

<b>Forum:</b>	Human Rights Council (HRC)
<b>Issue:</b>	Promoting the protection of human rights defenders in conflict and post-conflict regions
<b>Chair:</b>	Anita Tsai, President

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## Introduction

Human rights is a set of rights that everyone is entitled to; which includes “right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression” and to have these “rights without discrimination”. While people are entitled to fundamental human rights, it is not yet the reality for everyone in our world today. Many people still lack freedom of speech and even basic control over their own bodies. It is the Human Rights Council’s duty to come to a consensus to help these people who lack fundamental rights and ensure everyone is equally protected under the law.

A key component to creating a diverse yet inclusive society is to have citizens who have access to essential rights and are able to exercise these rights. Human rights defenders are just one of many who work to expose inequalities and do things in their power to bring justice and equality to society. Human rights defenders specifically, aim to eradicate abuses to human rights and ensure that all humans are entitled to what they deserve: basic human rights. “Defenders left defenceless” is how an UN expert once said when describing the work nature of human right defenders. Many people often overlook the ability and contributions that Human rights activists bring to society, in that they don’t recognize the danger the activists face while attempting to bring security, help, and rights to victims who were stripped from their rights. Human rights defenders risk their own lives, face gender based violence, and sexual violence. These are just some of many risks human rights activists risk in exchange for promoting human rights within conflict zones and post-conflict zones. It is important for society to recognize the great accomplishments of these human rights defenders but it is also a duty for society and states to help ensure the safety and equity for these defenders.

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into the United Nations also marked Human Rights Day where people are reminded to keep fighting for human rights. Whether it is through encouraging youth activation or creating new frameworks to defend human right defenders, it is the international responsibility to ensure everyone has access to what they are entitled to.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Human Rights Defender

Human Rights Defender, like the name suggests, are people, individuals as well as groups of people, who fight and advocate for human rights. The phrase “human rights activist” is often treated as synonym with human rights defender. These people urge for actions to be taken that will ensure basic human rights for all people, at all places, ultimately enhancing society. While many don’t realize, anyone can be a human rights defender, regardless of their gender, age, occupation. To differentiate between those who are human rights defenders and those who are not is not who is “right” or “wrong” in what they are arguing but rather whether the concern of a particular person is categorized under the title of “human rights” as suggested by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission.

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

On December 10th of 1948, the Declaration of Human Rights was passed which universally protects all fundamental human rights. Since 1948, the Declaration of Human Rights has not only been translated in over 500 languages, it has also influenced other independent nations to use the Declaration of Human rights, ultimately forming new democracy.

### Human Rights Council

The official United Nations Human Rights Council has 47 State Representatives and is the dominant UN intergovernmental body which focuses on promoting and protecting human rights in replacement of the old UN Commission on Human Rights on March 15th 2006.

### Democracy

People know democracy means to have a government where the citizens elect representatives that govern the state, with America being a classic example of democracy. What people often overlook is how the idea and goals of democracy aligns with the United Nations missions, which aims to bring “international peace and security, economic and social progress and development, and respect for human rights”. As democracy strongly connects to the founding of the United Nations, it is highly important to keep democracy in mind when crafting resolutions to address the issue of promoting the protection of human right defenders.

### State authorities

State authorities refer to individuals, agencies, councils that are elected by the state which are responsible for ruling the public. In this context, state authorities cannot be neglected as often they contribute highly to cases of silencing human rights defenders through means such as police arresting without warrants. Another form is when there are state authorities in higher levels, such as judges in court, who don't punish those below them for the crimes.

### **Non-state Authorities**

Non-state authorities are wider in range in that individuals, businesses, groups are all considered non-state authorities. There have been past examples where non-state authorities tried to silence human rights defenders by kidnapping, sending death threats, and defaming. At the same time, non-state authorities such as non-profit organizations can also help with the issue through ways such as providing shelter and support.

### **Freedom**

People are born with basic human rights entitled to them, which includes freedom of expression, freedom from slavery and torture, right to work and education without discrimination. However, this is not the reality for a large number of people, which is why there are people who are dedicated to helping fight for human rights.

