

ISHR and ICAR launch new guide for States regarding business and human rights policies

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At a side event held this week on the margins of the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council, ISHR and ICAR launched their new practical guide on how States should consult human rights defenders in the development of National Action Plans and ensure that these plans include protections for defenders.



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(Geneva) - With an event at the UN, the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) and International Corporate Accountability Roundtable (ICAR) this week launched their new practical guide on how States should consult human rights defenders in the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) and ensure that NAPs include protections for defenders.

The EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, joined human rights defenders, business leaders, diplomats and UN experts in endorsing the new publication and reiterating the important role of human rights defenders in shaping policies on business and human rights, whilst condemning the risks they face in doing so.

‘Defenders play a critical role in promoting business respect for human rights; identifying, preventing, mitigating and ensuring accountability for corporate human rights abuses’, said ISHR’s Ben Leather, adding that the publication is intended to guide States in ‘how to include defenders in the development of NAPs, and how to create a NAP that protects defenders’.

Mr Lambrinidis congratulated ISHR and ICAR for helping to bridge the gap between international standards and practical reality, arguing that more needs to be done to get States, business and defenders around the same table.

The publication – available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#) – contains a checklist for how States ought to engage defenders in NAP development, as well as a template of questions which States ought to incorporate into their National Baseline Assessments (NBAs) prior to NAP development, in order to assess and develop policies which impact on the participation and protection of human rights defenders.

The guidance was developed with input from global civil society, and Hiram Kabarita from Kenya and Ivette Gonzalez represented local defenders on the event’s panel. ‘Defenders play an important role to ensure that business respect human rights, even when all odds are against them’, said Mr Kabarita.

Ms Gonzalez, whose organisation *Poder* is in the centre of a civil society coalition carrying out a NBA for the upcoming Mexican NAP, asserted that including civil society in the development of NAPs strengthen their legitimacy.

Business representatives on the panel reaffirmed that the launch of the guidance was timely, as more and more corporations embrace collaboration with civil society and use their situation as a marker of the context in which the business will have to operate.

Representing the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights, Catie Shevin explained that ‘the freedom of civil society organisations is seen as an indicator of human rights risks associated with particular countries.’

Meanwhile Nicole Karlebach explained how her company, Yahoo!, strongly relies on the input of defenders and NGOs, as it helps business to identify, avoid and mitigate human rights risks. ‘Having CSOs at the table is

valuable and an opportunity to identify the unseen consequences', she said.

Both ICAR's Cindy Woods and Michael Addo, of the UN Working Group on business and human rights, highlighted NAPs as a platform for policy development on business and human rights, and human rights defenders as a key stakeholder in that development.

Ms Woods said that the engagement of civil society by States in NAP development had so far been mixed, but hoped that the new guidance would lead to an increase in fruitful collaboration. Mr Addo called the guidance a 'useful tool' which helped spell out exactly how States should engage defenders, and could be used in conjunction with the Working Group's own general guidance.

The launch was chaired by Harriet Berg of the Permanent Mission of Norway to the UN in Geneva, who co-sponsored the event together with ISHR, ICAR, Protection International and Proyecto sobre Organización, Desarrollo, Educación e Investigación (PODER).

For more information, contact ISHR's Ben Leather on b.leather@ishr.ch or ICAR's Cindy Woods on cindy@icar.ngo.

Photos from the event can be found on our facebook page [here](#)

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