

## [UN Secretary General | Support the General Assembly resolution on human rights defenders](#)

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**At the beginning of the Secretary General's mandate in October 2016, 80 civil society organisations from across the world called on him to place the promotion and protection of human rights defenders at the heart of the UN's priorities. In a follow up letter sent last week, civil society organisations highlight that not only is this call even more urgent today, but the recent UN General Assembly resolution on defenders provides a practical way to take steps toward that aim.**



This year marks the 20th anniversary of the [UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) (Declaration). While there have been some positive advances since 1998, it is not enough - defenders continue to face unacceptable restrictions, ranging from threats, to criminalisation, arbitrary detention and torture.

Though these commitments were made twenty years ago, and in UN resolutions since, they have not been realised. However, with the recent passage of the [resolution on defenders](#) at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, States are finally focusing on implementation.

This resolution is in line with calls made in a joint letter by [80 civil society organisations](#) at the start of the Secretary General's mandate to place defender protection at the heart of the UN's priorities. In a [follow up letter](#) sent last week civil society organisations reiterated this call, seizing on the practical steps for defender protection outlined in the resolution.

'Through this follow up letter, we're calling on the Secretary General to take action. By speaking out about the importance of their role, and denouncing attacks against them, the Secretary General would signal that defender protection is one of the UN's key priorities. Such a move would be consistent with UN initiatives such as Agenda 2030 which relies on civil society partnership and protection', says ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw.

The [General Assembly resolution](#), passed by consensus, calls on the Secretary General to undertake a comprehensive assessment and analysis of progress, achievements and challenges regarding the UN's promotion and implementation of the Declaration.

'This report provides a rare opportunity to reflect upon and recommend change in regard to the UN's vital work to support defenders, including advice given to States. We believe that the Secretary General's explicit backing of this evaluation would work toward ensuring comprehensive input and buy-in by UN bodies to the final report's findings and recommendations. Now is the time to act to change the pattern of the last 20 years, to focus on the implementation of international obligations and take steps toward protecting human rights defenders', added ISHR's Tess McEvoy.

The joint civil society letter can be accessed [here](#).

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