

ISHR advocacy helps to protect NGO participation in the UN Human Rights Council

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On 31 July, the Permanent Mission of Pakistan sent [letter on behalf of a group of 'like-minded States'](#) to the President of the Human Rights Council regarding the participation of NGOs. The letter makes a number of proposals which would have the purpose or effect of restricting NGOs' participation in the work of the Council, including by enabling the arbitrary or discriminatory exclusion of NGO representatives, exposing such representatives to increased risk of intimidation or reprisal, and facilitating the censorship of NGO side-events.

However, despite efforts to gather up to 60 signatories to the letter, the final letter was endorsed by just 13 States – Pakistan, China, Russia, Cuba, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Uganda, North Korea, Belarus, India, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Iran. This followed outreach and lobbying by NGOs to many States that were invited to sign on to the letter, including through the distribution of a [joint NGO letter](#) circulated to those States.

'International law recognises the important role played by non-governmental organisations in the promotion and protection of human rights, including through their advocacy at the UN,' said Phil Lynch, Director of the International Service for Human Rights.

'As the world's peak, multilateral human rights body, it is imperative that NGOs are able to participate in the work of the Human Rights Council and that the Council hears directly the voices of human rights defenders.'

'It is very pleasing that despite the best efforts of some States, only 13 of the UN's 193 Member States were prepared to endorse proposals that are incompatible with international law and which would undermine civil society contributions to the Council.'

The critical role of NGOs is enshrined in Article 38 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, General Assembly resolution 60/251 and the Human Rights Council's Institution Building Package. It is also reflected in Operative Paragraph 15 of Human Rights Council resolution 22/6 on human rights defenders, adopted by consensus by the Council in March 2013.

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