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Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions

Global Action Plan to support the protection and promotion of human rights defenders and civic space

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Introduction

1. Background

The *Global Action Plan to support the protection and promotion of human rights defenders and civic space* (Global Action Plan) is a reference document for the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), its members and their four regional networks[1]. It is an integral part of the implementation framework for GANHRI's *Strategic Plan 2020-2022*[2], reflecting the Strategic Plan's emphasis on GANHRI's role in supporting the strengthening of NHRIs and promoting the sharing and documenting of good practices and experience among GANHRI members.

Fulfilling the commitment made at the 2018 Marrakech Conference and its outcome, the Marrakech Declaration[3], the Global Action Plan is designed to empower and support NHRIs, which themselves require protection as human rights defenders (HRDs), and to strengthen their role in promoting and protecting civic space and defenders. This is in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.10 and other SDG targets of relevance for securing a supportive environment for HRDs. When drawing up the Global Action Plan, GANHRI members identified environmental human rights defenders and indigenous peoples as a group particularly at risk, followed closely by journalists and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) – understood as women defending human rights as well as individuals who, regardless of their gender, defend women's rights in a broad sense and work on gender-based discrimination, violence and rights violations[4]. The Global Action Plan was developed incorporating a gender-sensitive approach, identifying and taking into account specific gender-based risks and obstacles for WHRDs.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan will rely on the GANHRI Head Office which will be responsible for taking the lead, guiding and coordinating actions in order to ensure its objectives are met against the backdrop of implementation of GANHRI's Strategic Plan. When preparing and implementing actions under the Global Action Plan, GANHRI will consult and coordinate with its members and NHRI regional networks. In particular, GANHRI will build on experiences at the NHRI level to enable peer learning and the exchange of tools and practice. For instance, where GANHRI is responsible for coordinating the development

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[1] Asia Pacific Forum (APF); European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI); Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI); Red de Instituciones Nacionales para la promoción y protección de los Derechos Humanos del Continente Americano (RINDHCA).

[2] Adopted at the GANHRI Annual Meeting in December 2020, the *Strategic Plan 2020-2022* addresses HRDs and the civic space in three of its goals, namely: Goal 1.5. *"In situations where NHRIs are under threat, GANHRI, in collaboration with regional networks and UN partners, provides an effective and appropriate response that ensures their protection.";* Goal 2.3. *"GANHRI, in collaboration with regional networks and UN partners, facilitates focused and relevant network activities among NHRIs across all regions on specific human rights priority areas in focus […] (including) HRDs and civic space.";* and Goal 4.3. *"The ability of GANHRI to respond effectively and timely to assisting NHRIs under threat is analysed and remedial action identified."* Available online: https://ganhri.org/strategy/

[3] Available online: https://ganhri.org/international-conference/

[4] See A/HRC/40/60. Available online: https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/40/60

of a tool, it will ask its members to collect existing tools, to build on their strengths and weaknesses and to participate in designing the tool.

2. Methodology

The Global Action Plan was developed in a multiphase participatory and consultative process led by the GANHRI Head Office with the support of a consultant.

Consultation of regional networks in February-March 2021

- Consultation of regional action plans and individual meetings with the regional network secretariats

Global GANHRI-led consultation of members from March to May 2021

- Online survey by means of a questionnaire addressed to all GANHRI members[5]. To facilitate responses and allow the broadest possible participation, GANHRI developed a multiple-choice questionnaire[6]. Forty-five NHRIs from the four regions participated in the survey: 11 for Africa, 9 for the Asia-Pacific region, 10 for the Americas and 15 for Europe.
- Series of individual interviews with three or four members per region to complement the online survey through extensive discussions. The sample was selected in consultation with the regional networks, with the aim of reflecting the diversity of NHRI contexts and experiences concerning civic space and HRDs.

GANHRI used the data collected in the survey and interviews to:

- develop the Global Action Plan based on an analysis of the NHRIs' operating environment, in terms of both risks and opportunities as HRDs themselves and in their work on civic space and HRDs;
- identify challenges and best practices to determine potential needs for guidance, support, and experience- sharing among NHRIs; and
- determine NHRIs' priorities and expectations and their vision of GANHRI's role in relation to civic space and HRDs.

The participation of NHRI members was key in ensuring that this Global Action Plan is based on GANHRI members' priorities and needs and that it is owned by its members. GANHRI will publish a comprehensive report of the survey results.

