

**Preliminary Observations by the UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and
International Solidarity, Cecilia M. Bailliet**
Country Visit to Denmark and Greenland
Copenhagen, 18 April 2024

I would like to extend my warmest appreciation to the Governments of Denmark and Greenland for having extended an invitation to my mandate to conduct an official visit with the aim of understanding the policies and actions taken by the Government of Denmark, the Government of Greenland, and civil society actors to implement the right and duty of international solidarity.¹ I sought to identify the progress made and remaining challenges. I would like to thank everyone for the cooperation given to me prior to and throughout the visit. I hope that after my departure we will continue working jointly towards a better promotion of international solidarity.

I especially acknowledge the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Housing, and Senior Citizens, the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Taxation, the Ministry for Gender Equality, the Ministry for Children and Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Municipal Authorities of Copenhagen, representatives of Greenland and Faroe Islands, members of the committees of the Danish Parliament, the Copenhagen Police, and the Investment Fund for Developing Countries in this dialogue.

During my visit to Nuuk, Greenland, I was able to meet representatives from the High Commissioner; the Ministry of Industry, Trade, Mineral Resources, Justice, and Gender Equality; the Finance and Tax Committee; the Business and Raw Materials Committee; the Family and Health Committee; the Conservation and Environment Committee; the Chief of Police; the Country Judge; the Ministry of Statehood and Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure; the Prison and the Prime Minister's Office. I also met with representatives of the Human Rights Council of Greenland and the EU Commission. Further, I appreciate the conversations with academics from the University of Copenhagen in Greenland.

I also warmly thank the civil society representatives from Denmark and Greenland for contributing to a broader understanding of international solidarity in practice. I held meetings with them concerning indigenous peoples, gender equality, migration/refugee protection, disability rights, and environmental issues, among others.

I am grateful to academics of the University of Copenhagen for facilitating the academic consultation on the Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity.²

I also take this opportunity to sincerely thank the UN in Copenhagen and UNICEF in Greenland for the support provided to me before and during my visit.

I will now present some of the preliminary findings and recommendations in the spirit of holding a constructive dialogue and based on information received before and throughout my visit. I will elaborate on these preliminary findings in a more detailed manner in a report that will be presented at the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council in June 2025. These

¹ Act on Greenland Self-Government (7 October 2009) available at: <https://english.stm.dk/media/10522/gl-selvstyrellov-uk.pdf>

² [reviseddraftdeclarationrightInternationalsolidarity.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/2019-revised-draft-declaration-right-international-solidarity)

preliminary findings may not reflect all the issues presented to me, nor all the initiatives undertaken by the Governments and civil society organizations of Denmark and Greenland.

1. Context

The visit comes at an important time in which increased inequality, polarization, and fragmentation in the world underscore the need for identification of best practices of international solidarity. The Kingdom of Denmark has a long tradition of implementing international solidarity approaches to promote democracy and human rights within its foreign policy as well as domestically within its State institutions. Similarly, Danish civil society has pursued dedicated commitment to international solidarity actions with groups in vulnerable situations around the world and within the country. The current focus on the Arctic region as a strategic zone also highlights the importance of balancing the increased security solidarity with a human rights and sustainable development based solidarity policy with Greenland to improve social cohesion. The report will provide an overview of good practices as well as challenges in relation to implementing international solidarity.

2. Encouraging initiatives and good practices

I was encouraged to learn that there are many governmental and civil society actors in Denmark and Greenland that promote networked international solidarity actions, linking state, corporate, and civil society actors together to tackle common challenges and secure “the right to have rights” for everyone. I express my admiration for the work they do and encourage them to continue their efforts in implementing their mandates.

