

[Reprisals | UN and States can and must do more to prevent and address reprisals](#)

03.05.2020

In order for the international human rights system to function to its fullest potential, human rights defenders must be able to share crucial information and perspectives regarding situations on the ground. However, many defenders still face unacceptable risks and are unable to cooperate safely with the UN.



[ISHR's new report to the UN Secretary-General](#) demonstrates the need for the UN and States to do more to prevent and ensure accountability for intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate or seek to cooperate with the UN. The report was prepared in response to the call for submissions to the annual report of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the UN in the field of human rights, aka the 'Reprisals Report'. ISHR's report outlines developments in the international and regional systems, and documents a number of cases.

[ISHR's submission](#) presents a disturbing pattern of intimidation and reprisals. Cases of reprisals featured in the submission range from States dangerously maligning defenders to killing them. In Venezuela, increased monitoring of the situation by the UN has been met with increased risk, stigmatization and harassment of defenders working with the mechanisms. In the Philippines, human rights defenders continue to be vilified by the government and accused of being terrorists. Defenders in Honduras, India, Thailand, Cuba, and Yemen continue to be threatened and harassed. In Russia and Cameroon, defenders who engaged with the UN have been refused entry to the country. Defenders working on China continue to be smeared and discredited and there continues to be no investigation into the death of Cao Shunli, who was jailed and died in custody for trying to provide information to the UN. Defenders in Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, remain in jail because they dared engage in international advocacy. Other countries cited in the report include The Bahamas, Brazil, Burundi, Mexico, Morocco, and the United States.

[The report](#) includes follow-up information on a large number of cases, demonstrating that incidents of reprisals and intimidation are very rarely, if ever, adequately resolved. 'One only needs to look at the cases that remain unresolved year after year, to know that something more must be done by the UN on follow-up. Otherwise, reprisals 'work' to dissuade engagement, and perpetrators are emboldened', said Madeleine Sinclair, New York Office Co-Director and Legal Counsel.

The primary duty to prevent and remedy reprisals lies with States—who must do more to prevent, investigate and ensure accountability for reprisals. 'States must use the opportunity of the interactive dialogue on the Secretary-General's report in September, as well as Item 5 debates, to raise specific cases and hold their peers accountable', said Sinclair.

[The submission](#) also highlights ISHR's new study on new study, '[Intimidation and its Impact on Engagement with the UN Human Rights System: Methodological challenges and opportunities](#)'. The study responds to the challenge of severe intimidation leading to 'self-censorship' and proposes methodological approaches to strengthen the future capacity to measure and understand how intimidation tactics – both blunt and subtle – effectively inhibit human rights reporting and action, thus reinforcing impunity for States' abuses. Among these is the dire need for better data. 'As a starting point, the UN needs to harness its vast data collecting power to systematically track cooperation with its diverse human rights mechanisms so as to be able to track deterioration or improvements from year to year,' said Sinclair. The study proposes that this, combined with data on human rights abuses, would enable the identification of countries where there is high abuse and low cooperation as well as those with high abuse and high cooperation. Best practice research can then extract lessons learned from countries with high levels of abuse and high levels of cooperation that may assist countries where intimidation has been more successful in sustaining inhibition.

Links:

[Ending intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN in the field of human rights. Submission to the UN Secretary-General on recent developments, cases and recommendations, May 2020.](#)

[Intimidation and its Impact on Engagement with the UN Human Rights System: Methodological challenges and opportunities](#), March 2020.

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