

A Summary of the Report on Women Human Right Defenders: A/HRC/40/60*

Methodology

- The report was based on a multitude of data including survey's, communications, dialogues with women defenders, direct meetings and consultations with some women defenders in the forums at New York, Beirut and Bali.
- These communications were provided by states, civil society, human rights organisations and individual defenders.
- The responses highlighted the concerns and needs of women defenders including the need for legal recognition and protection from duty bearers.
- Concern has been expressed about the situation as well as the risks that women human rights defenders face, and respondents have called for their recognition, security and protection.

Definition and Normative Framework

- Many women decide not to identify as human rights defenders in fear of their safety.
- The report promotes the protection of women human rights defenders and draws upon the declaration of human rights defenders and other main treaties such as International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- The multitude of resolutions statements and general comments that the report draws on demonstrates the important role that women human rights defenders play.
- The report highlights the need for women in government decision making procedures and legal or political representation.

Background and Environment

- Report acknowledges the resistance women human rights defenders face.
- Violence against women and gender non-conforming persons, fundamentalism, populism, sexism, and homophobic opinions of political leaders are prominent.
- Despite the State's duty to aid human rights defenders, States are often involved in attacking women defenders work.
- Stress has been placed on the "traditional" values of women in society suggesting that women should limit themselves to the private sphere, demeaning their rights to equality and freedom of speech. The report acknowledges women defenders maybe criminalised repressed and harassed whilst violators benefit from impunity.

Contexts and root causes of violations

- The reasons why women defenders are targeted differ depending on the context and nature of their work. personal life and their circumstances.
- The report acknowledges the importance of communities and networking for many women defenders and their need for support as well as the grave impact out-casting has on their relationships and support networks.
- Some women defenders and their families are targeted because of their identity or the work they engage with.
- The mental, physical, psychological and digital security of women defenders must be protected.
- The report acknowledges how structural factors and root causes such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, fundamentalism, militarisation, globalisation, neoliberalism and gender ideology increase the risk to women defenders.

[Click here to see the contextual risks of women defenders](#)

Gendered risks faced by women human rights defenders

- The report acknowledges that heteronormative and societal norms work to deny women defenders a safe working environment in the public and private domain.
- Stigmatisation and attacks on the families or reputation of women defenders as well as sexuality baiting are powerful ways of condemning women human rights defenders across the globe.
- Risks include but are not limited to physical and sexual violence, enforced disappearances as well as online harassment. Some women defenders may be subjected to travel bans, denationalisation, interrogation, arbitrary detentions and exclusion from intergovernmental organisations.
- Women defenders are often not credited for their contributions and are expected to conform to motherly stereotypes otherwise they may face accusations, harassment and shaming.

Challenges and risks faced by specific groups of women human rights defenders

- The report acknowledges that certain groups of (women) defenders may be more at risk, the groups identified are young girl human rights defenders, gender non-conforming defenders, indigenous women, women defenders working in conflict or post conflict areas, refugee or migrant women, women defenders with disabilities, women defenders working on land or environment or women defenders working on gender equality, sex workers rights or reproductive health.
- The report acknowledges many reasons these women are more at risk some examples are that they lack funding, are side lined, are subject to threats for opposing traditional norms or exposing the negative implications caused by the economic motivations of the state and non state actors.

Building diverse, inclusive and strong movements of women human rights defenders

The report highlights key priorities that should be considered in order to create an effective and enabling environment for women defenders.

These priorities insist on improvements such as:

- An increase in legal and physical protection measures.
- Increased education and training for defenders.
- An increase in the representation of women in politics.
- The reinforcement of freedom of expression and digital connections between defenders
- Increasing the flexibility and immediacy of resources for women defenders.

Conclusion and recommendations

The report acknowledges that the work of women defenders needs to be globally recognised and protected. Some of the recommendations are:

- Protecting women defenders by enabling a safe environment which considers their diverse needs.
- Ensure that state and non-state actors meet their legal obligations to respect human rights.
- Adopt laws to protect (women) defenders privacy, online space, funding opportunities and participation in public life.
- Adhere to the [seven principles](#) underpinning good protection practices.
- Strengthen the movement through investigating attacks on women defenders promoting strategies and networks to improve accountability and develop programmes which recognise the holistic security of women and their diversity.

*The Situation of Women human Rights Defenders, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders, Michel Forst, A/HRC/40/60