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[5] The results of the online survey will be presented in a dedicated report.
[6] In addition, all questions allowed for comprehensive answers with no length restrictions to provide the opportunity to share any relevant information. See questionnaire in Annex.

GANHRI also consulted external partners at the United Nations (UN), as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based in different regions[7] that are working closely with HRDs[8]. By taking a rights-based approach, such contributions were intended to identify defenders' expectations of NHRIs in terms of cooperation as well as promotion and protection, including by contributing towards providing a safer and more supportive environment for HRDs.

The draft Global Action Plan was presented to the NHRIs for consultation. This included sharing at the GANHRI 2021 Annual Meeting on 1 July 2021.

3. Context

1998-2018: from the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders to the Marrakech Declaration

The 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders[9] adopts a broad definition of HRDs, referring to any person, group, society or organization which, personally or professionally, individually or with others, acts peacefully to promote and work for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels. HRDs are identified by what they do, not by who they are. Recognition of their positive role and the obligation of States to protect them are enshrined in the international human rights system.

Since 1998 and the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the "family" of HRDs has grown significantly. Human rights groups and movements have continued to emerge from civil society, including through the expansion of social media, meaningfully broadening the scope of recognized HRDs[10].

In 2018, NHRIs gathered at their 13th International Conference: "*Expanding the civic space and promoting and protecting HRDs, with a specific focus on women: The role of National Human Rights Institutions*", resulting in the adoption of the Marrakech Declaration.

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[7] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); UN Women; Defend Defenders; Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia); International Service for Human Rights (ISHR); Just Associates (JASS).

[8] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); UN Women; Defend Defenders; Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia); International Service for Human Rights (ISHR); Just Associates (JASS).

[9] *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, also known as *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*, adopted by the United Nations, General Assembly Resolution 53/144, A/RES/53/144 (9 December 1998), available online: https://undocs.org/A/RES/53/144

[10] Several reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders have provided definitions of specific categories of HRDs and broadened their scope, such as women defenders and social movements (A/HRC/40/60, https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/60); or environmental defenders (A/71/281, https://undocs.org/A/71/281, https://undocs.org/A/71/281).

The Marrakech Declaration: the pledge of NHRIs to safeguard civic space and protect and promote HRDs and WHRDs

As well as reminding States of their primary responsibility and obligations to respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Marrakech Declaration[11] explicitly recognizes that independent and effective NHRIs, along with their members and staff, are HRDs in their own right. As such, NHRIs can play an important role for human rights, by contributing to safeguarding civic space and protecting and promoting the rights of HRDs. The Marrakech Declaration highlights the specific gender-based risks that WHRDs face and sets out strategies to promote, protect and build cooperative partnerships with HRDs, through seven priority action areas. These can be summarized as follow:

Promotion

- Encouraging ratification of international human rights treaties as well as of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and advising on their implementation
- Establishing national protection systems
- Promoting gender equality and developing strategies to combat all forms of discrimination against WHRDs

Protection

- Monitoring and reporting on restrictions on civic space – online and offline – through relevant and disaggregated data-collection
- Establishing efficient and robust early warning mechanisms and focal points for the protection of HRDs within NHRIs
- Interacting with international and regional human rights systems in support of HRDs, and monitoring the follow-up and implementation of recommendations

Cooperation and partnerships

- Interacting regularly with HRDs and civil society, and a wide range of other actors and helping to develop and strengthen national and regional defenders' networks

The Marrakech Declaration requests that GANHRI and the regional networks support NHRIs in implementing these priorities by drawing up global and regional action plans, and report on their implementation on a regular basis, including at GANHRI Annual Meetings.

Regional and global responses to protect the definition of human rights defenders

In recent years, the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council have seen increasing attacks on the principle of universality of human rights and challenges to the definition of HRDs as adopted by the UN in 1998, with regular attempts by some Member States at questioning its existence and restricting its scope.

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[11] Available online: https://ganhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Marrakech-Declaration_ENG_-12102018-FINAL.pdf

Several actions have been taken by the UN since 2015 and the subsequent adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015[12]: designation of the UN Assistant Secretary-General (UN ASG) for human rights in 2016[13] as the senior official on intimidation and reprisals; the adoption of the *UN Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space*[14] in September 2020 under the Secretary-General's *Call to Action for Human Rights*[15] that identified public participation and civic space as a priority area; and the UN Environment Programme's *Defenders Policy*[16] for the protection of environmental defenders in 2018.