## **Background Information**

### **War and Human Rights Defender**

Within the past decades, nations have been seeing increases in war and violence. When there is violence and war, reporters and human rights defenders operate and perform their job, they are forced to balance between: the situation at hand, their work, and their own safety. In cases where defenders prioritize society in that they choose reporting factually, they often face all forms of harm and threats. Because of the work nature of a human rights defender, the United Nations as well as other organizations have gathered their attention into the issue of protecting these human rights defenders.

### **Safety and sacrifices of the Human Rights Defender**

There are many problems that hinder, or even worse, harm, human rights defenders within conflict and post-conflict regions of the world. It is necessary for nations and states to take actions to support and help provide safety for these human rights defenders.

#### ***Taking lives of Human Rights defenders***

Human rights defenders are often subjected to harm and violence because of their attempts at promoting human rights. Of which, 28-year-old Abdul Samad Amiri, is one of many examples of these innocent victims who lost their lives documenting, exposing violations of human rights and helping out those who were being denied human rights. Unfortunately, Abdul Samad Amiri is only one of many lives that have been taken because of doing the right thing.

### ***Human Rights defenders losing rights themselves***

Human right defenders aim to expose those who strip away basic human rights. Because of this, they are often silenced and targeted. It is common to see that human rights defenders lose their right to freedom of expression and freedom of speech in the process of carrying out their work. Human Rights Defender often get kidnapped and taken away without official warrants and put into jail with ill-treatment or beatings to make fake confessions. One example of this include Seng Nu Pan and Paw Lu who were convicted of “staging a street performance denouncing the resumption of hostilities in Kachin State”.

### ***Targeted***

Human right defenders are often subjected to harm and violence. Those being exposed by Human Right defenders often try to degrade and make human right defenders lose credibility and even criminal charges in order to hide their corruption from the public. Besides often being wrongly convicted and charged, human right defenders as well as their families often face threats, violence and abuses which are ways to scare these activists away from doing their work.

### ***Female Human Rights Defenders***

Situations for human rights defenders in general are harsh and highly dangerous. However, for female human rights defenders, it is even more difficult for them to urge for human rights equality. Females activists face gender based violence and even sexual violences. In addition, in places where gender inequality is still heavily present, females standing up and exercising their right to freedom of speech may be neglected or even punished.

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

### **United Nations**

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization that aims to maintain international peace and security, ultimately improving and enhancing society. Human rights, promoting and protecting human rights, serves as one of the fundamental guiding principles of the UN. A branch of the United

Nations, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the main body for the UN system which focuses on protecting and promoting human rights.

### Human Rights Watch

The Human Rights Watch is an organization that aims to expose abuses, advocate for changes and serve justice to victims. The researchers within this organization are widespread across different countries and their works get published online through social media as well as their website. In terms of advocating for improvements, the Human Right Watch collaborates with other organizations, meets with governments, different agencies to modify existing laws and policies, ultimately bringing justice.

### Amnesty International

Amnesty International is an international movement involving over 10 million people who fight for justice, specifically justice for those who were denied human rights. Amnesty International tries to reach this by researching, exposing realities of abuses and violations of human rights, meeting with governments and businesses, while constantly urging for more and more people to join the movement. In regards to human rights specifically, where public voices are recognized and are used to urge governments to comply with international laws and standards set for human rights.

### Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF)

The Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF) is an organization that urges to protect and support human right defenders through developing international standards that will ensure safety of the human right activists. The HRHF has developed a project, *Rights of Defenders*, where it identifies 16 international standards that correlate to the rights of the human rights defenders. The HRHF has also led several campaigns including: Freedom for Belarusian political prisoners as well as freedom for Mehman Huseynov.

### European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights attempts to protect human right defenders through creating intergovernmental organizations that cooperates with the society as well as create a platform for human rights activists to meet and discuss human rights such as upcoming activities.

### United States

The United States of America is known for democracy and freedom. Under Presidents such as Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Jimmy Carter, there are strong presences of advocating for human rights. Contrary, under the leadership of President Donald Trump, it is clear to see how the government can influence the development of human rights. Through these examples, whether human

rights are advanced or hindered is highly dependent on each nation's governments. The United States, known for democracy, urges for equality and promotes human rights, aligning with the United Nation. However, oftentimes, it is clear to see how realities can differ from the idea of democracy.

