

GANHRI Annual Conference

Thursday 16 March 2023, 10:00 - 13:00 & 15:00 - 18:00 | Geneva

Celebrating 75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 30 years of the Paris Principles: Reflecting where we are and where we go from here

I. Setting the context

2023 is a significant milestone for human rights and international and national human rights organisations and institutions.

It marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Principles by the United Nations General Assembly and the establishment of a worldwide network of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), today known as the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). This year also marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which provide the foundation for the work of NHRIs in all regions.

GANHRI's Annual Conference on 16 March 2023, to be held in person in Geneva, will be a timely opportunity for GANHRI members and partners to mark these anniversaries.

The Paris Principles and the Universal Declaration share a common spirit as they have paved the way for the establishment of international human rights standards and independent human rights institutions, which support States in their efforts to realise these standards for individuals and communities.

The adoption of the Universal Declaration in 1948 was a turning point. Each of its 30 articles echoed the aspirations of a generation that had suffered the terrors of war, the demolition of fundamental freedoms, and an indescribable loss of human life. The Universal Declaration sought to establish a spirit of peace and freedom for the next phase of human development.

However, there was also a need to establish institutions at the national and regional levels to ensure that the provisions of the Universal Declaration, and the subsequent international human rights treaties it inspired, could be implemented in practice.

While 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.

It was with this in mind that the international community came together in Paris in 1991 for a three-day workshop. The outcome 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 conformity with the Paris Principles.

Along with the Universal Declaration and the core international and regional human rights treaties, the Paris Principles constitute the framework that guides the work of NHRIs in their vision to help build a world where people can enjoy freedom, safety and respect. And through their international recognition, the Paris Principles confer legitimacy and credibility to an NHRI, as well as a unique and powerful protection.

In 1993, a small number of NHRIs decided to establish up a global network, recognising that they could better succeed in their daunting domestic responsibilities by working in unison. GANHRI² began with 12 members³ and has grown ten-fold over the past 30 years.⁴

Today, GANHRI is a mature and vibrant organisation of NHRIs from all regions, providing leadership in the promotion and protection of human rights. GANHRI works to support NHRs across the globe, in close coordination with NHRI regional networks and partners from the UN and civil society.

At a time when human rights, and those defending them, are under growing pressure, the anniversaries of the Universal Declaration, the Paris Principles and the establishment of GANHRI are an opportunity for us to recall the centrality of human rights in our everyday lives; reflect on the achievements of NHRIs over the past 30 years; discuss the impact and contribution of NHRIs at the national, regional, and international levels, in partnership with others; and highlight the action taken by NHRIs today to address the pressing human rights issues facing communities around the globe.

II. Mapping the way forward through the Annual Conference

Multiple challenges confront us as we begin 2023: the profound and continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; the devastating effects of new and protracted conflicts and war across regions; the impact of climate change on human rights; and the shocks of the ongoing economic crisis and their impacts on the most vulnerable.

While people in every region of the world have united their voices in important protest movements, calling for respect for human rights and accountability for abuse of power, the

¹ General Assembly resolution 48/134

² Initially 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/>

space for debate and dissent continues to shrink, with human rights defenders and NHRIs under pressure and facing threats for conducting their human rights work.

The responses to the multiple crises we face must be centred in human rights, in line with the provisions set out in the Universal Declaration and subsequent treaties, and designed with people as part of the solution, by enabling inclusive, safe and meaningful channels for debate and participation.

In this process, NHRIs – both individually and working collectively through GANHRI and their NHRI regional networks - have an important role and responsibilities.

NHRIs across the globe, and GANHRI as their collective voice, play a vital and constructive role in addressing the human rights impacts of today's complex and multiple crisis. Responding to these challenges, while also working within, at times, restrictive national settings, requires commitment, strategic thinking, innovation, partnerships and collaboration. Many GANHRI members require support and leadership to identify effective approaches to address these complex challenges and have voiced a desire to reflect together with peers on the role of NHRIs and GANHRI on potential approaches.

In addition to these global challenges, an increasing number of NHRIs report that the national context in which they operate is deteriorating, resulting in a combination of factors that may include reduced mandates and funding, and deteriorating working conditions, including escalated harassment of NHRIs and their staff. GANHRI, its members and partners continue to provide support, protection and emergency measures for NHRIs and their staff so that the NHRIs can continue to effectively fulfil their mandate of human rights promotion and protection.

III. Objectives

This year's Annual Conference will provide participating GANHRI members and partners with the opportunity to:

- Reflect on the current state of human rights and identify challenges, priorities and opportunities
- Reflect on the significance of the Universal Declaration and the Paris Principles in today's context
- Showcase the experiences and contributions of NHRIs in protecting the rights of people, both individually and in conjunction with their peers through GANHRI
- Discuss NHRIs' activities, priorities and needs, as they implement their mandates in accordance with Paris Principles in today's evolving context
- Highlight the important role that GANHRI has played throughout the years in supporting and protecting its members, and as their collective voice for promoting and protecting human rights

- Explore sustainable ways for moving forward and devising creative solutions, renewing our commitment and unlocking the full potential of NHRIs, the regional networks and GANHRI, while working with our partners, including across the United Nations, towards strengthening universal human rights.

IV. Outcome

An Outcome Statement will be adopted by participating GANHRI members.

V. Format and Participants

The Annual Conference will be participative and interactive. It will encourage all participants to engage in an exchange of experiences, discussions, and reflections. The Annual Conference will have an opening session, followed by sessions led by different speakers and interactive group discussions.

GANHRI will also coordinate a filming booth during the Annual Conference, where participants will be invited to share their insights on the role of NHRIs in promoting and protecting human rights, as well as on the importance of the Paris Principles.

The Annual Conference will be co-hosted by GANHRI and the UN Human Rights Office. It will enjoy simultaneous interpretation in all GANHRI working languages (Arabic, English, French and Spanish).