

[Study | ISHR launches new study on a Global Network of Human Rights Defenders Focal Points](#)

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On 21 April 2021, ISHR together with the HRD Hub at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, launched a new study on the 'Desirability and Feasibility of a Global Network of Human Rights Defenders Focal Points'.



Over the last 20 years, beginning with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the international human rights system has developed a strong set of standards, norms and recommendations on the recognition and protection of human rights defenders. Yet a significant protection gap remains due to the lack of implementation at the national level. ISHR commissioned [a study on the Desirability and Feasibility of a Global Network of Human Rights Defenders Focal Points](#), to explore whether and how such a Network could meaningfully contribute to the implementation of the Declaration in diverse national contexts.

Alice Nah of the Centre for Applied Human Rights and Hannah Dwyer Smith of Peace Brigades International, presented the study's findings. Some key conclusions of the study include that Focal Point delegations should be multi-stakeholder comprising government, national human rights institutions, and civil society representatives; be action- and solutions-oriented; and focus on supporting implementation of the UN Declaration domestically. Priority was placed on establishing well-functioning National Focal Point delegations first, with a Global Network being more robust due to the strength of its parts.

The event brought together a range of different stakeholders to discuss the study's findings, including **Mary Lawlor**, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, **Marthe Coulibaly** of the Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CIDDH), **Vincent Laurent** of the Switzerland Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), **Katharina Rose** of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), **Sukhgerel Dugersuren** of OT Watch Mongolia, **Pablo Romo**, former President of the Consultative Mexican Protection Mechanism for HRDs and Journalists, and **Felipe Sanchez** of the Peace, Rule of Law and Security division in OHCHR Colombia.

Mary Lawlor reflected on the importance of any such project being entered into seriously and with real political will and for focal points to be connectors, not gatekeepers between HRDs and States. Sukhgerel Dugersuren spoke of the recently passed HRD law in Mongolia as a warning to others, where HRDs were excluded from key deliberations and some harmful provisions were included in the law. Dugersuren shared that a global network should start with stakeholder countries that are more advanced in human rights protection and has to be weighed very carefully when comes to jurisdictions that are weak, corrupt, and strongly influenced by interests like the extractive industry in Mongolia for example.

Pablo Romo saw value in the idea of a network as a means to create space for change, political pressure, and share experiences and learnings across jurisdictions. Marthe Coulibaly thought that a network would be crucial for advancing legislative frameworks for the protection of HRDs and their implementation, and noted the importance of engagement with all relevant ministries across government. Felipe Sanchez reflected that such a network would be very useful in the framework of UN processes such as the UPR, to lead the monitoring of the situation of HRDs with civil society and governments, but also to coordinate recommendations from other countries.

Katharina Rose shared that the experience of networking national human rights institutions has been very positive, and has led to better fulfilment of domestic mandates, and strengthening of institutions through enrichment, inspiration and learning across jurisdictions. Vincent Laurent shared that a network of HRD focal points could facilitate information sharing and follow up on HRDs at risk, and provide a platform for HRDs to brief the international community, as well as support progress in international policy development, for example UN resolutions on HRDs.

ISHR's Tess McEvoy noted that the most significant protection gap for defenders is implementation at the national level, which requires commitment and coordination by States, monitoring by national human rights institutions, and meaningful participation and consultation with defenders, which in turn could be facilitated by the establishment of multi-stakeholder focal points on HRDs.

The full report can be [downloaded here](#).

The event can be viewed [here](#).

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