

Asia | ISHR launches new report on the legislative protection of human rights defenders in seven countries

13.04.2019

ISHR launches a report examining existing legal frameworks on the protection of human rights defenders in seven countries in Asia and calls for further legislative developments to protect their work.



ISHR's report entitled [*Fighting to Exist: Legislative Protection for Human Rights Defenders in Asia*](#) summarises the risks and challenges defenders face and examines the legislative frameworks on the rights to freedom of association, assembly, and expression in seven jurisdictions. It also discusses developments regarding specific laws and policies for the protection of human rights defenders.

'The legal recognition and protection of human rights defenders is essential to ensure they can work in a safe environment, free from attacks and reprisals. However, there is often a gap between the UN Declaration on the Human Rights Defenders at the international level and national laws seeking to implement those commitments at the national level. Not only this, there has been a proliferation of laws which act to restrict and criminalize the work of defenders. As a result, ISHR calls for developments to be made on the national level for the safety and security of defenders', says ISHR's Tess McEvoy.

Human rights defenders across Asia face threats and harassment. Their lives are in danger because of the work they do to protect the rights of others. The challenges faced by defenders in Asia vary, with extreme cases being seen in the Philippines – the deadliest country in Asia for defenders, where they are targeted and in some cases killed. 'This report not only examines the existing legislative frameworks in which defenders work, it also highlights some positive developments taking place within the region regarding legislative protection for defenders', added McEvoy.

Inputs on the situation of human rights defenders were provided in a [*regional consultation held by ISHR in the Philippines in January 2018*](#). Representatives from several Asian jurisdictions participated in the consultation with discussions focused on restrictive national legislation, such as laws that constrain NGOs and activities by hindering funding, freedom of expression and association.

We welcome developments in national legislation for the protection of human rights defenders across the globe. In addition to the passage of laws or mechanisms in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali, Colombia and Mexico; [*a bill on the protection of human rights defenders passed three readings in June*](#) in the Philippines House of representatives. The bill was developed in conjunction with civil society and is based on the [*Model Law for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders*](#).

In other States, such as Paraguay, Peru, Niger, Guinea, Mongolia and Nepal, draft laws are in the process of being developed by civil society. While ISHR welcomes the recent developments, much remains to be done by States to ensure national policies echo the rights asserted in the UN Declaration on the Human Rights Defenders.

This report forms part of [*ISHR's broader work to strengthen the legislative protection of human rights defenders in Asia*](#).

Photo: ISHR

Contact: Tess McEvoy, t.mcevoy@ishr.ch