



Closing Statement

adopted by the

Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions at its 2017 Annual Conference

**“Early warning, conflict prevention and re-establishment of peaceful societies:
The role of National Human Rights Institutions”**

Geneva, 8 March 2017

National human rights institutions (NHRIs) from all regions of the world convened in Geneva on 8 March 2017 for the Annual Conference titled **“Early warning, conflict prevention and re-establishment of peaceful societies: The role of National Human Rights Institutions”**.

The Conference was organised by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

More than 200 NHRI representatives from all regions, United Nations independent experts, partners from the UN including UNDP, from member states, civil society, and academia participated in the Conference, and discussed challenges to the protection and promotion of human rights worldwide resulting from situations of tension, instability, violence and conflict, both at the domestic and international levels, and the role that NHRIs can play in early warning, conflict prevention and re-establishment of peaceful societies by applying their mandates under the Paris Principles.

Deliberations focused on the following areas:

- i) Election-related and political violence;
- ii) Factors contributing to a climate of violence;
- iii) Early warning mechanisms and protection of human rights defenders; and
- iv) Protection and preservation of the independence of NHRIs.

Participating NHRIs adopted the following Closing Statement:

We, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) bringing together national human rights institutions from all regions stress that, whether resulting from armed conflict, civil unrest, or other situations of conflict, occupation, the erosion of peace and security in societies is generally preceded by clearly identifiable patterns of human rights abuses and discrimination. Respect for the rule of law and human rights norms and principles provides the framework to prevent, reduce and combat violence and insecurity.

We therefore call on all states to sign and ratify all international and regional human rights instruments as well as the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court, and ensure their implementation at the national level, and reaffirm our commitment as NHRIs in supporting, advising and monitoring our respective states in this endeavour.

We take note of the recent UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions¹ on sustainable peace which recognise the importance of addressing all stages of conflict from before the outbreak to the post-conflict phase of re-establishing peaceful societies and establishing measures for prevention of re-occurrence. Within this context, we reaffirm the role of NHRIs in the implementation of the SDGs and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, as part of conflict prevention and the establishment of a sustainable peace.

We further recall the Kyiv Declaration on NHRIs in conflict and post conflict situations. We recognise that reparation and participation of victims and affected communities in post-conflict mechanisms are essential to ensure a lasting peace, rebuilding trust within societies and strengthening democratic institutions.

With regard to election-related and political violence,

We welcome the report and recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association² concerning the exercise of these rights in the context of elections.

We reaffirm our commitment to monitoring elections, and investigating into, and reporting on, election-related violence and the restriction of rights including freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of speech, the right to vote, and the right to non-discrimination.

With regard to specific risk factors conducive to situations of conflict,

Whilst we note the complexity of pre-conflict situations, we recognise that certain factors are particularly conducive to the escalation of pre-conflict situations. This includes systemic sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination, as well as hate speech, including towards migrants and refugees, and the perpetuation of states of emergency.

We welcome the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred of 2012³ and welcome the recommendation from the Special rapporteur

¹ A/70/714–S/2016/115 of 4 February 2016 and S/RES/2282 (2016) of 27 April 2016

² Report A/68/299 of 7 August 2013.

³ Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, A/HRC/22/17/Add.4 of 11 January 2013.

on Freedom of Religion or Belief that NHRIs use the Rabat Plan of Action when designing national policies of combating incitement to acts of hatred⁴.

We are concerned at the impact a State of Emergency has on human rights, and recall the restrictions international human rights law places on government actions during states of emergency and that prolonged states of emergency violate human rights.

With respect to early warning mechanisms and the protection of human rights defenders,

We recognise that patterns of human rights violations provide an early indication of a potential or emerging crisis, which may deteriorate into tensions, violence, and armed conflict.

Accordingly, we reaffirm that early and targeted interventions to promote and protect human rights can significantly help to prevent a violent conflict and call on states to establish effective channels of communication and institutionalise cooperation for preventive action to ensure that state institutions take serious and systematic note of the information and recommendations provided by NHRIs, civil society, human rights defenders and other relevant actors.

We call on the international and regional organisations to systematically include the information from NHRIs into their early warning mechanisms.

We are concerned that global trends point towards a threatening environment for human rights defenders in all regions, with defenders being increasingly subject to harassment, restrictions and reprisals⁵ in an overall shrinking space of enabling environment under which human rights defenders work.

We stress that the work of human rights defenders is essential to promote and protect human rights and the rule of law including in preventing conflicts and violence and call on states to promote, and ensure, that human rights defenders can operate in a safe and enabling environment and implement effective measures for their protection, in line with the recommendations from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

We reaffirm the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and will promote its implementation in our respective countries.

With regard to protecting and preserving the independence of NHRIs, including risks for NHRIs,

We recall the General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions on NHRIs⁶ and urge all member states to implement these resolutions.

⁴ Report from the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, A/HRC/31/18 of 23 December 2015.

⁵ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, A/70/217 of 30 July 2015.

⁶ Most recently HRC resolution 33/15 of September 2016 and GA resolution 70/163 of December 2015.

In particular, we encourage member states to⁷

- Follow the Paris Principles and the advice provided by the Sub-Committee on Accreditation and GANHRI, to ensure that institutions are strong, independent and effective partners in the promotion and protection of human rights;
- Refrain from unduly interfering with the independence and autonomy of national human rights institutions. Any instance of intimidation, stigmatization, harassment or attack against members or staff of national institutions should be promptly investigated, with perpetrators brought to justice and remedy provided to victims, in line with HRC and GA resolutions;
- Establish effective protection measures or programmes to guarantee the security of members and staff of national institutions. Both staff and members should enjoy immunity while discharging their official functions in good faith; and
- Recognize, in law and practice, members and staff working for national human rights institutions as human rights defenders.

⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, A/HRC/22/47 of 16 July 2013.