

GANHRI
Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions

2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE: THE ROLE OF NHRIs IN PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE

Summary

Digital technologies impact much of how people access public services, information and security, and how they participate in civic and political life. Online spaces have become central to public debate and to the work of civil society. This shift cuts both ways: it has opened new forms of participation and access, while also enabling surveillance, data extraction and content control that often escape meaningful oversight.

GANHRI's 2026 Annual Conference brought together National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and partners to examine these risks and identify priority areas for NHRI engagement on digitalisation and their role in shaping emerging technologies governance.

The Conference closed with the adoption of an Outcome Statement setting out priorities and calling on States and international partners to support their implementation.

Setting the agenda

GANHRI Chairperson Amina Bouayach framed the central question: will societies passively undergo digital transformation, or actively shape it? This transformation is not neutral. It redefines how human rights are exercised, opening new opportunities while also creating new avenues for violations. On one hand, she noted, digital technologies can expand access to justice and essential services, improve efficiency and transparency in governance, and enable greater inclusion. On the other hand, she named disinformation, deep fakes, algorithmic bias and facial recognition as urgent risks, stressing that without safeguards, these technologies can weaken fundamental rights.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk drew a parallel between the Vienna Declaration and the World Wide Web, with one expanding human rights protections and the other reshaping the landscape where those rights operate. Today, protection systems have not kept pace with technologies. He underscored that NHRIs are "uniquely positioned to be at the helm of this shift" in digital governance.

Human Rights Council President Ambassador Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro and **UNDP Administrator Alexander De Croo** reinforced NHRIs' role sustaining the human rights system by supporting national implementation while bridging global commitments with on-the-ground action.

Three strategic shifts

Across the Conference, three shifts emerge as necessary going forward:

1. **From reactive to proactive:** Human rights must be embedded in technology design from the start, not applied afterward. NHRIs must anticipate risks before harm occurs.
2. **From isolation to coordination:** Effective governance requires continuous multi-stakeholder engagement across governments, civil society, academia, the private sector, and international bodies. Regional Networks and thematic working groups are essential mechanisms for coordination and knowledge-sharing.
3. **From regulation alone to systemic change:** Legal frameworks alone cannot succeed without cultural and systemic change. Education, stakeholder engagement, ethical responsibility within companies, and capacity building are equally important.

Not every intervention focused on risk. **Chile's *Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos*** framed the digital space itself as a tool NHRIs should actively use, not just monitor. **South Africa's Human Rights Commission** pointed to its own social media campaigns to engage the public rather than only watch for harm. **Sweden's Institute for Human Rights** stressed the need to rebuild shared values and common ground in a fragmented, polarized environment.

Capacity and technical expertise

Capacity emerged as the most raised constraint across the Conference: limited budgets, technical expertise and influence over tech companies.

The **Republic of Congo's *Commission nationale des droits de l'Homme***, unable to realistically regulate platforms, proposed strengthening human rights education in school and university curricula instead. **Somalia's newly established National Independent Human Rights Commission** called for institutional capacity support more broadly.[1] **Ghana's Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice** conducts judicial training on digital rights.

The **NHRIs of Indonesia, Nepal, and Oman** each flagged the gap between digital tools' potential and their institutions' current technical readiness. The **NHRIs of Georgia, Great Britain, and the Netherlands** pointed to the difficulty of recruiting in-house technical experts, citing Regional Networks such as ENNHRI's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Working Group as a one way to help close that gap. Greece's National Commission for Human Rights similarly called for user-friendly structures and frameworks grounded in human rights principles, and for a shared and accessible "language" across stakeholders.

AI governance frameworks and legislation

Several NHRIs described concrete work shaping national AI law.

The National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea presented the country's AI Basic Act, which took effect in January 2026 as Asia's first comprehensive legal regime for AI. In 2024, the Commission developed a Human Rights Impact Assessment Tool for AI aiming at preventing discrimination and violations arising from the development and use of AI. The **Australian Human Rights Commission** reported on activities related to AI, including ensuring data use respects human rights principles, producing public reporting on emerging harms and developing specific guidance with other regulators. Its guiding principle is that existing standards should be applied consistently rather than replaced with new frameworks. The **Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission** operates without AI-specific legislation. It relies instead on the EU AI Act and a five-pillar approach spanning capacity building, digital mainstreaming, national guidelines, legislative engagement and research.

