

Partners for Good

Celebrating 30 years of National Human Rights Institutions and the Paris Principles

While national human rights institutions (NHRIs) are relatively new bodies, the first call to form "local human rights committees" came in 1946 from the UN Economic and Social Council. Despite further encouragement from UN bodies over the following decades, progress to establish NHRIs was slow. By 1990, there were fewer than 20 NHRIs.

In October 1991, representatives of existing NHRIs met in Paris, France. The outcome of that three-day workshop was the development of the [Principles relating to the status of national institutions](#). The [Paris Principles](#), as they become known, set out the roles, responsibilities and minimum standards for NHRIs to be considered independent and effective.

The Paris Principles were endorsed by the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1992 and by the General Assembly in 1993.¹ The [World Conference on Human Rights](#), held in Vienna in 1993, gave additional impetus for establishing NHRIs in line with the Paris Principles.

The [Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions](#) (GANHRI)² was established in 1993 with the mission to establish, support, strengthen and be a voice for NHRIs around the world. GANHRI began with 12 members.³ It has grown ten-fold over the past 30 years.⁴

Key Messages

1. NHRIs support States to uphold their human rights commitments

- States have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the full enjoyment of human rights for all people within their borders. They take on this responsibility when they become a party to a human rights treaty and under international customary law.
- States are held accountable for their human rights performance in different ways, including through the UN Human Rights Council's [Universal Periodic Review](#) and through periodic reviews by [human rights treaty bodies](#).
- The advice that NHRIs provide to States on the human rights impact of laws, policies and practices helps States to meet their responsibilities under international law.

2. The Paris Principles set the benchmark for independent and effective NHRIs

- The Paris Principles set out the minimum standards NHRIs must meet to be considered independent and credible. They require that NHRIs have a broad mandate; pluralism in

¹ General Assembly resolution 48/134

² Previously known as the International Coordinating Committee of Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

³ The NHRIs of Australia, Cameroon, Canada, Denmark, France, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, the Philippines, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia

⁴ The current membership is available at: <https://ganhri.org/membership/>

membership; broad functions; adequate powers; adequate resources; cooperative methods; and engage with international bodies.

- GANHRI conducts a robust [accreditation process](#) to assess the extent to which NHRIs comply with the Paris Principles. Each NHRI is reviewed every five years and if there are exceptional circumstances. The goal is to support NHRIs comply more fully with the Paris Principles.
- NHRIs that comply with the Paris Principles are accredited with 'A status'; those that partially comply are accredited with 'B status'. GANHRI currently has [120 members](#): 89 'A status' NHRIs and 31 'B status' NHRIs.

3. NHRIs build constructive and strategic partnerships to tackle urgent human rights issues

- Human rights issues are complex and, increasingly, many of the most urgent issues cross national borders. Partnerships are essential to address these challenges and drive long-term change, especially to support communities vulnerable to human rights violations.
- The Paris Principles call on NHRIs to work cooperatively and engage with a broad range of groups across the community, including State institutions and civil society organisations. Many NHRIs also engage with business, international organisations, academia and the media.
- These partnerships can take many forms, including collaboration in human rights education, research, assistance in investigations, and joint advocacy for reform of laws, policy and practices.

4. NHRIs promote transparency, accountability and sustainable development

- NHRIs work to build fair, just and inclusive communities for all. However, it is essential that they give priority to those groups that face heightened risk of human rights violations.
- Paris Principles-compliant institutions play a key role in monitoring the situation of those deprived of liberty (OPCAT, art. 18) and monitoring the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD, art. 33). They promote transparency and accountability on behalf of those in situations of vulnerability.
- NHRIs help States ensure that human rights are embedded in national approaches to realising the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). Establishing and strengthening a Paris Principles-compliant NHRI is also an indicator for [SDG 16](#) ("Peace, justice and strong institutions") against which the progress of States is measured.

5. NHRIs are trusted partners of the international community

- NHRIs are trusted partners of the international human rights system, speaking with credibility and authority at the UN Human Rights Council, some General Assembly bodies and a growing number of UN forums.⁵
- NHRIs also contribute to the Universal Periodic Review and the work of human rights treaty bodies and the special procedures established by the UN Human Rights Council.⁶
- NHRIs follow up at the national level to promote implementation of recommendations made by UN bodies. This assist States meet their human rights obligations.
- Through GANHRI, NHRIs speak with a powerful and united voice on pressing human rights issues – including climate change, migration and human rights defenders – and advocate for positive change at the national, regional and international levels.

6. States have the responsibility to establish, strengthen and protect NHRIs

⁵ 'A status' NHRIs have independent participation rights.

⁶ All NHRIs are able and encouraged to contribute to the work of these bodies and processes.

- NHRIs are unique and independent bodies, established by the State through legislation or under the Constitution, with a mandate and powers to promote and protect human rights.
- Through recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review, and through resolutions of the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, the UN continuously encourages States to establish and strengthen NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles.
- GANHRI and its long-term UN partners – OHCHR and UNDP – support States with advice on the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs.
- States have a responsibility to protect NHRIs against threats and reprisals, which are rising in all regions, for work undertaken according to their mandate. The UN consistently encourages States to fulfil this obligation.