more active. Give the families of those killed a chance to speak. Prevent those responsible from travelling; issue arrest warrants. HRD, Morocco

IF YOU ARE AFRAID TO SHOW YOUR FACE. WE ARE THERE TO SHOW OUR FACES TO HELP YOU DEFEND YOURSELVES.
HRD. GUATEMALA

EVERY DAY. I THINK TODAY MAY BE MY LAST DAY.
HRD. BANGLADESH

MY JOB WAS TO DEFEND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE ANTI-TERRORIST COURT. THERE ARE OVER 150,000 PRISONERS IN SYRIA AND 50,000 HAVE DIED UNDER TORTURE. THE SITUATION IN PRISONS DEFIES DESCRIPTION. IN IDLIB PRISON, PRISON GUARDS MURDERED ALL THE PRISONERS BEFORE THEY RETREATED. [...] WE HAVE WITNESSED WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY. BUT NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE. THIS HAS PROFOUNDLY UNDERMINED THE CONFIDENCE OF SYRIAN PEOPLE IN INTERNATIONAL BODIES AND INTERNATIONAL LAW.
HRD. SYRIA

THE FIRST VICTIM OF IMPUNITY IS THE TRUTH.
HRD. VENEZUELA

EXTRACTIVE MINING AND ECONOMIC PROJECTS

Many participants alluded to human rights violations associated with extractive industries and major infrastructure projects. They critiqued the model of development they represent, the abuses and corruption they generate, the social and environmental harms they cause, and the double standards of states that preach human rights and promote such investments.

According to the French working group: 'HRDs are particularly exposed to risk when they defend the interests of local communities against the economic interests of companies that exploit primary resources. In such situations, HRDs have to deal not only with corrupt governments that want to protect their sources of revenue, but with groups in society, such as religious leaders, who campaign against HRDs and support the companies' interests.'

Amazonia is a region doomed to destruction by major projects supported by the Brazilian government and big foreign companies. Several indigenous and other HRDs have been killed for defending the environment and their land. Those that fight have been derided, slandered, imprisoned [...] Feeling insecure and unprotected, we continue to fight. They are not going to silence us. HRD, Brazil

In the Miskito region, we have been fighting for recognition and our lands [...] Settlers have been coming in, destroying our environment, our society, investing in big economic projects. Our complaints have generally been ignored and levels of conflict are now alarming. Since 2014 settlers have been responsible for at least 60 attacks with firearms. Several people have been killed and some communities have been displaced and need protection. [...] The Nicaraguan authorities make no attempt to protect us. HRD, Nicaragua

Investments often trigger reprisals against our poorest people. Police murders, police crime, police corruption - huge amounts of intimidation. In all these cases, the common denominator is poverty. Yet many people consider the poor are a threat to their well-being. HRD, Argentina

We suffer from the curse of location. We have the world's biggest companies looking for our minerals and riches to supply to the world's largest market. HRD, Mongolia

The war is over, but another war continues: a war over blood minerals. HRD, Democratic Republic of the Congo

We have a huge mine in our region which has poisoned our rivers and the environment. The agreement with the company signed by our community leaders states that it must be reviewed every few years. However, the government has never initiated the review we have asked for. We are far from the city and communication is difficult. We are put under pressure because of our environmental and community work. I have been threatened and have had to move with my family to the capital. HRD, Papua New Guinea

I am Mayan. As in other poor countries, we are starting to understand the extractivist economic model. It is a new form of colonialism and pillage. It has made our lives difficult. We no longer help people to solve their problems because we are firefighting an emergency of crime, exploitation and violence. The government of Guatemala says we are criminals, that we are against development. The legal system is abused to criminalise our struggle. [...] International organisations are guilty of double standards. We brought a case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the grounds that the fundamental rights of indigenous people are being abused, but we have no certainty or confidence that the court will find in our favour. Not all is dark, but we are challenged by this new and false model of development. HRD, Guatemala

SESSION FOUR

Strategies to tackle Gender-specific Risks faced by Women Human Rights Defenders. Panel with Marusia Lopez-Cruz (Mesoamerican Initiative for WHRDs), Nighat Dad (Pakistan), Héléne Kokolou Zogbelemou (Guinea), Azza Soliman (Egypt), and Selia Kramer (Kyrgyzstan).