Greece's National Commission for Human Rights convened a 40-participant hearing feeding into a forthcoming national AI report and bringing together stakeholders from public authorities, independent bodies, academia, civil society and the private sector. **Georgia's Public Defender** examined AI use across more than 70 public institutions, producing recommendations to inform government regulation. Both institutions making the case for evidence-based dialogue over one-off consultation.

[1] Somalia's National Independent Human Rights Commission is not an accredited NHRI.

Azerbaijan's Human Rights Commissioner pushed for clearer normative AI frameworks, and **Mauritius's *Commission nationale des droits de l'Homme*** called for a shift from external enforcement toward internal developer accountability, with transparency embedded in AI design. NHRIs can act as intermediaries between stakeholders to influence policy-making.

Beyond AI specifically, **Burkina Faso's *Commission nationale des droits humains*** focused on obtaining authorization before personal data is used.[2] While **Timor Leste's *Provedoria dos Direitos Humanos e Justiça*** advocated for cybercrime legislation to close gaps in existing data protection law.

Enforcement and accountability in practice

Legislation is only half the picture. Several NHRIs pointed to where accountability is hardest to enforce, from the roots of online hate to the limits of holding platforms responsible. Others described enforcing it directly: curbing trafficking and armed-group recruitment, monitoring elections, and, in one case, reopening investigations into serious offline violations.

France's *Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'Homme* noted that social media amplifies rather than creates hate, meaning responses must address both root causes and technological amplification. The Commission also issued a 24-recommendation opinion on online hate and a proposed national action plan. The **Human Rights Commission of Zimbabwe** raised a related point, that human rights risks exist across the entire AI supply chain, not just at the platform level, including data extraction and content moderation labour.

The NHRIs of Indonesia, Lebanon, and Malaysia pointed to limits in platform governance. **Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights** cited a high volume of complaints tied to digital space and freedom of expression restrictions. **Lebanon's National Human Rights Commission** described the tension between addressing digital harms and protecting freedom of expression.[3] The **Human Rights Commission of Malaysia** listed as two challenges: the erosion of privacy, through unchecked data collection and surveillance practices, and a rise in digital financial scams with little effective remedy.

Colombia's *Defensoría del Pueblo* showed what that enforcement looks like in practice on three fronts. Courts have applied privacy, due process, and access-to-information rights to digital contexts. On platforms, strategic litigation led to content removal orders and direct takedown requests over trafficking-related content**.** On elections, political parties and candidates signed the 2025 "Commitment to a Free and Peaceful Electoral Process," a voluntary pledge to reduce electoral violence that was monitored through media analysis and keyword tracking.

[2] Burkina Faso's *Commission nationale des droits humains* is not an accredited NHRI.
[3] Lebanon's National Human Rights Commission is not an accredited NHRI.

Côte d'Ivoire's *Conseil national des droits de l'Homme* used technology for real-time electoral monitoring in a similar vein.

Chile's *Instituto nacional de derechos humanos* shared its experience working with courts to prevent and sanction digital crimes. The **Democratic Republic of the Congo's *Commission nationale des droits de l'Homme*** showed that accountability must extend beyond platform to serious offline violations, using its digital work to relaunch investigations into offline atrocities, including the Kasai Central massacres.

While NHRIs are not responsible for designing digital platforms, they can play an important role in oversight, advocacy, and engagement with relevant stakeholders.

Protecting women and children online

Much of that enforcement work exists to protect the groups most exposed to harm online.

