

ORAL STATEMENT

51ST session of the Human Rights Council

Civil society space: COVID-19: the road to recovery and the essential role of civil society.

Mr. President,

GANHRI welcomes and commends the report of the High Commissioner calling for trustworthy decision-making environment that protects and empowers civil society and human rights defenders.

NHRIs are essential actors to promote “trust” between government and civil society; protecting civic space and human rights defenders; and in supporting the women, peace and security agenda.

National responses to COVID-19 pandemic have had alarming implications on the global trend of the shrinking of civic space, exacerbating existing challenges for NHRIs, civil society, and human rights defenders. GANHRI members in all regions have reported increased restrictions on rights and freedoms, and a deterioration of the rule of law resulting from abusive COVID-related policies.

GANHRI has been particularly concerned by threats and acts of intimidation that weigh more heavily on specific groups. As highlighted in the High Commissioner’s report, non-inclusive decision-making processes, and discriminatory laws and institutions, have had a significant impact on women human rights defenders (WHRD).

The 2018 Marrakech Declaration¹ highlighted specific gender-based risks that WHRDs face, and set out strategies to promote, protect and build cooperative partnerships with HRDs. Following-up on those commitments, GANHRI’s has developed, through a comprehensive consultative process, a Global Action Plan to

¹ The Marrakech Declaration “Expanding the civic space and promoting and protecting human rights defenders, with a specific focus on women: The role of national human rights institutions”
https://ganhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Marrakech-Declaration_ENG_-12102018-FINAL.pdf

Global Alliance of National Human Rights
Institutions
Palais des Nations
1211 Genève, Switzerland
info@ganhri.org
www.ganhri.org



support the protection and promotion of human rights defenders and civic space, with a particular gender-sensitive approach, that empowers and supports NHRIs to strengthen their role in promoting and protecting civic space and defenders.

Mr. President,

A large majority of NHRIs work regularly with HRDs and civil society organizations under threat, and, as recognized by the Global Action Plan, NHRIs themselves may require protection as human rights defenders.

We call on states to establish robust gender-sensitive early warning mechanisms and protection protocols to ensure that NHRIs and HRDs can continue working meaningfully and safely to protect and promote human rights.

GANHRI will continue supporting NHRIs members worldwide, including through our strategic partnership with OHCHR and UN agencies, building the capacity of NHRIs as independent and effective protectors of civic space and HRDs.

I thank you Mr. President.