

Alert | UN General Assembly 72nd Session: Third Committee agenda

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The General Assembly's Third Committee is now in session. Below is our outline of what to look out for.



The 72nd session of the UN General Assembly is in full swing and with it also the Third Committee, which holds its session this year from Monday, 2 October to Wednesday, 22 November.

This year the Committee is chaired by H.E. Mr. Einar Gunnarsson from Iceland. The agenda will focus on a wide range of human rights matters including country situations, the advancement of women, the rights of indigenous people, and the protection of the rights of the child. There will be interactive dialogues with over 50 special rapporteurs, independent experts, chairs of working groups, and chairs of treaty bodies who will come to New York to present their reports.

The Third Committee will consider more than 60 draft resolutions. Significantly, resolutions on the protection of human rights defenders, and on national human rights institutions will be negotiated. As in past years, the annual [report of the Human Rights Council](#) will likely be the focus of a resolution.

ISHR will be monitoring the Third Committee as well as the General Assembly plenary meetings and report on key developments. Follow us on Twitter at [@ISHRglobal](#) and at [#UNGA72](#) for the latest updates. Formal meetings of the Third Committee can be watched live on the [UN Web TV](#).

Key Resolutions

Thematic Resolutions

Human rights defenders: (lead sponsor Norway)

This year the GA's biennial resolution on the protection of human rights defenders returns. It is understood that Norway will be presenting a draft resolution reasserting the importance of human rights defenders in our communities. With the anniversary of the [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#) in 2018, the resolution is intended to provide impetus to the promotion of the Declaration and to encourage a range of actors to play and continue to play an active part in contributing to the effective implementation of the Declaration.

ISHR welcomes the signposted focus in this year's human rights defenders' resolution on implementation of the Declaration. The lack of implementation of the terms of the UN Declaration - a consensus text - and of UN resolutions on the protection and promotion of human rights defenders needs to be addressed urgently. The UN has to institute means to measure levels of implementation and for all relevant stakeholders to report regularly on that implementation. ISHR would like to see the Norway draft resolution propose activities that keep the Third Committee focused on the challenge of implementation of human rights defender resolutions over time.

National human rights institutions: (lead sponsor Germany)

Two years ago, the General Assembly passed a landmark resolution on national human rights institutions, which included a call for enhancing participation of national human rights institutions in relevant UN mechanisms and processes. The resolution is back this year and it is expected to note where participation has increased and where action still needs to be taken.

Safety of journalists and the issue of impunity: (lead sponsor Greece)

The word is that the resolution on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, led by Greece, will look to introducing a clearer gender focus. It is, however, unclear how closely the text will seek to introduce language agreed by the Human Rights Council in 2016.

Rural Women: (lead sponsor Mongolia)

This resolution is likely to draw attention given that 'rural women' is also the theme of next year's Commission on the Status of Women meeting. Concern has been voiced about States using the negotiation on the Third Committee text to advance outcomes they seek at the Committee on the Status of Women.

Country Situations

This year the Third Committee will focus on country-specific resolutions on:

- the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (led by the European Union and Japan);
- Iran (led by Canada);
- Syria (led by Saudi Arabia); and
- Crimea (led by Ukraine).

It is expected that the lead sponsors of the resolution on the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** will strive to ensure the resolution focuses on the human rights situation in the country, and not on questions related to peace and security that are discussed in other UN bodies. There are not expected to be huge changes to the resolution on **Iran**, with the aim of retaining or building the support the resolution enjoyed last year. The resolution on **Syria** that last year was led by the triad of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar, will this year most likely be presented solely by Saudi Arabia.

The GA resolution on **Myanmar** was dropped last year on the basis that progress had been made, singling Myanmar out as a country resolution that was unmerited. With the situation faced by the Rohingya people in the country, strong calls have been made to have the General Assembly define a course of action to protect their rights. It is understood that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is preparing a text on that topic. This text won't address other human rights violations experienced in the country, though. However, it is argued that they should also continue receiving attention by the General Assembly. It is understood that at this time the EU – the pen-holder on the recently discontinued resolution – is not considering bringing back a text.

In all country resolutions, ISHR urges the retention and enhancement of language on civil society organisations and human rights defenders, as well as language on the need to protect the right to free access and communication with international human rights mechanisms without being subject to intimidation and reprisals.

Negotiations of Resolutions

Overall, there is concern that some States will push for the insertion of paragraphs referencing the importance of respect for '**national sovereignty**'. Such a dynamic is not new at the Third Committee but is expected to be seen more this year, in part due to implementation successes last year and at the recent Human Rights Council session. ISHR hopes that any such efforts will be robustly challenged.

Reports and Interactive Dialogues

The Third Committee will hear the presentation of reports and engage in interactive dialogues with Special Procedures with both country-specific and thematic foci. Many of these have highlighted concerns about restrictions on the space for civil society to operate, emphasized the importance of the role of national human rights institutions, and provided recommendations for change.

Thematic Reports

- The **Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defender's fourth report to the GA ([A/72/170](#))** highlights the increasing threats and attacks faced by defenders working on business-related impacts on human rights. Defending human rights over 'profits, privilege and prejudice' can be dangerous, even deadly, work. The Special Rapporteur notes that businesses must desist from interfering with defenders' legitimate activities; assess the status of civic freedoms as part of their human rights due diligence; and engage with concerned Governments over their findings. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 25 October.
- The Report of the **Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the rights of indigenous**

peoples (A/72/186) focuses on the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as it celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. In her report, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz expresses 'very serious concerns' about the designation of '[human rights defence as a criminal activity](#)' and the impunity that dominates cases of violence against indigenous people under the guise of anti-terrorist legislation. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 12 October.

