

Concept note

20th Anniversary Promotion of the 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

In 2018, we will mark the 20th anniversary of the 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, adopted by General Assembly resolution 53/144 of 9 December 1998. On the basis of reports by the Secretary-General¹ and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders,² the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council³ have adopted a number of resolutions over the years that explicitly address the situation of human rights defenders in this context.⁴

As consistently recorded since the adoption of the Declaration, human rights defenders in many places face severe risks and consequences due to their activities. Furthermore, as reported in recent years by the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, and a number of regional organisations, human rights defenders are increasingly coming under pressure as targets of actions taken by state and/or non-state actors in violation of the Declaration. This is cause for grave concern.

As we approach the 20th anniversary of the Declaration, Member States must continue to stand firmly with human rights defenders. The Declaration and subsequent resolutions do not create new rights or privileges for human rights defenders. Human rights defenders are entitled to exactly the same rights as all persons. In light of the pressures that they face, however, protection is essential in order to safeguard their ability to exercise these rights, and the international community needs to continue to recognise human rights defenders and the positive contributions they can provide to society.

In the words of Secretary-General Guterres in his remarks to the Human Rights Council at the high-level segment on 27 February this year:

“As we work to promote all human rights, I want to express a final word of appreciation and admiration to those on the frontlines. To human rights defenders, I say: thank you for your courage. The United Nations is on your side. And I am on your side. I remind Member States of their responsibility to ensure that human rights defenders can operate without fear of intimidation.”

Against this background and in this spirit, the Norwegian delegation presents a draft resolution at the 72nd session of the General Assembly, for the consideration of all Member States in the third committee, in accordance with its programme of work. The draft resolution - based on the premise that universal rights apply equally to human rights defenders, without discrimination - aims to send an unequivocal message on the utility of human rights defenders as an asset in our societies, in accordance with international human rights law. The draft resolution intends to provide impetus to the promotion of the Declaration in view of the upcoming anniversary. To this end, the draft resolution seeks to encourage a range of actors in the international community to play, and to continue to play, an active part in contributing to the effective implementation of the Declaration.

All Member States are invited to join forces in this endeavour, and the mission of Norway cordially invites all missions to take part in the informal consultations scheduled on the draft resolution. Norwegian representatives will also be pleased to meet with all interested delegations on a bilateral basis during the session, at their request.

¹ By the Secretary-General and his Special Representative in the period 2000-2008

² By the Special Rapporteur since 2008

³ Prior to 2006 also its preceding body, the Commission on Human Rights

⁴ A/RES/55/98 (2000); A/RES/56/163 (2001); A/RES/57/209 (2002); A/RES/58/178 (2003), A/RES/59/192 (2004); A/RES/60/161 (2005); A/RES/62/152 (2007); A/RES/64/163 (2009); A/RES/66/164 (2011); A/RES/68/181 (2013); A/RES/70/161 (2015) – A/HRC/RES/7/8 (2008); A/HRC/RES/13/13 (2010); A/HRC/RES/16/5 (2011); A/HRC/RES/22/6 (2013); A/HRC/RES/25/18 (2014); A/HRC/RES/31/32 (2016); A/HRC/RES/34/5 (2017)