The panellists were asked first to describe the circumstances that led them to work as women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and denounce attacks against WHRDs in their regions. **Marusia Lopez-Cruz** said that she realised how secondary women were considered to be in Mexico when she had an abortion at the age of 15 and when, later, she understood the extent of sexual violence, which is an extension of state violence.

Héléne Kokolou Zogbelemou said that she had suffered FGM at the age of 15 and subsequently many forms of gender violence.

At 15 I was excised, which was tremendously painful. I haemorrhaged for three days. With poor care, there were complications. Later, in my home, I had to experience sex without pleasure: I was an object exploited for the pleasure of a man. When I refused him, my husband complained to my parents and my parents took his side. They did not speak to me for two years. This led me to want to defend other women from FGM and from child marriage.

After a tolerant childhood, **Azza Soliman** said that she became gender aware when she left home. 'My parents were liberal and I never took the veil. When I went out into the world, however, I realised how macho politics were in [Egypt] and how intolerant the society was.' She started to speak up about women's rights and tried to understand sharia in terms that would benefit women.

As a lawyer, **Nighat Dad** took up the cases of women in Pakistan who suffered online harassment. After Malala Yousafzai was shot, she subsequently received online threats herself. The security agencies sent her messages saying 'We know what you are doing and that you are polluting the minds of young people in Pakistan'. This led her to become an expert in the regulation of social media platforms (such as Twitter and Facebook) that can be used both to protect and to abuse women.

Like Azza Soliman, **Selia Kramer** had a liberal childhood. However, she realised that women are not free to manage their lives and are in effect the property of their families when she learned that the government had refused visas for women to study abroad on the grounds that they were likely to be trafficked as sex workers.

We belong to our fathers and mothers. We belong to our husbands. We belong to our communities. It's time we set the pace, knowing who we are and not being shaken from our path.

Asked to describe the issues they confront in more detail, Marusia Lopez-Cruz said that in more and more areas of Mexico women cannot go out alone without being aggressed, or even mutilated and killed. Physical attacks have increased, but also threats of sexual and physical attack, and slander. Family violence is high, women who defend women from violence are at risk, and violence also happens within human rights organisations – a taboo subject.

We need to review honestly what we are doing in our own movements to see whether we are reproducing discrimination.

Héléne Kokolou Zogbelemou observed that in Guinea it was taboo to speak about FGM, except to other women who have experienced it. Women who speak out may be fined, thrown out of their community, or even poisoned. They are considered to have betrayed their society's secrets. Nor will other communities take banished women in. They are rejected by society. As a result women feel obliged to remain silent and to remain in unhappy marriages. She said that, where laws exist against FGM, they are not enforced. 'The women who do FGM are very well organised. They must be won over.'

You need to understand what FGM is: it is a way of controlling women. Women need education; they must be able to walk away from FGM.

Azza Soliman said that women in Egypt are second class citizens in a non-democratic society. 'When we talked about incest, we were told we were attacking Egypt. When we talked about the rights of Christians in Egypt, we were told we were hostile to religion and Islam.' After seeing a policeman murder a woman in the street, Azza provided a witness statement and was then herself arrested for fomenting disorder. Recently acquitted, she said she continues to suffer personally, having seen the woman killed, and worries about the safety of her small son if she is arrested or detained again.

Nighat Dad emphasised that all forms of violence against women are translated into the online world. Some governments have even paid trolls to systematically abuse critics on social media. She advised participants never to underestimate the threat of harassment on line. Women should not turn away when threats are made but take practical steps to deal with them.