Denmark is a dedicated partner of multilateralism and supporter of international solidarity, as it meets a target of 0.7% ODA/GNI. In 2024, the Government of Denmark has a financial target of 30% of the development aid that is directed to climate response, of which 60% focuses on adaptation projects, with a focus on those most at risk, including forcibly displaced people. Denmark participates in Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETP) to help countries in different regions of the world transition from coal to renewable energy. The Government of Denmark has also pursued 14 partnerships with private sector actors to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 70% by 2030. Moreover, an innovative actor in international solidarity is the Investment Fund for Developing Countries (IFU). It provides a model for international solidarity for sustainable development within its investment projects as it follows a human rights matrix within its projects to assess due diligence obligations and risks. Its policies may serve as inspiration for other corporations and investors engaged in projects in regions marked by environmental and stakeholder vulnerability.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly supports the international solidarity participation of youth, such as through the Danish Youth Delegate Program. The program facilitates the participation of Youth Delegates in international fora and aims to inform about and promote greater ownership of global engagement and development policy among Danish youth. Through local youth panels, Denmark is engaging youth on how Denmark’s development aid can address equality and sexual and reproductive health, climate change/the environment, democracy, and vocational education and job creation in different countries in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The sustained, engaged participation of youth in international solidarity actions is a very positive contribution to addressing global challenges. The Youth Delegate Program’s uniqueness is that it is “By youth, for youth”, empowering the voice of the young.

The Municipality of Copenhagen pursues targeted solidarity programs including: 1) “A city of talents” program for employers with a focus on diverse recruitment and unconscious bias; 2) Financial support for an ethnic minority LGBTI organization; and 3) An advisory committee on initiatives addressing Inuit people from Greenland. Local CSOs lead international solidarity

marches in Copenhagen and other Danish cities, as well as providing support to civil society in countries in Africa and other regions, and promoting corporate sustainable investment by Danish and Nordic investors. The Police have a dedicated policy of pursuing primary dialogue with civil society activists who would like to hold public demonstrations of international solidarity before, during, and after the event. Civil society groups have a right to engage in freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Denmark and the police provide them with information to ensure successful logistics. Civil society groups are encouraged to notify the police 24 hours ahead of the event in order to provide proper support. This policy is exemplary at a time in which civil society spaces are closing for international solidarity demonstrations in many countries.

In Greenland, I witnessed international solidarity in action as Greenlandic CSOs give voice to vulnerable communities who seek improved enjoyment of their human rights, including access to a good education, health care, and the right to a clean, healthy environment. I also witnessed solidarity through the work of the High Court of Greenland that disseminates law to teachers and students, translating material into Greenlandic language in order to increase legal knowledge and help recruit the youth to study law at the University of Greenland. The Police (composed of integrated Danish and Greenlandic police officers) also visit schools all around Greenland to teach children how to protect themselves against sexual abuse and violence. UNICEF in Greenland provides “democratic *Nakuusa* forums” in which Greenlandic children can pick issues to discuss and pass resolutions to present to Greenlandic authorities who are in turn required to respond. This is in keeping with the Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity Article 7 (4): “States agree to take appropriate, transparent and inclusive action to ensure the active, free and meaningful participation of all individuals and peoples, including younger generations, in decision-making processes at the national, bilateral, regional and international levels on matters that affect their enjoyment of solidarity.” The government-owned businesses and ministries in Greenland also invite children and families to *Kulturnat* events involving music and other cultural performances in order to inspire youth to have aspirations about possible future career possibilities. These impressive solidarity examples aim to empower the Greenlandic children and youth. Nevertheless, as one CSO member said “It takes everybody to engage in order to change the direction of the ship.”

3. Challenges

During my visit, I met stakeholders who raised some challenges that may hinder the full enjoyment of the right and duty of international solidarity within Denmark and Greenland.

3.1 Structural discrimination against and stereotyping of Inuits and Greenlandic persons

The integration of Greenland within the Kingdom of Denmark occurred without a process of analysis of the impact of the colonial period on the Inuit and Greenlandic people. A common theme in conversations I had during my visit with Inuit people is that they seek recognition of their identity as indigenous people, in accordance with ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They seek enjoyment of their right to self-determination (Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) as well as respect for their free, prior, and informed consent in matters relating to the exploitation of natural resources in their territory and activities affecting their natural environment. Pursuant to the Act on Greenland Self-Government, the Greenlandic authorities have responsibility for the mineral resource and have the right to utilise the mineral resources from the subsoil.³ From my meetings, I learned that not all Inuit people feel represented by the Greenlandic Government and they fear that the flexible rules on Greenlandic permanent residency are easily exploited by persons who seek to capitalize on Greenlandic natural resources for commercial gain.

