

## [Global civil society alerts UN Committee to risks facing ESC defenders](#)

06.06.2016

As the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights convenes for 58th session in Geneva, a cross-regional coalition of over 300 civil society organisations called upon the expert body to respond to the grave risks facing human rights defenders who work on these rights and which could, they argue, amount to a violation of these rights themselves.



[Download the letter here in English!](#)

[Téléchargez la letter ici en français !](#)

[¡Descargue la carta aquí en español!](#)

[Download ISHR's new briefing paper on economic, social and cultural rights defenders here!](#)

(Geneva) - A cross-regional coalition of over 300 civil society organisations today called upon the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) to respond to the grave risks and hindering obstacles facing human rights defenders who work on these rights. Threats and obstacles for economic, social and cultural rights defenders, they argue, could amount to a violation of these rights themselves. The Committee's 58<sup>th</sup> session begins today in Geneva.

In a [letter](#) - led by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GIESCR) and Platform Against Impunity - NGOs, communities and social movements pointed to the reports of a range of international experts which show that ESC rights defenders are being killed, threatened, harassed, intimidated, disappeared, jailed, stigmatised and subject to restrictive laws, in attempts to silence them.

'Whether indigenous leaders opposing land grabs, health workers demanding access to medicines or NGOs denouncing obstacles to clean water provision, defenders of ESC rights often face a backlash which may dissuade them from continuing their activism', said ISHR's Ben Leather.

'In March, States expressed their concern for these defenders through a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council. Civil Society and Special Procedures have repeatedly called for concerted action. Now we hope the UN's expert body on this issue can also take a stand'.

The organisations accompanied the letter with a [briefing paper](#) on the issue, highlighting the important work already done by CESCR to encourage defender protection in countries under review. As Platform against Impunity's Andrea Bolaños underscored: 'The Committee has shown awareness and proactivity in speaking out against threats in countries where defenders face heightened risks. However, given the disturbing global trend we are currently seeing, civil society hopes CESCR can take action on the widespread issue as well as on country-specific situations'.

The coalition's letter expressed concern that the work of CESCR itself may well be undermined if States do not do more to protect local activists.

'If ESC rights defenders face attacks and restrictions for promoting ESC rights in their country, then they and others may well opt to discontinue this work', said GIESCR's Lucy McKernan. 'It then becomes less likely that they will submit information about the reality on the ground to the Committee, or support States in implementing the Committee's recommendations. This will hinder the impact of the Committee's valuable work'.

'A State which fails to protect human rights defenders is not serious enough about protecting the rights those

people defend', said Mr Leather, 'We hope the Committee can make that clear to all those who have signed the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights'.

*For more information, contact ISHR's Ben Leather ([b.leather@ishr.ch](mailto:b.leather@ishr.ch)), GIESCR's Lucy McKernan ([lucy@globalinitiative-escr.org](mailto:lucy@globalinitiative-escr.org)) or Platform Against Impunity's Andrea Bolaños ([ab@plataforma.org.gt](mailto:ab@plataforma.org.gt)).*

ISHR