The *EU also developed guidelines on Human Rights Defenders*[17] and similar national guidelines were adopted in several countries[18]. Stakeholders in the international and regional community established protection mechanisms for HRDs, including Protect Defenders.eu[19] – the EU HRD protection mechanism providing grants for urgent protection measures and enabling temporary relocation for HRDs at risk; and the Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund[20] providing emergency grants to civil society organizations (CSOs) threatened for their human rights work, as well as others.

Rationale for the Global Action Plan

4. Increased threats on NHRIs' work, effectiveness and independence

Throughout the consultation process for the Global Action Plan, one third of GANHRI members across all regions have reported cases of threats and acts of intimidation against their institutions, their members and/or staff. NHRIs are increasingly obstructed in their work in many different ways, including budget cuts that further deplete their already limited resources to conduct their work. There are various forms of threats and intimidation reported by NHRIs: threats to their independence through restrictive legal provisions that impact, for example, the selection and appointment process of members and the functioning of the NHRI, or prevent them from working on specific topics; media smear campaigns that

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[12] https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E
[13] https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Reprisals/Pages/ReprisalsIndex.aspx
[14] Available online: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CivicSpace/Pages/UNRoleCivicSpace.aspx
[15] Available online:
https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Asperation_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf
[16] Available online:
https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/22769/UN%20Environment%20Policy%20on%20Environmental%20Defenders_08.02.18Clean.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
[17] Available online: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/3958/EU%20Guidelines%20on%20Human%20Rights%20Defenders
[18] Canada: Voices at Risk; Netherlands: Action plan for HRDs; Finland: Finnish Guidelines on HRDs; Norway: Guide for the Foreign Service; Switzerland: 2019 revised Swiss Guidelines on HRDs (replacing 2014 version) ; United Kingdom: UK support to HRDs; United States: Fact sheet on HRDs
[19] https://protectdefenders.eu/
[20] https://www.csolifeline.org/about-lifeline-2

question the legitimacy of the NHRI and the Paris Principles; prosecutions of members and staff; aggressive behaviours by law enforcement officers against staff when monitoring peaceful protests; intimidations and reprisals from both State and non-State actors for the NHRI's actions   documenting human rights violations and more recently, for holding Governments to account for their responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Intimidation, threats, and attacks against human rights defenders

As reported by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: "*The threats faced by defenders come in many guises (physical, psychological, economic, and social); they reflect the interaction of multiple factors (poor governance or the absence of the rule of law, the surge in religious intolerance and fundamentalisms, and tensions over development issues); and they are triggered by a variety of (political, economic, religious, State or private) actors.*"[21] One can add that these threats can materialize both online and offline.

There is no agreed definition on what constitutes – and what differentiates – intimidation, threats and attacks against defenders. While it can be considered that there is a risk scale – from an intimidation to an attack – the relation between intimidation, threats and attacks is also more complex. A threat, whether direct or indirect, may or may not materialize into an attack, while an attack can occur without being preceded by a threat. In addition, the difference between threats and attacks can sometimes be blurred: *"A threat is also an attack in itself because, ultimately, it will affect the HRD (for example, a death threat may cause psychological harm to an HRD). On the other hand, some attacks are also threats (for example, shooting the windows of an HRD's office at night is an attack, but it should also be considered as a threat)"*[22].

Finally, mentions of *reprisals* against HRDs and NHRIs in the present Global Action Plan are understood in a general way. They include but are not limited to reprisals as a result of cooperation with the United Nations, in line with resolution A/HRC/RES/24/24[23] and the mandate of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights as established in 2016. References to reprisals in the Global Action Plan are not limited to intimidation resulting from cooperation with the UN in the field of human rights. They include acts of intimidation that result from all human rights work of an individual, organization or NHRI, even if not related to cooperation with the UN.