³ See Greenland’s Self-Government Arrangement and the Act on Greenland Self-Government.

Moreover, the Inuit are unable to participate in investor-state arbitration cases involving extractive industry in their territory and hence are limited in their ability to defend their interests. The Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity Article 9 (d) calls for “Creating a global enabling environment for sustainable development that is centred on individuals and peoples and is grounded in intergenerational justice and equity. This includes the increased use of sustainable agriculture and fishing, as well as the transition to renewable energy.” The Inuit Circumpolar Council (an international non-governmental association representing Inuits of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka, Russia) has identified protocols for Ethical and Engagement that may be interpreted as a type of inclusive International Solidarity Framework in order to form a basis for developing policies and practices for better communication among actors in pursuit of sustainable development⁴:

- ‘Nothing About Us Without Us’ – Always Engage with Inuit
- Recognize Indigenous Knowledge in its Own Right
- Practice Good Governance
- Communication with Intent
- Exercising Accountability - Building Trust
- Building Meaningful Partnerships
- Information, Data Sharing, Ownership and Permissions
- Equitably Fund Inuit Representation and Knowledge

The focus on the Arctic region as a strategic zone underscores the importance of ensuring the enjoyment of Inuit communities of their right to international solidarity with other indigenous peoples and with Governments, corporate, and civil society organizations who share commitment to common inclusive principles.

There is a lack of understanding of the continuous violations and traumas that are rooted in this history. Although there is a current historical inquiry into the relationship between Greenland and Denmark, there appears to be a need to take additional measures to address continuous human rights violations and aspirations for reconciliation for a better future. Greenlandic people express a profound lack of social cohesion with Danish society in the sense that the latter appears to lack contact with and understanding of Greenlandic culture, leading to misunderstandings and stigmatization. There is a need for both the Danish and Greenlandic society to claim the right to the truth as part of solidarity building. The Inuit Community and Greenland Parliament should discuss the creation of a Truth Commission to gather stories of persons who suffered trauma of separation from family, loss of culture/language, violence (including sexual violence), discrimination, and other continuous violations linked to past colonial policies and practices. A Truth Commission would help provide a common understanding between the people of Denmark and the Greenlandic and Inuit people in order to create greater social cohesion, as shown by previous studies on truth commissions.⁵

In my meetings with CSOs and the National Institute of Human Rights of Denmark, I was told that Inuits and Greenlandic people in Denmark face structural discrimination and stereotyping in public institutions, including higher education institutions, schools, places of employment,

⁴ [EEE-Protocols-LR-WEB.pdf \(inuitcircumpolar.com\)](#)

⁵ Bunselmeyer, Elisabeth. *Truth, Reparations and Social Cohesion: Transitional Justice Lessons from Peru*. Routledge, 2020. Allen, Jonathan. "Balancing justice and social unity: political theory and the idea of a truth and reconciliation commission." *U. Toronto LJ* 49 (1999): 315.

as well as private institutions.⁶ The average drop-out rate of Greenlandic persons from Danish higher education institutions is higher than the average drop-rate. Greenlandic students in Danish higher education institutions should be consulted to strengthen integration and identify measures to decrease drop-out rates, I recommend the exploration of the possibility of creating earmarked research scholarships. Greenland would benefit from an increase in the education of Greenlandic lawyers, doctors, engineers, and other professionals to support its sustainable development.

Greenlandic children in remote locations of Greenland lack access to good education. The Greenlandic government has responsibility for education in Greenland. There is a need to support translation of educational materials and dissemination to all regions within Greenland. This calls for the creation AI programs to translate educational materials to Greenlandic language and facilitate digital learning programs to improve the quality of education.

