

## **ISHR's achievements at the Human Rights Council's 22nd session**

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The 22nd session of the Human Rights Council saw ISHR pursuing its goals to promote and protect human rights around the world by supporting human rights defenders and strengthening human rights systems.

The session was one of the most successful ever, with a landmark resolution on the protection of human rights defenders being adopted by consensus, the prevention of efforts to undermine universality of human rights through regressive appeals to 'traditional values', and steps towards accountability in Sri Lanka, Syria, and North Korea.

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For ISHR, many of these outcomes marked the achievement of the advocacy goals we set for the session.

### **Supporting human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders**

The adoption of a landmark text on human rights defenders, ably led through negotiations by Norway, marked many months of hard work and engagement by ISHR. Alongside working to spearhead input into the text from human rights defenders around the world, ISHR's own expertise on the subject of human rights defenders enabled us to provide Norway with advice and support throughout the resolution negotiations.

The resulting resolution calls for an end to the use and abuse of national law to impair, restrict, and criminalise the work of human rights defenders, noting that this is in contravention of international law. All States are called upon to support the work of human rights defenders and to protect them from harassment, threats, and attacks.

Crucially, both this text and a text on the protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests, include reference to the specific threats faced by women human rights defenders.

One of ISHR's advocacy goals is to ensure that human rights laws and mechanisms protect women human rights defenders, in recognition of the specific vulnerability that women human rights defenders face, something made even more apparent during events of the 'Arab Spring'. As a result of ISHR's championing of this issue, lead States ensured that the final texts include this important reference to the particular vulnerability of women defenders and the need for States to pay particular attention to the protection of women.

The Council adopted both resolutions by consensus.

### **Responding to threats of regress to the universality of human rights**

ISHR continued to call for the Council to unequivocally clarify that under no circumstances can human rights be restricted to protect so called 'traditional values'.

It became apparent at this session, however, that the push to promote a 'traditional values' agenda is by no means slowing down. Not least, Egypt presented a draft text on 'protection of the family'. This text was met with grave concern by human rights defenders who felt that it represented neither the diversity of family forms nor the rights of particular individuals within the family.

Conveying our concerns to States, ISHR highlighted the dangers that such a resolution could pose if not well-framed to ensure protection of all individuals' human rights. Following sustained advocacy by a coalition of NGOs as well as concerned States, Egypt ultimately announced its decision to postpone consideration of the text.

ISHR will continue to work to develop strategic ways to respond to this issue, both in this particular case, with Egypt likely to re-introduce the text at the June 2013 Council session, but also the general 'traditional values' agenda.

### **Conducting advocacy to develop and strengthen human rights laws and mechanisms to prevent and respond to reprisals**

ISHR's longstanding efforts to urge States to take steps to protect human rights defenders from reprisals continued as we rallied States to join their voices to a Hungarian-led statement condemning reprisals. 54 States endorsed this statement, sending a strong signal that the Council is expected to act on this issue, and that political momentum towards a stronger response is building.

ISHR campaigned to have this statement delivered, and success ensured that the issue remained high on the Council's agenda in anticipation of the adoption of a further resolution at the September 2013 session of the Council.

ISHR has been in the lead on advocacy calling for the systematic address acts of reprisal within both the UN and regional systems. At UN level, this includes coordination within the framework of the UPR, treaty bodies, and special procedures, and for more coordination among these mechanisms, a call that was endorsed in the joint statement. States specifically called on the Council to react to, and follow up on, cases of reprisal that are brought to its attention. More broadly, ISHR has also pushed for consistent approaches of the UN and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The statement anticipates a further resolution on reprisals, to be led by Hungary at the September session of the Council. ISHR will continue to work closely with Hungary and other States to push for a systematic response from the Council to reprisals, to prevent and protect against reprisals, and ensure accountability for defenders who suffer reprisals.

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