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[21] Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, A/70/217. Available online: https://undocs.org/A/70/217
[22] Protection International, Understanding Death Threats Against Human Rights Defenders, Reflection Paper, June 2021. Available online:
https://www.protectioninternational.org/sites/default/files/understanding_death_threats_against_human_rights_defenders_aa_-_en.pdf
[23] https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/24/24

5. Covid-19 pandemic and the continued deterioration of civic space

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global trend of the shrinking of civic space. GANHRI members in all regions have reported increased restrictions on rights and freedoms and a deterioration of the rule of law. Restrictions justified by public health imperatives – such as the right to peaceful assembly, or access to public facilities including NHRI offices – may seem disproportionate and inconsistent with the generally low level of health precautions. In some countries, such restrictions appeared to be applied more strictly to HRDs than to other groups. In countries where HRDs are subject to arbitrary arrests, prosecutions and detention, the temporary suspension of judicial proceedings has also impeded their right of access to justice, including speedy and fair trials.

Given the restrictions on physical gatherings and movement in the Covid-19 context, online civic space has become an even more important component of the working environment of HRDs, as reported by several NHRIs. However, the development of digital technologies presents both new opportunities and potentially increased threats for HRDs. On a positive note, it provides new mobilization and participation platforms, but at the same time many of those technologies open up the possibility for broader surveillance – for instance through contact tracing applications during the Covid19 pandemic – and violations of privacy, while also allowing for significant restrictions of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, via the platforms' policies or internet shutdowns.

In this context, and in line with SDG indicator 16.10.1[24] and other SDG targets of relevance for securing a supportive environment for HRDs, there is an increased need for evidence-based monitoring of civic space, both online and offline.

6. Challenges for HRDs in a deteriorated civic space

Through the GANHRI global survey, members reported a wide range of threats and obstacles to the work of HRDs as a result of the interference from both State and non-State actors. These include Government officials at national and local levels, law enforcement, intelligence services, the military and members of parliament, as well as organized crime groups, private armed groups, extractive industry companies and agrobusinesses, media organizations, and members of groups that promote hate speech, including through social media.

HRDs are subject to threats and risks in many forms – from arbitrary arrests to murders. The most common risks for HRDs as reported by NHRIs through the GANHRI consultation are smear campaigns, threats and acts of intimidation against specific categories of HRDs and harassment. Challenges can also include practical obstacles to their work, including financial restrictions imposed by rules and practices on the funding of civil society. These

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[24] *"Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months."*
(https://www.sdgdata.gov.au/goals/peace-and-justice/16.10.1)

financial restrictions range from ineligibility for tax benefits to restrictions on the opening of bank accounts or receiving international funds. While such challenges do not represent a direct threat to HRDs' safety and life, they significantly undermine their ability to work effectively.

In the global survey GANHRI members also confirmed that, in their view, threats and acts of intimidation weigh more heavily on specific groups of HRDs:

- Environmental defenders, indigenous peoples and those defending indigenous peoples' rights
- Journalists
- Women defenders, defenders of sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality, and of LGBTI rights
- Civil society organizations and defenders working on asylum and migration

HRDs in general suffer from a lack of recognition, both at political and public levels. While some countries have adopted national laws for the protection of HRDs[25], others do not provide the legal framework to protect them or have passed laws that further restrict their rights. Moreover for many HRDs the added value of their work is not recognized. This occurs both in contexts where the law does not protect the rights that defenders defend and in contexts where despite the fact that these rights are protected by the law, which should provide grounds to legitimize their work, defenders are stigmatized for defending them.

Opportunities for GANHRI and its members

7. The unique positioning of NHRIs to address threats to civic space and HRDs

Interviews with networks of defenders have demonstrated that in several contexts, the role of NHRIs towards HRDs is insufficiently known by HRDs themselves. They also showed that building HRDs' trust was an important step in this direction, and that this could be achieved through the work of independent and effective NHRIs that:

- Reach out to HRDs and their networks, from the grass roots level;
- Provide public support to HRDs, especially when they are threatened;
- Promote positive narratives about HRDs to demonstrate recognition of NHRIs and respect for their work in defence of human rights;

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[25] E.g. Côte d'Ivoire (2014, https://ci-ddh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Loi-adopt%C3%A9e-%C3%A0-IAssembl%C3%A9e-Nationale-et-pro-mulgu%C3%A9e-par-le-Pr%C3%A9sid.pdf); Mexico (2012, http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LPPDDHP_200521.pdf); Mongolia (2021 and came into force in July 2021).

- Organize and support discussions on emerging human rights challenges for the future of civic space and human rights defenders; and

- Support the development and adoption of legislation and policies, including on the protection of HRDs.

This was highlighted as particularly relevant for WHRDs and defenders working on sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality and LGBTI rights, as they often do not benefit from public support given the lack of broader societal acceptance of their work, and are often excluded from decision-making processes, including within HRD networks.

