



Human rights defenders are key for 2030 Agenda

Human rights defenders play a crucial role in promoting and defending the human rights of all people to live free from fear and free from want without discrimination, which are key for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the context of the forthcoming High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), held under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, to review progress towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Amnesty International urges states undergoing national voluntary reviews to:

Reaffirm explicitly the key role and the legitimacy of human rights defenders (HRDs) and support their work by committing to:

- Develop and implement public awareness campaigns about their work;
- Adopt national legislation which recognizes and protects human rights defenders in line with the 1998 UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (The Declaration on human rights defenders) adopted by consensus 20 years ago;
- Effectively address threats, attacks, harassment and intimidation against all human rights defenders;
- Establish, in consultation with HRDs and civil society organizations, national protection mechanisms for defenders at risk which incorporate preventative, collective and gender-sensitive approaches;
- Acknowledge the particular and significant role played by women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and those who work on women's rights or gender-related issues, and ensure they are able to work in an environment free from violence and discrimination of any sort;
- Ensure they receive the specific protection they need against gender-threats and violence they may face due to their work, recognizing the particular challenges and risks they face, including specific forms of violence;
- Take appropriate measures to recognize and protect young human rights defenders and youth-led organizations engaged in the defence and promotion of human rights, including by removing age-based discriminatory practices which restrict participation of young people in public decision-making, as well as by providing resources for the work of young human rights defenders and youth-led organisations;
- Ensure that legislative and justice systems are not misused to target or harass human rights defenders and refrain from bringing criminal charges or any other proceedings or administrative measures against them that stem solely from the peaceful exercise of their rights.¹

The human rights movement is witnessing an assault on HRDs in many States, with civil society space shrinking daily. Governments, armed groups, companies and other powerful entities and communities which believe their interests are threatened by human rights defenders are using a range of tactics and tools to silence and repress those who defend human rights. Threats, beatings, killings, the use of legislation to criminalize human rights-related activities as well as the use of smear campaigns and stigmatization to delegitimize human rights work, are widespread methods to restrict freedom of assembly association and expression. Without respecting, promoting and protecting the human rights of all and the right to defend them, the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda will be impossible to reach.

¹ See Amnesty International, *Human Rights Defenders under Threat: A Shrinking Space For Civil Society*, Index: ACT 30/6011/2017, May 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/6011/2017/en/> for a comprehensive account of the current widespread and systematic human rights violations against human rights defenders worldwide.