

GANHRI 2021 ANNUAL MEETING

PROTECTING AND PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND CIVIC SPACE: CONSULTATION ON GANHRI'S GLOBAL ACTION PLAN

Online meeting on Zoom

Thursday 1 July 2021 | 16:30-18:00 CEST

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

Every day, human rights defenders risk their security and their lives to achieve freedom, justice and peace in the world. Whether fighting against environmental degradation, searching for the remains of the disappeared, documenting corruption or advocating for access to education, their efforts are instrumental in the process of building pluralistic democracies, providing access to justice and upholding the rule of law. Human rights defenders take enormous risks to expose violations and challenge abuses of power by states and corporations. Their work is indispensable to the safeguarding and advancement of human rights and strengthening of the rule of law.

Human rights defenders must have the space to speak out, to educate, to engage communities and to help ensure that everyone can participate in the democratic processes of their country. Across all regions, however, civic space is shrinking or even disappearing and the work of human rights defenders is becoming increasingly dangerous. This includes NHRIs, which, as HRD themselves, some of which have been targeted and faced reprisals for the human rights work that they do. These trends have further accelerated and intensified in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which has seen increased restrictions on rights and freedoms - including freedom of movement, assembly, and expression - as a result of states' measures to counter the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

At their [13th International Conference](#) on "Expanding the civic space and promoting and protecting human rights defenders, with a specific focus on women: The role of national human rights institutions" of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, held in Marrakech, Morocco in October 2018, participating NHRIs affirmed the vital contribution made by human rights defenders. In the outcome Marrakech Declaration, they affirmed that, "Human rights defenders have a positive, important and legitimate role in contributing to the realization of all human rights, at the local, national, regional and international levels."

NHRIs also noted the additional and gender-based risks that women human rights defenders can face when standing up for justice and equality, often from within their own organizations, communities and families.

The Declaration also stressed that independent and effective NHRIs are also at risk of threats and that reprisals and reports of attacks against NHRI members and staff are extremely worrying.

NHRIs set out a practical set of strategies to promote, protect and build cooperative partnerships with human rights defenders, including:

- Establishing national protection systems, in consultation with human rights defenders, civil society organizations and others;
- Encouraging States to ratify all international human rights instruments, including the [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#);
- Monitoring and reporting on civic space – online and offline – by collecting and analyzing disaggregated data and statistics, related to killings, fabricated legal charges, misuse of laws and other attacks against human rights defenders;
- Establishment of efficient and robust early warning mechanisms and focal points within NHRI;
- Promotion of gender equality and developing strategies to combat all forms of discrimination against women human rights defenders;
- Regular interaction with human rights defenders and civil society and helping to develop and strengthen national and regional defenders' networks;
- Interaction with international and regional human rights systems in support of human rights defenders, and monitoring the follow-up and implementation of recommendations.

The Marrakech Declaration calls on GANHRI and NHRI regional networks to support NHRIs implement the commitments made in the Declaration.

Against this backdrop, GANHRI is in the process of developing a Global Action Plan to support the protection and promotion of human rights defenders and civic space (Global Action Plan), including by supporting NHRIs in all regions implement the Marrakech Declaration in their domestic contexts.

The Global Action Plan is designed to empower and support NHRIs, which require protection, being themselves human rights defenders, and to strengthen their role towards civic space and defenders with a perspective gender including women rights defenders.

The Global Action Plan is framed both within the Marrakech Declaration and GANHRI's [Strategic Plan 2020-2022](#), and is informed by its objectives and goals. This includes the emphasis on protecting and supporting the strengthening of NHRIs and on GANHRI's unique role in promoting the exchange of experiences and good practices among NHRIs across all regions. As such, the Global Action Plan is integral part of the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2020-2022.

The draft Global Action Plan has been developed in a multi-phase participatory and consultative process, involving a global survey across NHRIs from all regions, interviews with NHRIs, NHRI regional network secretariats, and partners including UN, NGOs and HRD networks.

The development of the draft Global Action Plan has been coordinated by the GANHRI Head Office with the support of Michel Forst, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

Objective

The objectives of this event will be to exchange on experiences from NHRIs in working to protect and promote civic space and human rights defenders, and to reflect on GANHRI's role and specifically, the event will be an opportunity to:

- Discuss developments with regard to civic space and human rights defenders, including attacks and reprisals against NHRIs
- Share experiences from NHRIs in promoting and protecting civic space and human rights defenders

- Take stock of promising NHRI practices including progress made in implementing the Marrakech Declaration
- Present the draft Global Action Plan and invite GANHRI members' and partners' input

Format

The event will receive opening remarks from the GANHRI Acting Chairperson and partners, to be followed by a presentation of the draft Global Action Plan by Michel Forst. It will hear presentations from NHRIs and HRDs, and invite interventions from participants, commenting both on experiences and the draft Global Action Plan.

The event will be public, with participants from NHRIs, member states, civil society, and UN partners.

The event will benefit from interpretation into all GANHRI languages: Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

Members will have the opportunity to interact with each other through Zoom and a dedicated chat box of the Zoom website.

[For more details on accessing the Zoom, please read the dedicated logistic note]

Outcome

Remarks and comments will be summarized and considered for integration into the finalization of the Global Action Plan. The final draft will be shared with all GANHRI members for their endorsement once finalized.

Agenda

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| 16:30-16:45 | Welcome and opening remarks by GANHRI, OHCHR, UNDP and EU |
| 16:45-16:55 | Presentation of the draft Global Action Plan, Michel Forst |
| 16:55-17:20 | Experiences from NHRIs and HRD |
| 17:20-17:55 | Discussion |
| 17:55-18:00 | Conclusions and closing |