



Focal Point for Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions

**A vibrant civil society is at the heart of any democracy.
Human rights are best secured when citizens
– individually or collectively – are able to hold their
government to account.**

In recognition of the vital contribution made by civil society to security, OSCE participating States have made a number of commitments to support civil society, NGOs, human rights defenders, and national human rights institutions.

Systematic work with civil society is at the heart of all programmes conducted by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

One of the ODIHR's core activities involves monitoring the implementation of human dimension commitments, as well as lending assistance to participating States, where needed. This has involved monitoring the ability of human rights defenders and national human rights institutions to operate, especially in challenging circumstances.

The ODIHR also helps to build the capacity of human rights defenders through education and training in human rights.

Independent national human

rights institutions can play a crucial role in advancing and securing human rights. Working with human rights defenders, they foster a national culture of human rights and serve as a respected independent voice. There is a need to promote the establishment of independent national human rights institutions where they do not exist and to support them where they do.

In its 2006 report *Common Responsibility: Commitments and Implementation*, the ODIHR identified the situation of human rights defenders as an issue of major concern. In a number of OSCE states, human rights defenders work under constant pressure from authorities and face restrictions on the exercise of their freedoms of expression, association and assembly. There are still too many cases where human rights defenders are subjected to unnecessary bureaucratic burdens, arbitrary detentions, assaults, ill-treatment, or defamation campaigns.

The Focal Point

Building on ongoing work across all of its programmes, and following a recommendation from the 2006 Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions, in 2007 the ODIHR established a Focal Point for Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions.

The Focal Point closely monitors the situation of human rights defenders, identifies issues of concern, and seeks to promote and protect their interests.

Working with other relevant intergovernmental agencies, national and international NGOs, and OSCE partners, the Focal Point supports the work of human rights defenders through a series of training and development activities.

The Focal Point's programme was developed in consultation with other international organizations, in particular the Council of Europe and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, including the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders.

'The participating States ... emphasize the need for protection of human rights defenders'

***Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Era
(Summit of Heads of State or Government)
Budapest 1994***

Activities

The ODIHR Focal Point for Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions carries out the following activities:

- ***Training for personnel at national human rights institutions***

The ODIHR supports regional training aimed at increasing the independence of national human rights institutions, and enhancing their capacity to deal with and resolve individual complaints of breaches of human rights.

- ***Activities on freedom of association and assembly***

The ODIHR organizes regional roundtables on issues affecting freedom of association and assembly such as the registration of NGOs, payment of registration fees, taxation of NGOs, foreign funding of NGOs and the status of domestic branches of international NGOs. Guidelines aimed at legislators and policy-makers dealing with practical issues concerning freedom of association are being developed, following the publication of *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly*. These guidelines should facilitate conditions conducive to the free functioning of NGOs and human rights defenders.

- ***Capacity-building for human rights defenders***

A series of training activities for human rights defenders will be delivered in order to improve their knowledge of human rights standards, and develop their monitoring and advocacy skills. This will include training NGOs to monitor the right to peaceful assembly.

For more information, contact:

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