

## Director's Update - October 2013

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### **Preventing reprisals**

In a little over two months the international human rights movement will celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders – a declaration that enshrines the rights of individuals and associations to advocate and agitate for human rights, and the obligation of States to ensure they can do so free from hindrance or reprisal.

The recently completed session of the UN Human Rights Council demonstrates both how far we've come but also the challenges that remain to render the Declaration a reality. ISHR is pleased to have played a key role in some of the session's most important developments.

Even before the session commenced, [ISHR mobilised with other NGOs](#) to successfully defeat hostile proposals made by a number of States to restrict civil society access to the Council.



Then, as the Council began, we were reminded of the risks that many human rights defenders face when a defender due to fly to Geneva to participate in an ISHR advocacy course was [intercepted and interrogated at Beijing airport](#). We have since received reports that Cao Shunli is detained at Beijing First Prison but there has been no official accounting for her condition and whereabouts since she was disappeared on 14 September.

[Cao Shunli's disappearance](#), apparently in connection with her advocacy on China's forthcoming Universal Periodic Review, is just one example of the worsening trend of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders.

In this context, the Council's adoption of a Hungarian-led [landmark resolution on reprisals](#) was timely and important. In line with [ISHR's key advocacy calls](#), the resolution says States must protect and respect the right of unhindered access to the UN, including by [enacting specific laws and policies to prevent and redress reprisals](#). It also recognises that the UN has a responsibility to protect those who contribute to its work, [often at great personal risk](#), and calls upon the UN Secretary General to appoint a high level official to coordinate an international response to reprisals.



### **Supporting civil society**

It is perhaps a testament to the work of human rights defenders as agents of change that governments around the world are increasingly imposing unnecessary and illegitimate restrictions on civil society associations and NGOs. According to US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, in the last five years alone more than 40

countries have passed 'restrictive laws trying to shrink the space' for civil society.



In this context, ISHR was pleased to [work closely with Ireland](#) and a group of other States, including Chile, Japan, Sierra Leone and Tunisia, to develop a [significant new resolution on expanding and protecting civil society space](#). The resolution, which calls on States to ensure civil society can operate in a safe and enabling environment, free from hindrance and insecurity, is an excellent example of what can be achieved at the Human Rights Council by States prepared to adopt a robust and principled approach to negotiations and to develop a collaborative and consultative relationship with NGOs.

## Looking ahead

While the Council has adjourned until March 2014, the coming months are shaping up to be very busy for the ISHR team and our key partners.

Over the next few weeks, we'll be advocating at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on the [protection of women human rights defenders](#) and working with Norway and the [Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition](#), among others, to develop and secure the passage of a strong resolution on women defenders at the UN General Assembly.

We'll also continue work on the development of a model national law on human rights defenders – set to be a valuable tool to ensure the concrete, domestic application of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders – and help ensure the next person appointed to the crucial position of UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders is [independent and expertly qualified](#).

We're also planning a party to celebrate our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014 – more on that to come!

## Thanks for your support for human rights and their defenders

At ISHR we are deeply conscious that human rights progress is only made possible through commitment and investment – the commitment and personal investment of individuals who promote human rights and demand accountability for violations; the commitment and political investment of States who take a stand for human rights defenders globally; and the commitment and financial investment of individuals, States and foundations who know that [liberty is not free](#).

On that note, I'd like to personally thank you for your commitment to, and [investment in, the work of ISHR](#) and the many human rights defenders we work to protect and support. Long may it continue!

Yours sincerely

Phil Lynch  
Director