

[UN: Uphold the fundamental right to freedom of association](#)

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(Geneva) - The UN and other multilateral organisations should practice what they preach and uphold the basic rights to freedom of assembly and association in all aspects of their work, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

In a [new report submitted today](#) to the UN's expert on freedom of assembly and association, Maina Kiai, ISHR highlighted the obligations of multilateral organisations, and States acting within those organisations, to promote and protect the right of everyone to access and communicate with international human rights mechanisms. The report also documents a range of ways in which the UN and States are violating these fundamental rights.

'The UN should practice what it preaches,' said Michael Ineichen, ISHR's Human Rights Council Advocacy Director. 'At a minimum, this means that international organisations should provide access and a voice to human rights defenders and victims, and redress where others seek to silence this voice.' Mr Ineichen said.

'Sadly, the very [procedures the UN created to facilitate civil society participation](#) in its work are often used in violation of international human rights law to discriminate against human rights defenders, such as on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, or to threaten and stifle activism' Mr Ineichen said.

Civil society is a significant source of expertise and knowledge for the UN human rights system, and plays a critical role in promoting human rights, accountability, the rule of law and development. However it is often confronted by obstacles imposed by States seeking to restrict NGO access and participation in the UN human rights system, or by bureaucratic obstacles inherent in the functioning of the system.

These challenges include difficulties of physical access to the UN mechanisms, limitations on the accreditation of NGOs and individuals, and can even include threats, attacks and reprisals for attempted or actual engagement with these mechanisms. One of the cruelest examples is the detention for several months of Cao Shunli, a Chinese human rights lawyer who died on 14 March 2013 after being denied adequate healthcare while in detention. She was arrested when travelling to participate in a training session on the UN human rights system. Her [alleged 'crime' was having campaigned for greater civil society participation](#) in the Council's review of China's human rights record.

'Enabling the safe and unhindered participation in all aspects of the UN's work, including particularly the promotion and protection of human rights, is not optional,' Mr Ineichen said, 'It is a legal right which imposes certain legal obligations on the concerned institutions themselves.'

The submission by ISHR outlines steps that States individually and through collective action at the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly should take to live up to their obligations under international human rights laws. As a principle of good governance, multilateral organisations should facilitate NGO access to and association with those organisations and should take positive steps and measures to prevent and ensure accountability for any reprisals associated with such access or attempted access.

Download the full submission [here](#).

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