

HRC35 | UN experts on business and human rights to develop guidance on supporting defenders

12.06.2017

In response to the growing recognition of the risks faced by human rights defenders working in the context of business, the UN's expert working group on business and human rights has announced it will develop new guidance for business to engage with and help protect defenders.



The United Nations experts on business and human rights are [developing guidance for business to respect and support human rights defenders](#), said its Chair Michael Addo in addressing the Human Rights Council's 35th session in Geneva.

'The protection of human rights defenders is high on the agenda of my Working Group', said Addo. 'We are engaged in initial conversations with a range of stakeholders, including human rights defenders and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders on this matter.' The Working Group held a workshop on the topic in May 2017, and will consult further in the coming weeks.

As part of the Working Group's annual dialogue with the Human Rights Council, ISHR delivered a statement developed with human rights defenders from Peru, Ecuador and Russia.

Speaking on behalf of ISHR, Peruvian indigenous rights campaigner Maria Torres deplored the fact that many human rights defenders working in the context of business are killed and live in fear for merely defending human rights, and for their important role of assisting States with implementing their international human rights obligations. Citing examples from the Americas and Russia, ISHR made recommendations on responding to these threats.

'The Council should demand that States immediately adopt policies to protect human rights defenders, as the Working Group has also recommended', said Torres.

The statement further drew attention to the situation of human rights defenders from indigenous communities, and indigenous peoples' right to decide freely on their economic, social and cultural development priorities. The statement welcomed the emphasis of the Working Group on the free, prior and informed consent of all those affected by business operations, including indigenous peoples.

Responding to the statement by ISHR, Addo said that letters alleging human rights violations which his expert group sends to companies are 'taken very seriously' by both States and businesses. As such they can be key channels for human rights defenders to leverage the UN experts to contribute to their protection, and help respond to situations where human rights defenders are stigmatised, criminalised, attacked or killed.

Watch the statement here (English):

The full statement (in Spanish) is available [here](#).

Contact: Michael Ineichen, Human Rights Council Advocacy Director, on m.ineichen@ishr.ch or + 41 78 827 77 86.

Photo credit: UN Web TV