Many opportunities to monitor the situation of civic space and HRDs arise from the unique position of NHRIs and their role as organizers of human rights-based discussions on emerging challenges for the future of civic space and HRDs. NHRIs' complaint mechanisms and mandates, such as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)[26], provide access to information and data that can be used for monitoring and early warning analysis. Where they exist, NHRI offices outside capital cities provide an opportunity to reach out, including to grass roots HRDs, and identify their needs for greater protection and promotion. Finally, as institutions that work with a wide range of stakeholders and have access to national authorities and regional and global human rights systems, NHRIs are also in a unique position to create bridges for HRDs to break their isolation, make their voices heard, and reflect their needs and knowledge in policy development both at national and global levels, including to further a human rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

8. Creating synergies through GANHRI to support NHRIs as independent and effective protectors of civic space and HRDs

Despite the threats and challenges highlighted above, in recent years we have also witnessed an increasing focus on civic space and HRDs at global, regional and national levels. Progress has been made and initiatives have emerged, expanding the existing protection framework provided by the international human rights system.

As UN entities are mandated to include NHRIs in their work[27], each initiative on civic space and HRDs represents an opportunity for GANHRI and its members to strengthen their cooperation. Over the years, GANHRI has contributed to the increased visibility and recognition of the role of NHRIs by establishing robust partnerships, continuously cooperating with HRDs, and through its influence as a member-based network and collective voice of NHRIs.

Building the trust of civil society actors in their NHRI is essential. GANHRI is working to support and strengthen NHRI's role and contributions as unique institutions that

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[26] https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/OPCAT/Pages/NationalPreventiveMechanisms.aspx
[27] As per the explicit reference to NHRIs as an indicator under SDG 16, and the recent UN General Assembly A/RES/74/156. Available online: https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/156

independently and effectively protect HRDs, including by promoting positive narratives on HRDs and the important work that they do.

This can be done by working to create synergies and coordinate approaches to protecting and promoting civic space and HRDs, especially through:

- Reinforcing the global mechanism to protect NHRIs' independence, effectiveness and staff and members, including through continued strengthening of the accreditation process that contributes to attaining SDG 16.a.1. by reinforcing compliance with the Paris Principles;

- Supporting NHRIs' capacity-building and reinforcement of their contribution, as independent and effective institutions, to protecting and promoting civic space, HRDs and WHRDs, including by developing guidance and tools;

- Providing a global platform to bring together NHRIs and enable peer learning through experience sharing and exchanges about challenges and good practices in their work for civic space, HRDs and WHRDs;

- Serving as a global and collective voice for all NHRIs and bringing their voice to international forums through global advocacy and cooperation with global entities to contribute to global policy development on civic space, HRDs and WHRDs.

9. Building on NHRIs' actions and priorities to maximize GANHRI's impact

The consultation process has given GANHRI a broad overview of the actions undertaken by NHRIs with regard to civic space and HRDs, and a clear understanding of their priorities and needs. The latter vary depending on members and country contexts, and the Global Action Plan aims to reflect the diversity of views while prioritizing actions.

The survey showed that a capacity-building workshop for sharing experiences on the Marrakech Declaration ranks in the top three of the types of support that GANHRI's members consider useful. This is a shared priority across all four regions (Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe).

GANHRI members have for some time included the protection and promotion of civic space and HRDs in their work. For many, these were areas of intervention prior to the Marrakech Conference, although the adoption of a specific declaration allowed for more targeted actions.

A large majority of NHRIs work regularly with HRDs and civil society organizations. Actions taken in this area mostly consist of identifying and reaching out to HRDs and their networks[28]. However, further steps have been taken in several countries with, for example,

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[28] Question 9 of the online survey aimed to identify the steps taken by NHRIs for implementation of the Marrakech Declaration. It offered multiple choices as well as the possibility to mention other actions.*" Identifying human rights*

the establishment of councils of defenders or the creation of thematic working groups that involve HRDs in the development of strategic plans or human rights advocacy.

Other significant areas of action include:

- Advocacy on international human rights treaties and the promotion of positive narratives about HRDs and their work, for example through awareness-raising campaigns for the public;

- Interactions with international and regional human rights systems, especially by submitting reports for the Universal Periodic Review;

- Establishing national protection systems, for instance by contributing to the development of national laws, policies, or guidelines on HRDs or by creating specific ombudsman's offices for the protection of HRDs[29].