WHEN A WOMAN IS ATTACKED, A MESSAGE IS BEING SENT THAT ALL WOMEN SHOULD STAY AT HOME.
HRD. MEXICO

WE SAY THAT WE WOMEN ARE LIKE WATER COMING TOGETHER, BECOMING STRONGER.
HRD. AMAZON

IT IS DIFFICULT FOR ME TO TRUST ANYONE. I CANNOT EVEN TRUST MY OWN RELATIVES.
HRD, PAKISTAN

FOR MEN IT IS ALSO HARD BECAUSE OF SEXUAL NORMS. MALE HRDS ARE NOT WELL PAID EITHER. AND YOU CANT BE SICK. YOU CANT TALK ABOUT YOUR PAIN. CANT GRIEVE. BUT, UNLIKE WOMEN, YOU DO BELIEVE YOU OWN YOUR BODIES.
HRD, KYRGYZSTAN

I AM A TRANSEXUAL WOMAN. WHEN I CAME OUT MY MOTHER WAS TRAUMATISED. I WAS THROWN OUT OF THE HOUSE, BECAME HOMELESS, BECAME A SEX WORKER. WHEN I RETURNED HOME, I FOUND WORK BUT WAS OFTEN FIRED FOR LOOKING FEMININE. I SUED FOR DISCRIMINATION AND CREATED SEVERAL LEGAL PRECEDENTS. I ESTABLISHED A MEDICAL CENTRE FOR TRANSSEXUALS AND NOW LEAD THE ECUADORIAN FEDERATION OF LGBTI. I HAVE BEEN ATTACKED SEVERAL TIMES, AND ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO ASSASSINATE ME. I HAVE EXPERIENCED TERRIBLE NEGATIVE THINGS SINCE MY ADOLESCENCE, BUT I HAVE TRANSFORMED THEM INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE.
HRD, ECUADOR

In discussion, participants made a variety of comments.

- Why do male activists in West Africa not identify with the struggle of women? Why have their attitudes not changed?
- Women's issues, important as they are, should not be isolated from other human rights issues, because this makes women more vulnerable.
- We need to build alliances. In Ecuador my LGBTI group worked with a lesbian group to take a complaint forward and the women won, and won damages from the government.
- FGM is a difficult issue because attitudes are so deeply entrenched. But dialogues between victims and the women who carry out FGM are also frequently superficial. We need to assist communities to find their own solutions.
- Why are there so few women leaders?
- HRD groups are often male-dominated. What has been the effect of training women HRDs?

SESSION FIVE

Initiatives for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. Panel with Brian Griffey (OSCE), Rosa Celorio (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights), Jean-Louis Ville (European Commission) and Lela Tsiskarishvili (Georgian Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims).

Brian Griffey introduced the OSCE's Guidelines on the Protection of HRDs, which were inspired by the Dublin Declaration and published while Ireland chaired the organisation. The guidelines bring together core principles affirmed in other HRD guidance and good practice standards, and underline the importance of creating an enabling environment. The OSCE is developing information videos to support the document and will begin monitoring states' implementation from next year. Mr Griffey emphasised that the 57 states that belong to the OSCE are diverse and that implementation can be expected to be uneven.

I support the view expressed by several other speakers that we need a coalition of organisations to promote and protect human rights, including governments, the UN, the OSCE, and civil society.

Rosa Celorio explained the core mechanisms of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) and the Inter-American Court on Human Rights (IACtHR). She argued that the situation of HRDs on the continent has worsened rather than improved. The IACHR receives numerous reports of acts and threats of violence against LGBTI persons and in connection with land disputes, development, and sexual and reproductive rights, as well as reports of arbitrary arrests and disappearances.

She outlined the different mechanisms available (case petitions, precautionary measures, regional initiatives, press releases, thematic hearings, visits, and rapporteurs), focusing on precautionary measures, regional investigations, and hearings.

Jean-Louis Ville said that the EU is committed to further strengthen the protection of HRDs in situations where they are particularly at risk. The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has enabled the EU to support HRDs better, while the new EU Action Plan on Democracy and Human Rights provides additional support and promotes an enabling environment for civil society. In addition, a new Gender Action Plan commits the EU to work on FGM, early marriage, empowerment and the political voice of women. The EIDHR is now the biggest programme for HRD protection worldwide. Between 2015 and 2020 it will spend 20-25% of its budget on HRD protection (Euro 200-250 million over the period). This implies an average spend of Euro 37 million per year, compared to the approximate Euro 20 million annually in the previous 4 years, demonstrating the EU's commitment to HRDs. In 2015, Euro 10 million will be made available for country-based calls in 107 countries, and Euro 5 million for global calls for international projects. The EU has also established an extra global mechanism worth Euro 15 million to provide resources for very serious cases. The EU's system of small, short-term emergency grants, disbursed directly, has also grown from 100 cases at inception to more than 220 in 2015.