The **Human Rights Commission of Zambia** raised the normative tension between protecting children online and respecting their rights to non-discrimination, participation and access to information, calling for a balanced approach. **Ghana's Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice** described advocacy against online sexual exploitation of children and called for legislative and policy frameworks to guide children's safe and responsible use of digital technology. should be given to children, including through the development of legislative and policy frameworks to guide safe and responsible use. The **Arab Network (ANNHRI)** piloted an AI avatar for receiving complaints from children, lowering barriers to access to justice for them and other groups in situations of vulnerability.

Morocco's *Conseil national des droits de l'Homme* launched in 2025 the « Speak Out against Gender-Based Violence" campaign addressing technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, combining AI-generated content, a nationwide caravan and public testimonies.

Cooperation and tools

Closing capacity gaps and aligning standards across borders increasingly depends on enhanced cooperation and shared resources. **The NHRIs of Mongolia and Thailand** both called for stronger alignment on standards across countries, given how borderless digital harms are.

ENNHRI focused on regulatory implementation across its members while **NANHRI** developed its own toolkit on the digital space, cited as a model other networks could build on.

The Digital Readiness Toolkit (developed through the Tripartite Partnership) provides practical guidance for assessing digital maturity and planning digital transformation,

recognising that NHRIs operate in different contexts and providing frameworks for decision-making without prescribing specific technologies.

The Human Rights Data Exchange (HRDx) consolidates fragmented human rights data (such as treaty body reports, field monitoring, statistical indicators) to enable earlier, more coordinated responses to violations. This aims at addressing the data silos that prevent early detection.

UNESCO's Internet Universality Indicators (ROAM-X framework) helps assess the state of Internet development at the national level according to rights, openness, accessibility and multi-stakeholder participation.

Index: Contributions by NHRI

NHRI	Topics raised	Section
Australia	Existing frameworks applied to AI	AI, governance frameworks and legislation
Azerbaijan	Normative AI framework	AI, governance frameworks and legislation
Burkina Faso	Consent before data use	AI, governance frameworks and legislation
Chile	Proactive digital engagement	Three strategic shifts
	Courts and digital crime	Enforcement and accountability in practice
Colombia	Strategic litigation	Enforcement and accountability in practice
	Electoral integrity initiative	
Rep. of Congo	Human rights education	Capacity and technical expertise
Côte d'Ivoire	Electoral monitoring	Enforcement and accountability in practice
Dem. Rep. of Congo	Offline accountability	Enforcement and accountability in practice
France	Hate speech and online hate	Enforcement and accountability in practice
Georgia	Technical hiring gap	Capacity and technical expertise
	AI use across 70+ public institutions	AI governance frameworks and legislation
Ghana	Child protection	Protecting women and children online
	Judicial training	

Great Britain	Technical hiring gap	Capacity and technical expertise
Greece	AI governance hearing	AI governance frameworks and legislation
Indonesia	Expression restrictions and complaint handling Technical readiness gap	Enforcement and accountability in practice Capacity and technical expertise
Ireland	AI governance	AI governance frameworks and legislation
Rep. of Korea	AI Basic Act Impact assessment tool	AI governance frameworks and legislation
Lebanon	Freedom of expression	Enforcement and accountability in practice
Malaysia	Data collection Financial scams	Enforcement and accountability in practice
Mauritius	Developer accountability	AI governance frameworks and legislation
Mongolia	Common standards	Cooperation and shared tools
Morocco	GBV campaign	Protecting women and children online
Nepal	Technical readiness gap	Capacity and technical expertise
The Netherlands	Technical hiring gap	Capacity and technical expertise
Oman	Technical readiness gap	Capacity and technical expertise
Somalia	Institutional capacity support	Capacity and technical expertise

South Africa	Digital rights engagement	Three strategic shifts
Sweden	Shared values and trust	Three strategic shifts
Thailand	Common standards	Cooperation and shared tools
Timor Leste	Cybercrime legislation	AI governance frameworks and legislation
Zambia	Children's rights online	Protecting women and children online
Zimbabwe	AI supply chain risks	Enforcement and accountability in practice

Note: **Bold**=A-status NHRI; Plain text=B-status NHRI; *Italics*=not an accredited GANHRI member. Status as of April 2026.

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