To a lesser extent, NHRIs have also taken actions to:

- Monitor and report on civic space, both online and offline, including through participation In monitoring bodies on specific topics, such as law enforcement;

- Promote gender equality and WHRDs, for instance through the development of a gender policy within the NHRI and the adoption of gender-sensitive approaches and actions in their work;

- Establish early warning mechanisms and focal points within the NHRI.

However, in the survey GANHRI members expressed their need for support to continue addressing the different priority action areas of the Marrakech Declaration, as many lack resources and operate in increasingly challenging environments.

The top priority for NHRIs in order to effectively implement the Marrakech Declaration is the promotion of gender equality and the development of strategies to combat discrimination against WHRDs[30]. NHRIs should address this in an intersectional approach that takes into account the diversity of identities and the variety of experiences of women defenders, which depend on circumstances and other aspects of their identities (e.g. age, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, belonging to a grass roots movement or a larger NGO, etc.).[31]

This priority is also considered an area for GANHRI's support, in particular to develop and provide tools for the mainstreaming of gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches

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defenders and existing civil society and human rights defenders' networks in your country" and *"Reaching out to human rights defenders and civil society networks"* were the most selected options.

[29] In Guatemala, for instance: https://www.pdh.org.gt/defensorias/personas-defensoras-de-ddhh-y-periodistas.html
[30] GANHRI has decided to endorse the broad definition of WHRD explained in the 2019 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (A/HRC/40/60) .
[31] See the report on the situation of women human rights defenders of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: A/HRC/40/60 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1663970. In his report, the Special Rapporteur recommended, inter alia, that NHRIs view protection practices through the lens of intersectionality in order to develop a deeper understanding of how protection practices can be gender-sensitive.

in all HRD programmes and strategies. Some of the other highest-ranking priorities for which NHRIs have expressed their need for support from GANHRI are:

- Interacting with international and regional human rights systems in support of HRDs – GANHRI's privileged position at the global level of interacting with the international human rights system, in particular the UN, also makes it one of the most expected areas for support, for over a half of GANHRI members. In this perspective, the existing partnerships and cooperation with the UN bodies and mechanisms, as well as other stakeholders, provide a significant opportunity to bring its members' unified and collective voice to UN forums with a view to contributing to global policy development on civic space and HRDs.

- Monitoring and reporting on civic space online and offline – Although many NHRIs already monitor civic space, the survey demonstrated an important need for support to strengthen this activity: the need for monitoring tools and templates – both for online and offline civic space – was identified as second on the list of tools NHRIs need the most. This creates an opportunity for GANHRI to bring together its members to share existing practices on monitoring, including activities supported by the regional networks[32], and to discuss ways to improve those processes. This could lead to the development of a common framework of indicators for civic space monitoring.

- Interacting regularly with HRDs and civil society and helping to develop and strengthen national and regional defenders' networks – As previously highlighted, most NHRIs have taken actions to identify and reach out to HRDs and CSOs. They expect support to strengthen this component of their work, especially regarding the contribution they can make to the creation and reinforcement of HRDs networks. Given that WHRDs are often marginalized when it comes to public support, there is an opportunity for GANHRI to include this gender focus when contributing to NHRIs' capacity-building on HRD networks.

Although NHRIs consider their priority to be activities related to ratification and implementation of international human rights treaties, those are not identified as an area where GANHRI's support is needed, unlike the four priorities mentioned above (promotion of gender equality, monitoring and reporting on civic space, interacting with human rights systems, interacting with HRDs and CSOs).

GANHRI also has an opportunity to respond to the needs of its members and maximize their impact on the protection and promotion of HRDs by developing tools to monitor the situation of HRDs, and by providing specific support for the development and promotion of positive narratives about the most threatened groups of HRDs. In the questionnaire two thirds of NHRIs selected the training on how to promote positive narratives about HRDs within

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[32] e.g. ENNHRI's Annual report on the state of the rule of law in Europe (http://ennhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Regional-Rule-of-Law-Report-2021.pdf)

training options, making it the most popular option. These include positive narratives about: WHRDs and LGBTIs' rights defenders; HRDs working on asylum and migration; environmental defenders; indigenous defenders; and journalists and lawyers.

