

Council calls for protection of human rights in the context of protests

28.03.2014

The Human Rights Council has adopted an important resolution underlining the responsibilities of States in protecting the human rights of protesters and laying the grounds for greater guidance on how to put that protection into practice.



(Geneva) - The UN Human Rights Council has adopted an [important resolution](#) underlining the responsibilities of States in protecting the human rights of protesters and laying the grounds for greater guidance on how to put that protection into practice.

The resolution calls upon States to promote safe environments for protests, recalling their responsibility to ensure that national legislation and practices comply with international human rights law.

The resolution also tasks the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of assembly and association and on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to present to the Council a compilation of practical recommendations for the proper management of assemblies, based on best practices and lessons learnt, in two years' time.

'Protests are a critical mechanism for guaranteeing civil society participation, ensuring the protection of human rights, challenging repression, and demanding good governance', said Ben Leather of the International Service for Human Rights.

'ISHR is pleased that the Human Rights Council has highlighted the legitimate and important role of protests in democratic societies and reaffirmed the obligations upon States to protect protesters' rights, avoid the use of force against them, and properly train their law enforcement officials'.

The resolution, led by Switzerland together with Turkey and Costa Rica, received cross-regional co-sponsorship and passed by 31 votes to nine, with seven abstentions. In spite of the long consultation process prior to the resolution's tabling, four hostile amendments proposed by South Africa on behalf of a group including Russia and Venezuela had to be defeated before the full resolution was voted. Earlier in the week, [ISHR and other NGOs had spoken out against the amendments](#), which ran contrary to the spirit of the resolution.

'Everything should be done to ensure that people can give full voice to their message. The resolution is of relevance given that in recent years peaceful protests have proved an important channel for peoples' participation', said Swiss Ambassador to the UN Alexandre Fasel.

The resolution also points to the particular vulnerability of human rights defenders in the context of protests, expresses concern at the criminalisation of protesters, and calls upon States to establish communication channels with those who take to the streets. It also highlights the importance of investigations into abuses occurring within protests.

'Whilst the Council still has much to do in order to respond adequately to violations committed in the context of protests, the strong support which this resolution received is an important step towards ensuring that protests can continue to be used by citizens to secure their rights, as they have on many occasions in generations before us', said Mr Leather.

'ISHR hopes to see States acting upon this resolution, and looks forward to the presentation of the practical recommendations by the Rapporteurs'.

Contact: Ben Leather, b.leather@ishr.ch

ISHR