

# **Strengthening diplomatic initiatives for the protection of human rights defenders**

20.05.2019

**ISHR's 'action sheets' on diplomatic initiatives for the protection of human rights defenders are tools to enhance the impact of diplomatic guidelines and other forms of support to HRDs. They help defenders better leverage diplomatic support, and assist diplomatic representatives to provide better quality, consistent and targeted support to HRDs, including women human rights defenders, defenders working in restrictive environments and environmental human rights defenders.**



## **A tool for defenders**

- [Leveraging Diplomatic Support for the Protection of Defenders](#)

## **Tools for diplomats**

- [Protecting Human Rights Defenders as Essential Partners](#)
- [Women Human Rights Defenders](#)
- [Human Rights Defenders in Restrictive Environments](#)
- [Environmental Human Rights Defenders](#)

*Note: For brevity and readability, all of the sources and references used for the action sheets are contained in a consolidated separate document. Since the finalisation of these action sheets in June 2019, the UK has published its own guidelines, which are still listed as 'private' in the tools above.*

Diplomatic initiatives for the protection of human rights defenders can be an important part of the overall protection strategy for human rights defenders. Several countries have adopted specific 'Diplomatic Guidelines' on the protection of HRDs, including Switzerland, Canada, the European Union, Norway, and Finland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

International mechanisms such as the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs have welcomed such Guidelines as show of "real will, over and above formal commitments, to promote a national or intergovernmental policy in support of human rights defenders" and have called on other States to follow this good practice. However, HRDs and the Special Rapporteur have also noted barriers to the effectiveness of the guidelines, including:

- Lack of awareness of the existence, content and use of guidelines by human rights defenders and even diplomatic representatives;
- Lack of training on and evaluating the impact of guidelines;
- Inconsistency in the support provided, based on political considerations, lack of coordination or real or perceived conflicts of interest.

To respond to some of these challenges, ISHR undertook consultations and research with HRDs and diplomatic representatives to strengthen the scope and implementation of such guidelines. The product of this research is captured in five 'action sheets' intended to make diplomatic initiatives for the protection of human rights defenders more comprehensive, responsive and effective, and enhancing the complementarity of these efforts and the increasing existence of national level protection laws, policies and mechanisms.

We hope that these action sheets will serve as useful tools for human rights defenders and diplomatic representatives to better leverage and provide diplomatic support, and may also serve to catalyse action by other States, who are generally supportive of HRDs, including at international levels, but do not as of yet reflect this explicitly in their policy.

## Diplomatic Guidelines

This page also provides quick access to the key guidelines on the protection of human rights defenders:

- Canada: [Voices at Risk](#)
- Netherlands: [Action plan for HRDs](#)
- European Union: [EU Guidelines on the Protection of HRDs](#)
- Finland: [Finish Guidelines on HRDs](#)
- Norway: [Guide for the foreign service](#)
- Switzerland: 2019 revised [Swiss Guidelines on HRDs](#) (replacing 2014 version of [Swiss Guidelines on HRDs](#))
- United Kingdom: [UK support to HRDs](#)
- United States: Archived [fact sheet on HRDs](#)

For further information, questions or feedback, please [get in touch](#).

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