The participants posed a range of questions to the speakers, several of which focused on the regulation of businesses and the association of business investments with human rights violations.

- What can the EU do within Europe, where space is also shrinking? **HRD, Hungary**
- The EU's commitment to human rights is questioned in some countries because it is said to be returning asylum seekers to countries like Sudan and selling tear gas to countries that use it to repress protests.
- The EU should approve universal jurisdiction, making it possible to prosecute major violators of human rights in European courts. **HRD, Syria**
- Major donors like the EU should monitor the investments of large European companies which are frequently associated with human rights violations and environmental harm. Europe's approach to human rights is inconsistent. **HRD, Argentina**
- Businesses must be monitored and regulated because they are looting our countries.
- We have submitted cases to the IACtHR against the Guatemalan government and mining companies. By law, the government should dialogue with civil society, but it does not, and has imprisoned many of our leaders. **HRD, Guatemala**
- We need more effective protection mechanisms in South America. We applied for precautionary protection but have heard nothing and feel unsafe.

In response, Rosa Celorio apologised for the fact that the Commission has a backlog of precautionary protection cases.

She acknowledged that mining activities and large infrastructure projects are a major issue in the region. The IACHR is preparing a study of mining, which will examine how natural resources should be protected as well as government responsibilities in this area.

Jean-Louis Ville agreed that EU countries do not show equal commitment to human rights. He said that this is the subject of a lively internal debate. Specific concerns should be raised with the Fundamental Rights Agency, which is responsible for monitoring human rights within the EU.

NO-ONE WILL HAND US THESE RIGHTS ON A PLATE. WE MUST SEIZE THEM.
HRD. TUNISIA

YOU NEED SOMEONE TO SAY 'YOU ARE NOT ALONE' AND TO STAND BESIDE YOU.
HRD. EGYPT

Does Europe have a double standard on business and human rights? Mr Ville said that the EU is under pressure from European civil society to apply the Guiding Principles on Business Practices more vigorously. For the moment it has adopted a voluntary approach, but the issue is actively debated by both governments and businesses. Issues of policy consistency arise every day. Mr Ville said that he believed it is much better to have human rights policy mechanisms available than not to have them, even if, for political reasons, it is not always possible to apply them with perfect consistency.

MANAGING WELL-BEING

Lela Tsiskarishvili, of the Georgian Centre for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, spoke during the same panel about managing the well-being of HRDs.

We are first of all people, and we can be traumatised and suffer because of our work [...] We should take care of ourselves.

Because human beings have limited emotional and personal resources, and the work of HRDs is stressful and never ends, HRDs can become frustrated and angry, or affected by the suffering of those they help. If they do not take steps to protect their health and self-esteem, they can become self-critical, depressed, embittered, narcissistic ('saviour of the world' syndrome) or simply exhausted.

It is vital to establish boundaries. Supervision is crucial. She listed some red lights to watch out for.

- Staff are not managed.
- Staff do not delegate.
- Leadership is authoritarian.
- Decision-making is too egalitarian.
- Decisions are not taken.
- Staff caseloads are uneven.
- Staff feel unappreciated.
- Staff overestimate their capacity.
- Work environments are chaotic and stressful.
- Deadlines are set that cannot be met.
- Teams do not communicate.
- Staff do not socialise or relax.

She recommended that HRDs should meet regularly in a safe environment to discuss policies, workload, levels of stress, etc.