- In her report, **Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association (A/72/135)** Annalisa Ciampi states that '[the voices of civil society have been restricted or silenced, if not eliminated, in every region across the globe](#)'. She attributes this, among other things, to restrictive legislations, counter-terrorism measures used to silence opposition, and the '[harassment of and violence against human rights defenders and ordinary people who exercise their right to express opinions in peaceful protests](#).' She sees an urgent need to expand global civic space to defend and further democratic processes. Ciampi also highlights the role of her mandate in alerting the UN and its Member States to emerging crises. Presentation of report and interactive dialogue: 17 October.
- In his third report, the **Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (A/72/350)** reviews access-to-information policies of international organisations, including the UN. Though the UN has vast resources available to the public, there is an array of undisclosed information and no system in place to access it. David Kaye provides key elements for effective access-to-information policies including involving multiple stakeholders in the adoption process. In its submission for this report, ISHR outlined information that could be relevant to the public, and proposed ways OHCHR could improve proactive disclosures. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 24 October.
- In their report the **Working Group on the issue on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises (A/72/162)** focuses on effective remedies as defined by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It notes that one of the main problems when seeking remedies is fear of victimisation. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders are essential to 'enable justice' for victims of corporate human rights abuses. The Working Group notes that there is an increasing awareness by businesses that it is in their interest to speak up for persecuted human rights defenders. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 17 October 2017.
- The report of the **Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (A/72/172)** addresses two key issues: the de-criminalisation of consensual same-sex relations, and effective anti-discrimination measures. The Special Rapporteur calls for reforms at all State levels to end criminalization and to repeal legislation that discriminates against LGBTI defenders. Referring to a submission by a group of NGOs, including ISHR, he emphasises the importance of civil society, the need for '[more space for a strong civil society, national human rights institutions and human rights defenders](#)', and the need to protect them from reprisals. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 20 October 2017.
- The report of the **Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights (A/72/153)** provides an analysis of how fundamentalism and extremism impact upon the cultural rights of women. Karima Bennouna stresses the danger women human rights defenders face when they are seen as opponents by both non-State fundamentalists or extremists, and/or by repressive governments – often simultaneously. She commends the women for regularly being '[at the forefront of recognizing, documenting and opposing fundamentalist and extremist abuses](#).' She urges the international community to listen, empower and protect women human rights defenders, and to provide them with '[resources, structures, visibility and access to media outlets so that their efforts can crystallize into systematic and institutionalised opposition](#)'. She further remarks that the rise of extremism can be facilitated by governments silencing civil society, which renders them unable to combat fundamentalism and extremism. Presentation of report and interactive dialogue: 25 October.
- In her first report as mandate holder, **the Special Rapporteur on human rights of internally displaced persons (A/72/202)** outlines her thematic priorities. She emphasizes the important role of national human rights institutions (NHRIs) in identifying human rights violations that so frequently precede displacement, and in pushing for change. The Special Rapporteur notes her intention to deepen her office's engagement

with NHRIs, and to '[provide technical assistance and training to national authorities, national human rights institutions and civil society partners](#)' in order to conduct and sustain participatory processes. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 20 October.

- In a report ([A/72/291](#)) requested by the General Assembly (resolution [71/179](#)), the **Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance** emphasises the role of civil society and international and regional human rights mechanisms '[to effectively counter extremist political parties, movements and groups \[...\]](#)'. He highlights their importance in '[collecting information, working closely with victims and promoting democratic principles and human rights](#)' and '[welcomes coordination between governmental structures and civil society in order to maximise efforts on anti-discrimination policies](#)'. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 31 October.
- The **Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences** ([A/72/134](#)) reports on the effectiveness and adequacy of current legal frameworks surrounding the mandate, and their implementation, following a call for input. Amongst other recommendations, civil society organisations called for strengthening national human rights institutions and greater support for women's rights organisations and women human rights defenders, who face threats and harassment. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 5 October.

Country Reports

The Third Committee will also engage in interactive dialogues with mandate-holders on several country situations.

- On 25-26 October 2017, Special Rapporteurs will present to the Third Committee on the situation of human rights in **Myanmar** (report to be issued), the **Islamic Republic of Iran** ([A/72/322](#)), the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** (report to be issued), **Eritrea** ([A/HRC/35/39](#)), **Belarus** (report to be issued), and the **Palestinian territories** occupied since 1967 ([A/72/322](#)).
- The Secretary-General's report on the situation of human rights in the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** ([A/72/279](#)) has also been issued. He will also be releasing a report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- The Chair of the **Commission of Inquiry on Burundi** ([A/HRC/36/54](#)) will also present their report to the General Assembly. The Commission's conclusion that it has 'reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Burundi since April 2015', and Burundi's failure to cooperate with UN mechanisms, both require the General Assembly to take action and suspend Burundi's membership of the Human Rights Council. Interactive dialogue and presentation of report: 26 October.

For the full provisional list of when Special Procedures will report to the Third Committee, see: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/72/docs/dialogues.pdf>.

Other Relevant Reports

- The President of the Human Rights Council will present the **Human Rights Council Annual Report** ([A/72/53](#)) to the Third Committee on 2 November 2017. It is strongly hoped that this year there will be no challenge to Human Rights Council resolutions and decisions by the Third Committee.
- The **Secretary-General's report on protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism** ([A/72/316](#)) focuses this year on countries' obligations under international human rights law in measures to combat terrorism. Specific challenges include the use of counter-terrorism legislation to suppress freedom of expression and association. It also frequently targets and detains human rights defenders, as well as journalists and lawyers. The Secretary-General urges states to comply with their obligations under international law, reaffirming that these laws apply to counter-terrorism legislation.

Photo: ISHR

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