

PROPOSED CRITERIA FOR SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF A NEW MANDATE HOLDER ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Selection and appointment of a mandate holder

In March 2026, the UN Human Rights Council (the Council) will appoint the next [Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders](#).

This Special Rapporteur will be expected to serve two terms of three years each, starting in 2026.

Candidates must have the required expertise and experience in the field of the mandate, must be independent and impartial and show a high level of personal integrity and objectivity.

This document was prepared by civil society organisations to support all stakeholders in the dissemination of the upcoming vacancy with a view to encouraging a broad pool of applications from **highly qualified and independent candidates** for the mandate of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

States may use the document to disseminate and encourage the identification of suitable candidates at the national level. It is also intended as a checklist that can be used by the Council's Consultative Group, Regional Coordinators and the President of the Human Rights Council to ensure that only highly qualified and independent candidates are considered and appointed.

Prospective mandate holders should be aware that this is a voluntary, unpaid role. Mandate holders do not receive a salary or other financial compensation from the UN but receive travel expenses and substantive and technical support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). This role requires a substantial time commitment from the individual, including readiness to travel and respond to urgent situations.

The appointment of diverse, independent, impartial, competent and expert persons from all regions of the world as mandate holders is essential to ensuring a well-functioning system of Special Procedures, which, in turn, is of crucial importance to the functioning of the Human Rights Council.

List of signatories

1. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
2. Southern Initiatives (SI), Myanmar
3. Dawei Probono Lawyer Network (DPLN), Myanmar
4. Fundación Red por la infancia, Argentina
5. Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
6. Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras)
7. Intersex Society of Zambia (ISSZ)
8. Refugees in Libya (RIL)

9. Inclusive Bangladesh
10. Project on Organizing, Development, Education, and Research (PODER)
11. AWAFFY Sudanese Organization
12. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
13. Green Development Advocates (GDA)
14. Action for Conservation and Environmental Sustainability (ACES)
15. International Financial Institutions Monitoring Group (IFI Monitoring)
16. Human Rights Reporters Ghana (HRRG)
17. Regional Coalition of WHRDs in Southwest Asia and North Africa (WHRD MENA)
18. Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC)
19. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
20. CIVICUS
21. Peace Brigades International
22. RAWSA - Regional Advocacy for Women's Sustainable Advancement
23. Uyghur Human Rights Project
24. Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
25. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
26. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
27. Centro de Asistencia Legal a Pueblos Indígenas (CALPI)
28. The Lesbian and Gay Association of Liberia (Liberia-Liberia)
29. Hivos
30. Oyu Tolgoi Watch
31. Rivers without Boundaries Mongolia
32. Foundation for Public Interest Law and Development (Nigeria)
33. Equality Bahamas (The Bahamas)
34. Advocacy for Human Rights and Justice-Sierra Leone
35. Oil Refinery Residents Association (ORRA)
36. MENA Rights Group
37. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
38. Plataforma Nacional Juvenil Nicaragua (PNJ)
39. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
40. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
41. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA World)
42. Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples (MRAP)
43. American Association of Jurists (AAJ)
44. Amnesty International
45. Front Line Defenders
46. Vuka! Coalition for Civic Space

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR MANDATE OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

According to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1, the following general criteria will be of paramount importance while nominating, selecting and appointing mandate holders:

- (a) expertise;
- (b) experience in the field of the mandate;
- (c) independence;
- (d) impartiality;
- (e) personal integrity; and
- (f) objectivity.

Resolution 5/1 provides that, to be independent, “individuals holding decision-making positions in Government or in any other organisation or entity which may give rise to a conflict of interest with the responsibilities inherent to the mandate shall be excluded.” The conflict of interest provision has also been interpreted to mean that candidates are expected to clarify how, if appointed, they would deal with any perceived or actual conflict of interest in relation to governments, inter-governmental organisations, private companies or non-governmental organisations. **We encourage that the Consultative Group, when selecting and proposing candidates, rigorously apply both the letter and the spirit of this provision.**

Human Rights Council decision 6/102 establishes four technical and objective requirements to be considered in the selection of Special Procedures mandate-holders:

1. qualifications,
2. relevant expertise,
3. established competence, and
4. flexibility/readiness and availability of time.

Due consideration should be given to gender balance and equitable geographic representation, as well as to an appropriate representation of different legal systems. *Noting that previous mandate holders have been from WEOG, the African Group, and the Asia-Pacific Group¹.*

Eligible candidates are highly qualified individuals who possess established competence, relevant expertise and extensive professional experience in the field of human rights.

We consider it paramount that this selection process give continued consideration to the diversity of all kinds. Human rights defenders who are most at risk around the world are often persons with discriminated identities or from communities that are marginalised. Consequently, the Special Rapporteur on the

¹ Ms. Mary Lawlor (Ireland) 2020-2026; Mr. Michel Forst (France); 2014-2020, Mrs. Margaret Sekaggya (Uganda); 2008-2014, Mrs Hina Jilani (Pakistan) 2000-2008.

situation of human rights defenders should be able to consider the particular contexts and challenges faced by these individuals and groups with the benefit of insights from the mandate holder's personal experience. We encourage the Consultative Group to give special consideration to candidates from communities or identities that are underrepresented among special procedures mandate holders.