Finally, GANHRI in coordination with regional networks could also explore the possibility of organizing capacity-building training for NHRIs on strengthening national protection systems and early warning mechanisms, as these two topics were in the top three preferred training options, along with the promotion of positive narratives about HRDs. Given the many activities undertaken by NHRIs to develop such systems and mechanisms, there is an opportunity for GANHRI to bring together its members to share their experiences, both challenges and good practices.

Objectives and Actions

OBJECTIVE 1

To promote and protect human rights defenders and civic space through supporting and enhancing the capacity of NHRIs

Promotion

- Encouraging ratification of international human rights treaties and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and advising on their implementation

Proposed actions:

- Organize, in collaboration with and with the participation of networks of HRDs and individual HRDs, NHRI peer learning workshops on the development and promotion of positive narratives about HRDs, including those most at risk
- Develop tools to assist NHRIs promote the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and encourage States to ratify the relevant international human rights treaties
- Disseminate and raise awareness about the Marrakech Declaration and the role of NHRIs among both NHRIs and HRDs and their networks

- Establishing National Protection Mechanisms for HRDs

Proposed actions:
- In close cooperation with regional networks of NHRIs, build capacity of NHRIs as national protection mechanisms. This should be carried out based on an understanding of protection as being holistic (both online and offline protection), and taking into account the variety of contexts in which HRDs operate and their specific challenges
- In cooperation with HRDs, develop protocols so that NHRIs can engage safely and appropriately with defenders at risk, including with a specific focus on WHRDs
- Support NHRIs in advocating to strengthen legal frameworks for the protection of HRDs; this may include advocacy to amend or repeal legislation that restricts the

rights of HRDs or advocacy in support of national legislation for the protection of HRDs, as well as advocacy on the duty of vigilance and corporate social responsibility to provide legal grounds for the inclusion of HRDs and civil society in due diligence processes in line with the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*

- Promoting gender equality and developing strategies to combat all forms of discrimination against WHRDs

Proposed action:
- Building on existing policies and experiences of GANHRI members, and in close collaboration with partners, including UN Women, develop guidelines and tools on the integration of gender-sensitive and -responsive approaches throughout the work of NHRIs – including monitoring, investigations, complaints handling and reporting – and in particular in programmes related to civic space and HRDs. Because the presence and participation of women at all stages and levels of discussions are essential to ensure a gender-sensitive approach throughout the work of NHRIs, GANHRI's efforts to achieve this objective will include ensuring and reinforcing a gender-balanced composition and functioning of NHRIs, as provided for by the Paris Principles and the SCA accreditation process.

Protection

- Monitoring and reporting on civic space – online and offline

Proposed actions:
- In collaboration with OHCHR, develop and support the implementation of an NHRI tool to monitor civic space online with a specific focus on attacks against HRDs and with a gender perspective
- Develop guidance for NHRIs to conduct inquiries and respond to the situation of HRDs and of WHRDs specifically
- Develop tools and indicator frameworks to guide NHRIs in monitoring, data-collection, including under SDG 16.10.1, and reporting to UN mechanisms, including under the SDG and VNR processes
- Facilitate the exchange of experiences and identify promising practices among NHRIs and their partners concerning monitoring and reporting on civic space

- Establishing efficient and robust early warning mechanisms and HRD focal points within NHRIs

Proposed actions:
- Assist and advise NHRIs in the establishment of early warning mechanisms on civic space, and the protection of HRDs, particularly WHRDs
- Support NHRI focal points, including the organization of peer exchange and training among them and with HRDs

- Interacting with international and regional human rights mechanisms in support of HRDs, and monitoring the follow-up and implementation of recommendations

Proposed actions:

- Develop and implement global training for NHRIs on the international framework relating to civic space and HRDs. Develop opportunities for NHRIs to engage with international bodies and mechanisms, including the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR), treaty bodies and SDG processes, with a focus on WHRDs. This includes guidance for members on how to support the participation of HRDs and civil society within UN human rights mechanisms and bodies.

- Develop guidance for NHRIs on UN protection mechanisms, and procedures to report individual cases and to follow-up to recommendations related to HRDs and civic space protection.

- Support NHRI engagement with UN human rights bodies and mechanisms, including the UPR, treaty bodies, SDG processes and other relevant processes by providing (individual) needs-based advice and guidance to members and promoting the exchange of experiences among NHRIs, HRDs and partners.

