

## **New manual aims to make violations against women human rights defenders and their activism visible**

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Violations and abuses against women human rights defenders (WHRDs) have for too long been largely invisible. The new manual '[Gendering Documentation: A manual for and about Women Human Rights Defenders](#)' outlines why documentation of their experience is important. It encourages documentation of a context in which particular abuses occur and focuses on bringing out the gender-dimension of those threats and attacks in a bid to make those visible.

'Experiences of women human rights defenders often go unnoticed, partly because of the very systems of oppression we are challenging - and even by allies in social movements that actually do document political resistance and abuses,' said Cynthia Rothschild, editor of the new manual. 'This project transcends existing documentation analysis and provides a unique tool for capturing the specific nature of violations against and activism of WHRDs.'

Documentation can have many purposes, including creating public awareness and mobilising people to push for social change. It can also be channeled towards human rights mechanisms in a bid to seek recognition, justice and accountability. Documenting violations against WHRDs can have specific advocacy objectives, including more effective gender specific protection measures for WHRDs.

'Ensuring protection for women human rights defenders relies on understanding the complexity of the situation they face,' said ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw. 'Documenting this experience is an essential first step in defining effective gender-specific protection measures.'

The situation faced by WHRDs has been the focus of [reports](#) by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, as well as the Special Rapporteur for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Reporting by the former was the springboard for the landmark [UN General Assembly 2013 resolution on the protection of women defenders](#), which highlights the importance of documentation and encourages States 'to promote and support projects to improve and further develop the documentation and monitoring of cases of violations against women human rights defenders'. The manual provides a guide as to how that documentation can be done.

'This pioneering project rests in the ideas that WHRDs work with bravery and resilience, and that documentation of our experiences of both abuses and activism is critically important,' said Ms Rothschild. Through the manual 'we are presented not just as victims and survivors of abuses but also as agents of change with strategic political vision and concrete demands for social justice,' she added.

ISHR is a founding member of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition and was a member of the team responsible for conceptualising, researching, drafting, editing and publishing the manual.