Our organisations need to behave and look like the world we want to create. We have to think far ahead. HRD, United States

I belong to a Vietnamese bloggers' network that promotes human rights campaigns. Many of our members have been harassed, fined, had their passport confiscated, lost jobs [...] Many HRDs have broken down and given up because of family harassment. Most of us are willing to bear personal suffering but cannot bear to see our loved ones suffer because of our human rights work. HRD, Vietnam

SESSION SIX

Circumvention, Flexibility and Resilience: continuing to work in spite of restrictive legislation. Panel with Svetlana Gannushkina (Russian Federation), Adilur Rahman Khan (Bangladesh) and HRDs from Ethiopia and Iran.

Svetlana Gannushkina described the response to administrative harassment of HRDs in the Russian Federation. A recent law categorises NGOs that receive money from abroad as foreign agents, which in Russian means 'enemies of the people'. Another law on 'undesirable organisations' would have included the OSCE and UN until it was amended, but still nets Amnesty International and similar international NGOs.

Civil society has responded by refusing to register. Organisations have been prosecuted, defended their own cases, and been regularly fined because judges side with the state even when it argues illogically. Independent Russian civil society organisations (CSOs) continue to work to change the law and continue to accept funds from abroad.

Svetlana Gannushkina gave an example of creative thinking. Threatened by deregistration, one organisation created five legal sister organisations that funded its advocacy and whose staff worked for it for free.

She emphasised that the new laws are counterproductive. They damage the infrastructure of Russia's parliamentary and media institutions as well as judicial independence, on which the viability of the Russian state eventually depend. But she warned:

We need to work with parliamentarians and other official bodies; we must avoid positioning ourselves or being positioned as enemies of the state.

Adilur Rahman Khan described the increasing repression and constriction of civil society activities in Bangladesh. For CSOs, the situation has become increasingly difficult. The state has barred unregistered organisations from receiving overseas funds and overseas donors respect its decisions. CSOs face virulent official slander and numerous HRDs, including many journalists, are in prison. In Rahman Khan's own organisation, many staff have had to leave because of threats or because it cannot pay their salaries. But it will go on working to build a democratic Bangladesh. In the end, he said, only community support will truly protect HRDs and advance the cause of human rights.

If the judicial system is functional, you can look for loopholes – but our system is dysfunctional. We cannot look for loopholes: we can merely delay decisions against us.

Ethiopia's civil society law has severely restricted CSO funding, networking and activity. CSOs are required to raise 90 per cent of their income from domestic sources and are not allowed to work with foreign NGOs for any purpose, while foreign NGOs are prohibited from working on human rights. The law caused almost all of Ethiopia's 2,500 NGOs to close or move into service delivery. Only about five continue to work on human rights. To survive, these have raised more money locally, reduced costs, and made alliance with organisations that are not subject to the civil society law, such as universities. Law departments send young lawyers to work free of charge. The EU has obtained permission to include human rights in its development portfolio, enabling it to fund some human rights activities. International organisations and foreign universities support CSO human rights work indirectly by funding Ethiopian universities that collaborate with them.

A questioner asked the speaker how Ethiopian organisations talk about 'human rights' or 'democracy', since these subjects are legally inadmissible. He answered that it is important to understand the motive and logic of restrictive legislation. It aims to undermine the ability of people to act independently. Most organisations in Ethiopia are in survival mode but many strategies are available. Identify your allies, identify loopholes, think laterally.

We adjust our language to accommodate the law. We speak of 'feedback' and 'welfare' instead of 'rights'. International organisations talk of 'women's empowerment' when they refer to harmful traditional practices.

In Iran there has been a long, slow struggle to demand free speech and democratic institutions, and end violations of human rights, in the course of which thousands of people have been executed. The speaker argued that it is critical for Iranians, and others in the same situation, to form their own organisations, because in the end bodies like the UN are closer to states than they are to the people.

Fear is the greatest tool of dictatorial governments. It is important not to be afraid, or at least not to show fear. [...] We may be killed by authoritarian rulers at any time – but we may also die for many other reasons. Although I love my life and care about my happiness, I believe we should discard fear of death and imprisonment. Let us act together and have faith in our power to achieve change, because hopelessness is our enemy.