## Yemen

Because of the Yemen crisis, Yemen is known to be the country with the worst human rights violation. Within the Yemen crisis, there is severe lack in freedom of expression and association when it comes to reports on the situations. Not only is there lack of freedom of expression, it is common to see within Yemen that there are cases of sudden disappearance, beatings, as well unfair trials upon human rights defenders as means to silence and prevent human rights defenders from doing their work.

## Netherlands

Within the Netherlands, human rights are supposedly protected by the national legislation. Within the first chapter of the Netherlands' constitution, the foundations of human rights is listed and for more information, the National Action Plan on Human Rights is a file that can be accessed when it comes to how governments protect and promote human rights. As a model of a nation to follow in terms of care towards human rights, the Netherlands has previously signed international agreements as well. While Netherlands has a pretty good representation as a nation with high care towards human rights, there are still instances of violations of human rights and cases of harm made against human rights defenders.

## China

It is undeniable that within China there are acts of censorship from the government and lack of freedom of expression which heavily violates human rights according to international standards. Within China, for human rights defenders to operate freely can almost be considered impossible in that surveillance, imprisonment, death penalties are all challenges human rights defenders face.

## Timeline of Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
1689	England adopts Bill of Rights
1776	US Declaration of Independence acknowledges that "all men are created equal"
December 10th, 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human rights was adopted into the UN
1998	Declaration on Human Rights defenders adopted in the UN

## Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- International Bill of Human Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- The convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- The Slavery Convention of 1926
- The Convention on the political rights of Women
- Human rights defenders operating in conflict and post-conflict situations, 30 Dec 2019, A/HRC/43/51
- Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, 9 Dec 1998, 53/144

## Possible Solutions

**Encouraging the participation of youth in the issue of defending human rights and helping protect human rights defenders is one of many solutions to the issue.** Like the saying “the future is in the hands of the youth”, the issue of human rights cannot be solved without the participation of youth. Having youth participate in defending human rights and supporting human rights defenders can encourage other youths as well as bring the “younger view” to society. In the past, there have been several examples of youth leading great impacts in the community; such as that of Greta Thunberg on the issue of climate change and females like Samaira Mehta on the issue of gender based violence. While these people have raised significant awareness in these individual issues, the root problem still needs to be fixed. Delegates can consider how to increase youth activeness on the issue, whether it is through raising awareness through the internet or education in school.

**Another solution is to encourage nations to establish or implement existing training programs and guidelines for human rights defenders and supporters of these activists.** By creating more guidelines, framework, training programs, both human rights defenders as well as supporters of human rights activists can be better protected and supported. An example of international standards incorporated into nations is the Declaration on Human Rights where this declaration serves as a foundation of what human rights should be like in a society with justice and basic human rights. In addition, an example of establishing training systems for human rights defenders can be seen by works of the International Service Human Rights (ISHR). ISHR is a non-profit organization which aims to protect and promote human rights and human rights defenders through improving existing standards for human rights. There have been several training systems developed by the ISHR that can be found through the official website that delegates can view.

**In addition, another solution is to support or encourage more developments similar to that of a Human Rights House.** Human rights house is a dominant project which the Human Rights House Foundation focuses on, where everything related to human rights is supported. Specifically, the idea of human right house is to collaborate with other non-governmental organizations to enhance the current status of human rights. Currently, there are 17 human rights houses across 11 nations. Through projects and developments like such, the issue of human rights would be better known and more lead nations closer to a society with everyone having the human rights that they are entitled to.

**Last but not least, another solution could be for nations to allow for more cooperations between non-governmental organizations (NGO) and businesses or governments.** Collaborations with organizations between governments and businesses can help situations in that it can increase efficiency and expand projects/policies. Non-governmental organizations are devoted to improving situations and usually have specific goals to carry out in order to tackle an issue. For example, World Organization Against Torture is a network that aims to connect different non-governmental organizations and together to document victims who faced violation in human rights and provides resources for these victims. With collaborations between governments and these third party organizations, the issue on defending human rights activists can be better monitored. With benefit comes difficulties in that without high incentives, governments or businesses may not agree to these collaborations easily.

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