

[From text to practice: States widely endorse good practices in the protection of defenders at Human Rights Council](#)

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During the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, States widely endorsed seven principles of good practice laid out in the Special Rapporteur's report. The Special Rapporteur called on States to act and advocate globally for the implementation of the principles in developing protection systems for human rights defenders.



(Geneva) – States have widely endorsed [seven good practice principles to protect human rights defenders](#) set out in the [new report of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders](#), Michel Forst presented to the UN Human Rights Council last week.

59 States and 15 NGOs participated in the interactive dialogue, with States focusing on the following general key thematic issues:

- Condemnation of **threats and attacks against defenders**, including reprisals, arbitrary detention, prosecution and even killing of human rights defenders, with several States specifically condemning and citing the murder of [Berta Caceres](#) as part of the wider global crackdown against defenders.
- The need to **develop and implement national legal and policy frameworks to enhance the protection of defenders** and create a safe and enabling environment for their work, identifying that this includes not only ensuring the physical and psychological safety and wellbeing of defenders and their families, but also ensuring their safety in the digital space as well.
- Condemnation of the **increasing use of laws and policies to restrict access to funding** or fetter the resources and independence of human rights defender organisations.
- Recognising the **increased vulnerability of specific groups of defenders**, including lawyers, journalists, indigenous rights defenders and, in particular, women and LGBTI rights defenders facing acute risks of reprisal in carrying out their work, including a wide range of violence, including sexual violence, as well as gender-based discrimination measures.
- Highlighting the fact that **shrinking space for civil society organisations and human rights defenders is often an early warning sign of conflict and even genocide**, and encouraging the Special Rapporteur to collaborate with the full range of UN mechanisms and processes available to ensure early warning, prevention and effective intervention.

Several States also referred to other points concerning the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for defenders to carry out their work, including:

- **Non-engagement concerning country visits**, with Germany, Ireland and Denmark raising concerns over several States failing to respond to requests by the Special Rapporteur for country visits.
- **Reporting and complaints mechanisms** - Brazil and Sweden identified the need for States to create safe, free and accessible mechanisms for all defenders to report cases of threats, and that States need to adopt measures to ensure the physical protection of defenders through properly trained and equipped legal offices.

States: Take up the challenge - engage and advocate for good practices

'I would also call on States to look closely and see if laws that have been adopted by parliament are really in line with international obligations. I am available to these States if they would like to talk to me about whether their legislation hinders human rights defenders or if these laws are in line with international law.' - Closing remarks of Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders

Highlighting the importance of [the seven principles of good practice](#), a number of States,

including Switzerland, Australia, the Netherlands, Poland, South Africa (on behalf of the Africa Group), Spain, Latvia, and Slovenia used the dialogue to seek advice on further measures to implement the good practices at a regional, national and international level.

On **implementing good practices** generally, the Special Rapporteur proposed that each State take up the challenge of implementing these good practice principles by prioritising one such principle to act on domestically, and then also championing implementation of that principle among other States.

On **fostering local, national and international co-operation**, he referred to the need to pay greater attention to regional co-operation with organisations specialising in human rights, as well engaging with existing systems, such as the Annual Inter-mechanism Meeting, to further dialogue and knowledge exchange between States.

On **taking action to protect defenders in greater risk**, including women defenders, he reinforced the need to take a holistic approach to tackling these issues through identifying their intersectionality with gender. In doing so he commended [a report produced by the International Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders](#) as a key resource.

On **reprisals**, he identified the need for the Secretary-General to designate or appoint a senior, system-wide focal point or representative to combat reprisals against those seeking to co-operate with UN systems. He further emphasised this issue, stating:

'I am struck by the increasing number of attacks against defenders, and I'm struck by the fact that here in the Council even, some delegations say things which are unacceptable against defenders who just want to participate in the work of the Council or the work of the treaty bodies.'

Earlier this week [ISHR spoke on behalf of a group of NGOs](#), reaffirming the call on States, business enterprises, national human rights institutions, donors, civil society organisations and other stakeholders, to take the Special Rapporteur's challenge by engaging with and advocating for the implementation of the good practices globally – by taking a holistic approach to protecting and supporting human rights defenders.

Video of the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur as part of the 31st UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, is available in two parts [here](#) and [here](#).