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO ISOLATE OURSELVES. WE HAVE TO LEARN TO WORK WITH OTHERS.
HRD. RUSSIAN FEDERATION

WE NEED TO BE MORE CREATIVE. [...] I HAVE NEVER SEEN A FOOLPROOF LAW THAT CANNOT BE CIRCUMVENTED.
HRD. SWAZILAND

CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

WE HAVE A LOT IN COMMON. WE
ARE ALL FIGHTING FOR A BETTER
WORLD. ALL COLOURS OF THE
RAINBOW ARE HERE AND WE NEED
AS MANY COLOURS AS POSSIBLE TO
RESIST THOSE WHO WANT TO PAINT
THE WORLD IN ONE COLOUR ONLY.
HRD, MEXICO

On two afternoons, the participants divided into six working groups to discuss problems and challenges, and identify actions to combat or resolve them. This section collates and combines these discussions. The summary allocates less space to threats and challenges described elsewhere in this report and focuses on internal challenges and solutions.

Analysis of the situation

Modern communications mean that we can network better but also that electronic surveillance and harassment by social media are more intrusive. We can take steps towards the creation of a universal civil society but must also confront the prospect of a society under police surveillance in which privacy has collapsed. In some societies, social isolation, harassment and media defamation are as dangerous to HRDs as government threats.

The influence of major international institutions (UN, European Union, OCSE, other regional bodies) is in decline because they have failed to prioritise human rights and many state media run massive disinformation campaigns against them. As a result, civil society too is losing confidence in these institutions; increasingly, HRDs no longer believe international bodies offer effective protection.

Western countries are distancing themselves from their own values and paying less attention to human rights. More generally, the diplomatic community does not sufficiently defend human rights or HRDs. The cause is partly their fear of international terrorism. Terrorism is a real threat, but does not justify downgrading human rights. In some regions, HRDs are hunted simultaneously by an intolerant, repressive state and by intolerant, violent civil society or armed groups. At the same time, it is increasingly difficult for HRDs at risk to flee or seek protection abroad, especially in Europe.

Many governments are becoming less tolerant of dissent. They are harassing CSOs administratively, strangling their funding, passing laws that curtail advocacy and reduce civil society space, and promoting government-sponsored non-governmental organisations (GONGOS) to disrupt legitimate human rights work.

Journalists, LGBTI workers, women HRDs and activists working on major economic projects are particularly at risk.

In this situation, the community of human right defenders becomes a guardian of global values - a huge responsibility.

There is an ongoing liberal retreat within the international community. Asia English Working Group

The more the international community closes its eyes, the more HRDs are at risk. French Working Group

Internal challenges

- Human rights organisations frequently have a shallow support base. As a result, the general public does not stand beside them to defend rights.
- In some regions, human rights defenders are an ageing community. Many leaders have an authoritarian model of decision-making and organisations do not attract, train and give responsibility to young activists.
- Our organisations are sometimes conservative and afraid of change. Some implement the same programmes year after year and do not examine new approaches.
- Management is often poor. In some regions this is rarely discussed, but it causes young professionals to abandon human rights careers because they see no possibility for professional growth.
- Stress and depression are major internal issues. Organisations do too little to prevent burn out. Too few rehabilitation programmes are available and those that exist provide temporary respite rather than systematic solutions.
- HRDs lack social protection. Most have no medical insurance. Alongside the long term effects of low income, this will be an increasing problem as HRDs age.
- Not enough is done to protect the security of HRDs, for example by establishing security procedures, secure communications, etc.