The checklist below is intended as an interpretive aid for those requirements

CHECKLIST FOR SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE MANDATE OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS²

1. QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS: RELEVANT EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND EQUIVALENT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

Checklist:

- Expertise in the field of protection for human rights defenders, preferably with an international, cross-regional component; experience working with and contributing to the protection of human rights defenders;
- Demonstrated experience addressing issues relevant to the mandate, from a human rights perspective (for example, through lived experience and practice, academic publications, studies, reports, research papers or any similar written material demonstrating in-depth knowledge);
- Extensive experience in public speaking (for example in expert seminars) as well as in communicating and/or working together with relevant stakeholders, including senior government officials, the diplomatic corps, intergovernmental organisations, national human rights institutions, NGOs, human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations, businesses, media and other non-state actors;
- Extensive experience in a discipline directly related to the mandate, preferably with a focus on international human rights law, would be highly desirable;
- Excellent oral and written communication skills in at least English and an additional UN working language (French or Spanish). Communication skills in other UN official languages are welcome (knowledge of other widely used or official UN languages, such as Arabic, Chinese or Russian, would also be an asset);

2. RELEVANT EXPERTISE: KNOWLEDGE OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS, NORMS, STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES; AS WELL AS KNOWLEDGE OF INSTITUTIONAL MANDATES RELATED TO THE UNITED NATIONS OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL OR REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS' WORK IN THE AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS; PROVEN WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

Checklist:

² This document was prepared by a coalition of organisations.

- Extensive knowledge of international human rights law and standards, as well as protection mechanisms, including through the lens of non-discrimination and equality, and their application for the promotion and protection of human rights defenders and their work;
- Several years of progressively responsible work experience in the field of human rights or as a human rights defender, including in protection, human rights research, monitoring, reporting, investigating and advocacy;
- Excellent knowledge of the international and regional legal frameworks, including case law relevant to the promotion and protection of the rights of human rights defenders, including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, torture and other ill-treatment, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and enforced or involuntary disappearances;
- Extensive experience in working in varied socio-cultural, legal and religious contexts to raise awareness on, and foster understanding of, issues related to the promotion and protection of the rights of human rights defenders; knowledge of the differential impacts of those contexts on women human rights defenders and defenders of the rights of LGBTTTIQ+ people and communities.
- Practical experience in promoting and protecting the rights of human rights defenders, including through a gender perspective;
- Excellent knowledge of institutional mandates of the United Nations and/or other international or regional human rights bodies.

3. ESTABLISHED COMPETENCE: NATIONALLY, REGIONALLY OR INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED COMPETENCE RELATED TO HUMAN RIGHTS.

Checklist:

- A demonstrated commitment to human rights law and standards;
- Excellent knowledge and expertise of the work of human rights defenders, and of responding to recent trends, developments and challenges human rights defenders face;
- Recognised knowledge and experience of human rights-based academic and field research and/or fact-finding methodology, including carrying out fact-finding visits;
- Experience in applying international human rights standards, such as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, in particular with a view to furthering the recognition and protection of human rights defenders and their work;
- Experience at national, regional and/or international levels in developing legislation, policies and mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders, including knowledge in developing comprehensive protection strategies that incorporate a collective, gender, ethnic and intersectional perspective, and in creating a safe and enabling environment for their work, including addressing issues related to discrimination, threats, intimidation, reprisals, and impunity;

- Extensive experience with and proven commitment to working and/or interacting with civil society and individuals who have been at risk, or who have experienced, among other, harassment, stigmatisation, smear campaigns, travel bans, surveillance, criminalisation, threats, intimidation, reprisals, violence or killings as a result of their work in defending human rights;
- Proven awareness of the particular risks faced by and particular protection needs of specific groups of human rights defenders, such as women human rights defenders, defenders working on sexual orientation and gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics issues, ethnicity, religion or belief, minorities or people discriminated against based on work, descent or socio-economic status, non-nationals, migrants, refugees and internally displaced people, defenders working on environmental and land rights issues, journalists and media workers and youth/children human rights defenders;
- Knowledge of the particular challenges and risks facing human rights defenders in the digital age and proven awareness of the digital security needs of human rights defenders and strategies for protecting and promoting the exercise and defence of human rights online;
- Experience in interacting with actors impacting the work of human rights defenders, such as governments and political groups, security forces, armed groups, companies, investors, international or regional financial institutions or development finance institutions and religious groups and institutions.
- Experience in the development and delivery of assistance and capacity building in human rights and the rule of law, including as relevant to the training of law enforcement officials, judges and other legal professionals and officials responsible for the protection of human rights defenders;
- Knowledge and sensitivity to the issue of reprisals or intimidation experienced by persons who interact with the mandate in any way;

4. FLEXIBILITY/READINESS AND AVAILABILITY OF TIME TO PERFORM EFFECTIVELY THE FUNCTIONS OF THE MANDATE AND TO RESPOND TO ITS REQUIREMENTS.

Checklist:

- Willingness and ability to conduct in-country investigations, in all regions of the world, into laws, policies, and practices affecting human rights defenders and their work;
- Energy, determination and vision to promote the effective and comprehensive implementation of the Declaration on human rights defenders, including the protection of human rights defenders wherever they are at risk, and the promotion of a safe and enabling environment so that they can operate without fear of reprisals;
- Preparedness, willingness and ability to devote a substantial number of working hours to fulfilling the mandate, which includes undertaking two to three country visits per year, preparing and presenting reports to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, attending conferences and seminars and other UN meetings relevant to the mandate. Willingness and ability to act urgently on individual cases or situations concerning human rights defenders requiring immediate attention;

- A demonstrated commitment to human rights in general, and a commitment to uphold the integrity, objectivity, discretion, independence and impartiality of the Special Rapporteur's mandate and the Special Procedures system as a whole.
