

Director's Update - February 2013

22.02.2013

Geneva, 22 February 2013

Dear friends and supporters

I'd like to introduce myself as the new Director of the International Service for Human Rights. I also want to take this opportunity to share my vision for the organisation and an insight into our key priorities in the coming months.



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I'd like to introduce myself as the new Director of the International Service for Human Rights. I also want to take this opportunity to share my vision for the organisation and an insight into our key priorities in the coming months.

I was very excited to take up the Director post just a few weeks ago, joining an NGO with a proven track record in supporting human rights defenders and strengthening human rights systems. Since joining I have been greatly impressed by the passion, commitment and professionalism of the staff and encouraged by the depth of support for ISHR in the broader human rights movement.

Looking ahead, I am very keen to build on ISHR's historic achievements in coordinating and catalysing human rights change. Over the last 20 years this has ranged from facilitating global civil society engagement with the [Vienna Conference on Human Rights](#) (1993), to leading the adoption of the [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#) (1999), to contributing to the establishment of the [UN Human Rights Council](#) (2006), to initiating the development of the [Yogyakarta Principles](#) on sexual orientation and gender identity (2007). In recent years, ISHR has also played a leading role in putting the issue of [reprisals against human rights defenders](#) on the international agenda.

Over the coming year, I have three key priorities for ISHR which I look forward to working with you on.

- The first is to ensure that ISHR works in a way that is strategic, collaborative and impactful. I am committed to ISHR being an organisation that leads and coordinates coalitions for change, that is nimble and able to take advantage of opportunities for reform, and that is dynamic and able to move quickly to respond to threats of regress.
- The second is for ISHR to speak out with greater frequency and force on situations of human rights concern. While much of our advocacy must be discreet and diplomatic in order to be influential, there are other occasions when ISHR must speak out, as we have recently on issues such as the [criminalisation of so-called 'homosexual propaganda'](#) in Russia and attempts to [censor or exclude NGOs](#) from the UN.
- My third priority is to ensure ISHR's financial security and to plan for growth. This will require the continued generous commitment of existing funders and reaching out to new supporters, including private donors, trusts and foundations. I look forward to your support in this regard.

In the immediate future, the staff and I are busy preparing for the 22nd session of the UN Human Rights Council, which starts next week. As I recently wrote in the [Global Post](#), our priority for this session is the passage of a landmark resolution calling for the elimination of laws which criminalise or restrict the work of human rights defenders and the enactment of laws ensuring they are able to fully exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms. We're delighted to be hosting a [major seminar](#) on this issue with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, to which you are invited. We'll also be in Nigeria next week, conducting training and advocacy to challenge discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender

identity.

As many of you will know, this Council session also marks the 20th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. While I am too young to have attended the 1993 conference, Professor Manfred Nowak (former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture) recently wrote to me reflecting on the 'most important role' that ISHR then played in facilitating and supporting the engagement of 'more than 1,500 NGOs from all over the world'. For a new Director, this is a daunting but inspiring history! Read what 20 of the world's leading human rights advocates and experts - from Mary Robinson, to Vitit Muntarbhorn, to Sir Nigel Rodley - have to say on the impact and future of the VDPA in the special [Vienna + 20 section of our website](#).

I look forward to working together with you in the coming months and years towards our common goals of supporting human rights defenders and strengthening human rights systems worldwide. In the meantime, please feel free to [contact me](#) about any aspect of ISHR's work.

Best wishes

Phil Lynch
Director
International Service for Human Rights

ISHR