

## **Special Rapporteur documents a global war against human rights defenders**

26.12.2018

**In a major new report on the situation of human rights defenders globally and at country level in over a decade, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders suggests that restrictions placed on those defending rights and attacks against them amounts to a war being waged against human rights defenders.**



The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Michel Forst, has just launched what could be the most far-reaching global and country-level analysis of the situation for human rights defenders in over a decade. With a focus on legal and administrative protections – or the absence of them – and State policy and practice, [the World Report](#) examines the situation for defenders in 140 countries and provides States with recommendations on how to better implement the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Forst concludes that across the globe, States are not only failing to implement the Declaration but actually go out of their way to frustrate its ambitions. By restricting and attacking defenders, the States are wrecking their own chances of dealing with major global challenges, such as ensuring sustainable development, dealing with migration and climate change.

‘The Special Rapporteur makes the point that human rights defenders are essential partners to States. They should not be seen as the enemy,’ said ISHR’s Madeleine Sinclair.

In the decade since the 2006 [Global Survey](#) of Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders to the UN Secretary General, Hina Jilani, Forst notes that there have been positive advances. The 2017 decree implementing a law on the protection of defenders in Cote d’Ivoire, for example, is said to have produced ‘a positive impact on several countries in the region where engagement from civil society or government institutions has resulted in similar legislation in other countries of the region.’

The development of laws and policies to support defenders, and the use of legal and administrative frameworks to both protect and persecute defenders are two of the major findings in the report. The third attempts to revile and target human rights defenders, including through State sanctioned campaigns. Forst notes that even where States officials are not actively targeting defenders, they often fail to challenge criticism of defenders advanced by powerful social, political and economic interests.

The situation for defenders in many locations is bleak.

‘The World Report documents the much discussed closing of civic space and suggests that it has become, in too many locations, a war on human rights defenders,’ noted Forst.

The findings draw from human rights reports of civil society organisations and individual defenders, as well as input from States and national human rights organisations.

The Special Rapporteur was speaking to the report conclusions at the [High Level Event on human rights defenders](#) held at the UN General Assembly on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

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