IF NEWS GETS ABROAD, THE
GOVERNMENT REACTS. THAT'S
WHAT SAVED ME.
HRD, NIGER

WE NEED TO BE PROACTIVE, NOT
REACTIVE. WE MUST STOP PUTTING
OUT FIRES.
HRD, KENYA

Actions in response

- Build the support of your communities. Public and community support provides the strongest form of defence for HRDs.
- Develop a strategy to address threats in association with local, regional and international human rights organisations.
- Develop stronger local, national, regional and international networks to support HRDs who are attacked or at risk. Set up early warning systems. Identify 'triggers'.
- Where feasible, take local action quickly after arrests. Phone officials for information, go to police stations.
- Develop a strategy for achieving change over time. At the same time, act tactically. Consider whether quiet diplomacy, action through allies, or public campaigning will be most effective. Where appropriate, take legal advice before acting.
- Especially where governments are afraid of political isolation, build links with the diplomatic community. Encourage diplomats to speak out for HRDs and their work.
- Support and build links with international human rights mechanisms. At the same time, assess how much they can help in your context.
- Look for allies in government, political parties, businesses, universities and other institutions, and work with them to influence state behaviour.
- Build public support for the work of HRDs, by involving the public in activities, communicating actively, and addressing issues of public concern.
- Publicise successes. Counter slander, build a new narrative by publicising positive stories and positive images of your work.
- Share experience with HRDs in your region and in other countries.
- Attract, train and give responsibility to young human rights activists.
- Train HRDs in digital security from the start. Analyse risks, develop a security culture, train as required. Set up security systems for individuals and their organisations.
- Raise more funds locally where you can.
- Invest in management training and give proper attention to governance.
- Plan and implement long-term programmes to prevent depression and burn out. Meet together. Take care of one another. Nurse self-esteem. Take steps to reduce stress.
- Root out improper conduct in our organisations (sexual harassment, discrimination, intolerance).

WE ARE ALIVE. AND FREE.
AND FIGHTING.
HRD. KAZAKHSTAN

YOU ARE THE CONSCIENCE OF
HUMANITY. PLEASE DO NOT STOP.
HRD. KUWAIT

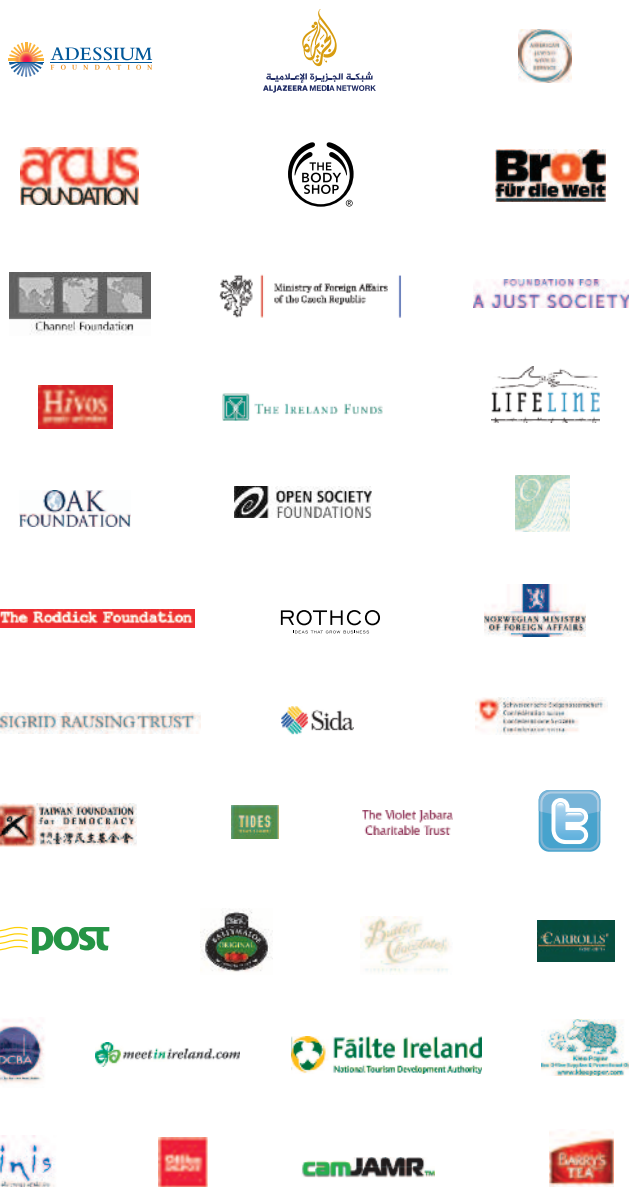


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NO REPRESSION
CAN LAST FOREVER.
HRD, PALESTINE

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