CSOs have reported that there are cases of systemic stereotyping and hate speech of Greenlandic people within State institutions and society in Denmark. The Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity Article 3 (8) advocates “Countering misinformation, disinformation and hate speech with facts, science and knowledge.” I recommend dissemination of the UN Rabat Plan of Action⁷ to all State institutions and civil society actors to promote inclusion, diversity, and pluralism. Moreover, it would be beneficial to promote more cultural exchange initiatives to diminish cultural misunderstandings and improve social cohesion, including student exchanges, Greenlandic art and music festivals within different cities and towns of Denmark.

CSOs reported that mechanisms for processing discrimination claims presented by Inuit and other minorities and inter-sectoral victims (including women) to the Board of Equal Treatment as well as to courts in Denmark failed to provide effective remedy, in part due to delays and other factors.⁸ There is concern that the current system has minimal impact and lacks the trust of vulnerable individuals.

Mentally ill Greenlandic persons who commit crimes are sent to mental health institutions in Denmark due to the fact that there is no closed psychiatric ward in Greenland. There is a need for financing of a mental health institution in Greenland to address the specific needs of this population locally. Some criminal cases involve Greenlandic child witnesses or victims that require psychological health care. These types of cases underscore the need for the Law Schools of the Danish Universities to create an elective law course addressing Greenlandic Law so that lawyers will be able to address cases involving conflict of law, such as Danish criminal law and children’s rights under Greenlandic health law.

3.2 High rates of domestic violence and sexual violence against women and children in Greenland

The Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity, Article 2 characterizes reactive solidarity as including response to violence against women and children and Article 3 (9) International Solidarity has as a specific objective: “Combating violence against women and the use of gender stereotypes.” Moreover Article 7 (2) sets forth “States undertake to support each other in the establishment of transparent institutions to address discrimination and violence against women through reporting, according to indicators that are established for that purpose.” Greenland has very high rates of domestic violence and sexual

⁶ Input from CSOs and the National Institute for Human Rights of Denmark: [Flertallet af grønlandske studerende i Danmark oplever fordomme og eksklusion | Institut for Menneskerettigheder](#)

⁷ [The Rabat Plan of Action | OHCHR](#)

⁸ [Ligebehandlingsnævnet — Ankestyrelsen \(ast.dk\)](#)

violence against women and children (1/3 of girls, 1/5 boys). They also have high rates of transfer to foster care: Greenlandic children's rate is 7 times higher than the one of Danish children. The intergenerational systematic violence in Greenland requires a comprehensive preventive and responsive solidarity approach to educate the society and strengthen mental health support for victims and treatment of offenders. There is a need for the Greenlandic Health Authorities to provide resources to establish community mental health centers/mobile psychiatric response programs to treat adults and children facing stress and depression due to trauma in Greenland. In particular, there should be focus on providing increased resources for psychological support to women and children victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence in Greenland in accordance with Article 26 of the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Danish Government has a due diligence obligation to investigate and provide remedy to the victims of the IUD and other birth control cases in Greenland. Forced contraception is considered a serious gender-based crime.⁹ Solidarity reparation can include apology and psychological support to victims, as well as symbolic measures - such as the creation of a fund to support Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and prevention of sexual abuse/domestic abuse programs in Greenland, in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

3.3 Shift from Integration to Return of Forced Migrants

Denmark has been very successful integrating refugees with language education, job placement, and access to housing in order to provide a durable solution in accordance with the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. However, in 2015 there was a paradigm shift in favor of temporary residency, requiring serial evaluations of status in light of country conditions in the country of origin, and increased denial of renewal of status for persons who have not received individual protection under the 1951 Convention or other protected status.¹⁰ This policy places pressure on a human rights solidarity approach to forced migration as refugees and migrants experience severe psychological stress due to the fear of eventual deportation during an epoch of protracted conflicts around the world. Moreover, the Independent Expert is concerned about the marked decrease in the rate of quota refugees; it is estimated that since 2017 only 436 refugees have been resettled.¹¹ I advise that a solidarity approach to migration may be informed by Article 3 (4) of the Revised Draft Declaration on International Solidarity that calls for: "Supporting refugee and migrant-centred approaches to the contemporary challenges of forced and irregular migration, including efforts to increase opportunities for safe, orderly and regular migration and legal protections for migrants, including access to justice;" and Article 9 (c): "Correcting structures that increase the vulnerability of migrants and the violation of their human rights, including externalization of migration control and transfer mechanisms that frustrate access to asylum and to fair and effective refugee determination procedures".

