

Human rights defenders and civic space – the business & human rights dimension

Call for written inputs to inform efforts of developing guidance by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights on the role of the private sector in relation to human rights defenders and preserving civic space as well as identifying opportunities for coordination and collective action

Call for written submissions

Background

The safety and security of human rights defenders (HRDs) and increased threats to civic freedoms has become increasing public concern globally. It is also one of the most urgent issues for the business and human rights agenda, as defenders find themselves at great personal risk, including the risk of death and grave bodily harm. Civil society also finds itself with fewer avenues to express concerns regarding human rights issues, and also fears criminal prosecution when engaged in public protest or civil dissent. At the same time, the role of business is being called into question with respect to its role in potentially contributing to attacks against HRDs or in failing to take action when linked to abuses, but also its role in helping to protect defenders and support protection of civic space. In response to these challenges, there are emerging efforts by a range of actors seeking to address the problem.

Against this background, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights has decided to focus on this critical issue in its own work and has identified activities it proposes to undertake to complement and support efforts by others, including to (i) develop guidance for business on engaging, respecting and supporting human rights defenders in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) as well as the role of business in preserving civic space; (ii) facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue among stakeholders with an interest in the issue, so as to develop coordinated efforts; and (iii) help identify and support new opportunities for collective action. The Working Group is undertaking this project in consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders.

For more information: See the [Working Group's background note](#) for its project.

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Consultation process

To begin its consultation process, the Working Group organized a [workshop in Geneva, Switzerland, on 11 May 2017](#) during its 17th session. It aims to consult further with a wider range of stakeholders, including human rights defenders themselves. Inputs will be sought through the Working Group's country visits and participation in meetings in different world regions. It is seeking to complement in-person consultations with written inputs and submissions from all relevant stakeholders. The Working Group plans to issue a draft guidance document toward the end of 2017 for stakeholder feedback, and to finalize the guidance document for publication in 2018.

Call for written submissions

The Working Group would like to encourage all stakeholders to submit relevant research, documentation and materials to inform the Working Group's efforts as set out in i-iii above. In particular, the Working Group would like suggestions as to what types of recommendations might be useful for the business community with respect to how it can respect human rights through its engagement with human rights defenders, and in addressing challenges to the rule of law that are linked to their business operations. The Working Group hopes to come up with practical recommendations that elaborate on implications of the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#).

More targeted calls and questionnaires may be issued at later stages. Initial deadline: 1 September 2017.

For questions, contact the Working Group's Secretariat at wg-business@ohchr.org indicating in the subject line "HRD CONSULTATION [+ name of contributor/entity/organization]".