Cooperation and partnerships

- Interacting regularly with HRDs and civil society and helping to develop and strengthen networks of national, regional and global defenders

Proposed actions:

- In consultation with a wide and diverse range of HRDs (including from grass roots level) and their networks, develop advice for NHRIs on how to support the strengthening of HRD networks, and in particular networks of WHRDs, and on how to maintain cooperation with HRDs to enhance trust and cooperation in the longer term.

- At the global level, strengthen GANHRI's partnership with HRD networks and CSOs. This includes participating in mutual and regular exchanges along with policy development.

- Explore opportunities to further enhance GANHRI's role as coordinator for NHRIs, HRDs, civil society and partners concerning civic space and HRD protection.

OBJECTIVE 2

To support and protect NHRIs as human rights defenders (when under threat)

Proposed actions:
- Document threats and attacks against NHRIs, their members and staff, and regularly update this information, as well as responses from GANHRI, regional networks and partners in support of NHRIs under threat. This information should be included as a standing item on meeting agendas and in the GANHRI Annual Report.

- Report threats and attacks against NHRIs, their members and staff both internally within the GANHRI network and within regional and UN mechanisms bodies and forums – including the UN ASG, as well as CoE, OSCE, IACHR, ACPHR and EU – reflecting the identified gender-based specific dimensions and dimensions of root causes where relevant.

- Compile and disseminate information among GANHRI members on how to activate support from GANHRI, NHRI networks and partners when an NHRI is under threat. This includes information on the mandate and functioning of existing or new protection and support mechanisms (e.g. UNSR on HRD, UN ASG, protectdefenders.eu, Lifeline, and regional IGOs) and support to NHRIs on engaging with these mechanisms (e.g. UN ASG).

- Review GANHRI support and explore the further strengthening, including at an early stage (prevention), of high-level country missions, and cooperation among peer NHRIs through NHRI's public support – when relevant and possible – of the NHRI under threat; and/or NHRI hosting a NHRI member or staff under threat).

- Engage with the UN ASG mandate, in order to incorporate all existing forms of indirect cooperation between NHRIs and the UN system (that are not currently reflected in the scope of the mandate), hence strengthening their protection through this mandate; reprisals should be included in the mandate of the IACHR Special Rapporteur[33].

- Engage with DCO/UNCTs, Member States, HRDs, NGOs and the EU-EEAS and EC-INTPA focal points and with the EU Delegations where NHRIs, their members and staff are under threat.

OBJECTIVE 3

To bring NHRIs and their regional networks together at a global level and serve as collective voice of NHRIs to inform of global and national norms and standards on HRDs and civic space

Proposed actions

- Advocate collectively for the protection and promotion of civic space, HRDs and WHRDs in international forums. This should include advocacy on the ratification and implementation of international human rights treaties (and provide guidance to NHRIs on how to do so at national level) including on women's rights and gender equality and other groups at risk.
- Advocate collectively through GANHRI and members for a broad definition of HRDs and WHRDs, as defined by the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs[34], at global, regional and national levels.
- Report internally within GANHRI membership as well as to the UN and other relevant forums on rules and practices impacting, targeting and/or criminalizing WRDs, including by collecting and using data from NHRIs.
- Promote positive narratives about NHRIs' work as independent and effective defenders and about HRDs in global, regional and national forums.
- Develop a collective position to raise awareness about the role of HRDs in due diligence processes and advocate for States to work to prevent, investigate, punish and redress any obstruction of HRDs' legitimate activities concerning corporate human rights abuses in line with the *UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights and the Guidance for companies*, developed by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights*.*

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[34] See A/HRC/40/60. Available online: https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/40/60

- Coordinate with UN partners, including OHCHR and UN Women, and civil society on the implementation of the UN *Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space*, including where appropriate with the involvement of UN Resident Coordinators.
- Strengthen GANHRI's partnership with UN Women, UNFPA and other UN agencies on the coordination of gender-sensitive approaches in the work with civil society and HRDs at national levels and provide support for NHRIs' engagement with international stakeholders at national level, including UN Resident Coordinators and the EU.
- Promote and facilitate sharing of experiences among NHRIs, including by organizing event(s) on the Marrakech Declaration and this Global Action Plan to discuss ways to systematically integrate civic space, HRDs, WHRDs throughout GANHRI's work, and enable peer learning especially between HRDs' focal points. Consider whether it is appropriate to organize a regular GANHRI event on HRDs and civic space as well as other knowledge exchange activities.