3.4 Gender vulnerability in the context of migration

Women forced migrants have a higher rate of receiving temporary protection on general reasons and less individual protection.¹² Under new work obligation regulations, they are at

⁹ See [Spiralkampagne i Grønland udgør grov krænkelse af menneskerettighederne | Institut for Menneskerettigheder](#)

¹⁰ §7,3. Law 2014/1 LSF 72, (February 2015)

¹¹ [Denmark is failing resettlement refugees](#)

¹² [they-dont-know_web.pdf \(refugeeswelcome.dk\)](#)

risk of underpayment. Migrant women who arrived in Denmark through family reunification programs and have been victims of domestic violence fear losing their residency permit if they report the abuse to authorities.¹³ This inhibits reporting of abuse to authorities. The Ministry of Immigration should abide by the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women, Article 59, by evaluating women migrants who are victims of domestic abuse for autonomous residence permits.

3.5 Risk of criminalizing international solidarity activists

Some civil society organizations that engage in international solidarity actions are concerned about a perceived increased risk of potential criminalization of their actions. Relevant topics raised include potential exclusion from banking services or freezing or closing of financial accounts banking services due to their engagement in countries under scrutiny on account of armed conflict or violence, hence there is a need to review whether there is a need to strengthen humanitarian carve-outs in the anti-money laundering-counter-terrorism/extremism legislation. It may be noted that the Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity Article 3 (6) sets forth that an objective of International Solidarity is “Empowering civil society organizations and social movements.”

Some civil society actors who engage in international solidarity actions calling for the environment or peace in Middle East report anxiety about the possibility of being registered as potential extremists and potentially losing residency status or denial of citizenship application if they are foreigners. There is a need to respect the balance between freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful association and assembly, and security concerns in the context of international solidarity actions. The State may be advised by the Revised Draft Declaration on Human Rights and International Solidarity, Article 8 (3): In accordance with the right to freedom of expression, States have the duty to take steps within their respective capacities to facilitate the protection of actual and virtual spaces of communication, including access to the Internet and infrastructure, in order to enable individuals and peoples to share solidarity ideas.”

3.6 Better Coordination for Good Faith Implementation of Human Rights Treaties

I am concerned that persons in vulnerable situations in Denmark and Greenland, including persons with disabilities, children, women, LGBTI, migrants, refugees, minorities, and indigenous peoples report that they are unable to fully enjoy their rights under the core human rights treaties due to delayed responses by State and Government institutions to protection claims. There is a need to strengthen competence within State and government institutions and improve communication mechanisms with civil society groups. Governmental Ministries of Denmark and of Greenland respectively should jointly coordinate a good faith international solidarity approach to address cases that involve human rights issues crossing mandates- such as environment and defence (outstanding clean-up of military waste), health and gender (IUD/birth control cases), children and health (disabled children’s lack of enjoyment of the right to education or participation in sports in Greenland) in order to provide holistic responses to stakeholders. Fragmentation between ministries and both the Danish and Greenlandic jurisdictions results in neglect of the needs of those most vulnerable. International Solidarity calls for the dedicated cooperation of State and Government actors, corporations, and civil society to meet the needs of those who are marginalized or excluded in order to ensure the inclusion of all persons in the enjoyment of human rights and break the cycle of inequality and discrimination.

¹³ See §19,7 [Udlændingeloven stiller for høje krav til ofre for partnervold | Institut for Menneskerettigheder](#)

I would also like to remind the Government of Denmark and the Government of Greenland to implement in good faith the recommendations issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in his Country Visit to Denmark and Greenland in 2023¹⁴.

It was very inspiring to visit Denmark and Greenland and gain insight as to the advances and challenges in pursuing international solidarity in action. I look forward to continuing our dialogue and discussing my full report when I present it in June 2025 at the UN Human Rights Council.

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¹⁴ [g2319815.pdf \(un.org\)](#)