



DIGNITY AND JUSTICE FOR DETAINEES WEEK

Information Note No. 3

Roles of National Human Rights Institutions, Civil Society and the Media

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media have key roles to play in the **Dignity and Justice for Detainees Week (6 - 12 October) proposed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**. The initiative is part of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

All partners are invited to participate in the Detention Initiative in a manner they deem appropriate in light of their expertise and conditions in the country of operations. But the goals of the initiative are common: to prevent arbitrary and unlawful detention and to improve conditions for all those deprived of their liberty.

NHRIs

The Paris Principles adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 give NHRIs a mandate to protect and promote human rights. NHRIs in compliance with the principles are usually established by a legislative Act or decree, and should be independent of the State. In accordance with the principles, NHRIs may have the following roles and responsibilities:

- educating/creating awareness on human rights;
- advising governments and making recommendations on legislation and other initiatives to promote and protect human rights;
- preparing country reports on the general human rights situation, and more specific areas;
- handling complaints and investigating allegations of human rights violations;
- visiting places of detention;
- promoting and ensuring the harmonization of national legislation, regulations and practices with international human rights instruments to which the State is a party, and seeing to their effective implementation;
- encouraging ratification of the above-mentioned instruments or accession to those instruments, advocating for their implementation; and
- cooperating with the United Nations, regional institutions and the national institutions of other countries that are promoting and protecting human rights.

Civil Society

The diversity of civil society organizations means that many of the elements cited above may also be applicable to them.

NGOs, academic institutions, human rights defenders and other civil society actors are invited to select the activities they deem most appropriate for their participation in the Dignity and Justice for Detainees Week. These could range from raising awareness of international human rights standards relevant to

detention and advocating for governments' ratification and implementation of human rights treaties to setting up specialist debates and supporting detainees and their families.

OHCHR's Civil Society Unit welcomes feedback on all activities related to the Detention Initiative. Please write to civilsocietyunit@ohchr.org.

Media

The media are an essential interface between human rights organizations, the general public and national authorities. Civil society, OHCHR and national institutions wishing to engage the media in the struggle for detainees' rights must first:

- Identify spokespeople among NHRIs, civil society organizations, academia and the like who can describe detention-related issues in media-friendly language.
- Coordinate with each other a simple media strategy, which indicates who is best placed to do what with various forms of media.
- Identify possible feature stories, including especially moving or shocking ones, and prepare a list of suitable former detainees who are willing and able to give media interviews on a range of detention-related issues.

Once the steps above have been completed, they could:

- Inform the media about the general principles behind Dignity and Justice for Detainees Week by means of a press release and follow-up calls to journalists. (This should be done at the latest two weeks prior to 6 October. Other press releases with fresh information or angles could follow at strategic moments in the run-up to, or during, the Detainees Week.)
- Identify and approach journalists/editors who have themselves been detained.
- Provide media with a news "hook", such as new or re-interpreted statistics relating to arbitrary or unlawful detention.
- Steer journalists towards specific interviewees such as ex-detainees, officials and human rights spokespersons who can provide interesting information to enable journalists to write feature articles.
- Convince TV and radio stations to produce news items or short documentaries on detention issues. This will require engagement with the media at a very early stage in the run-up to Detention Week.
- Exchange useful information/resources/interviewees with NHRIs and civil society organizations in other countries.
- Use inspirational detainees at the global level, such as Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi, as reference points.

While the media are not, officially, human rights campaigners, they can be engaged emotionally in the fight for justice, and therefore keen to participate in an initiative such as this. The likelihood of media support will be greatly enhanced if a well-prepared human rights community provides journalists with their key needs: powerful stories, interviewees with quotable quotes, statistics, etc.

ABOUT OHCHR

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a part of the United Nations Secretariat, has been given a unique mandate to promote and protect all human rights. Headquartered in Geneva, the Office is also present in some 50 countries. Headed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, a position established by the General Assembly in 1993 to spearhead the United Nations' human rights efforts, OHCHR takes action based on the unique mandate given it by the international community to guard and advocate for international human rights law. For more information please visit www.ohchr.org

On Human Rights Day 2007, the United Nations and OHCHR launched a year-long UN system-wide advocacy campaign to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), under the theme: "**Dignity and justice for all of us**".