

Human Rights Defenders (Autrement)

The birth of a concept.

"Today should be a day of shame for many governments" said Pierre Sané, Secretary-General of Amnesty International on 10 December 1998 during the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). "There is reason to be ashamed, when we see that fifty years from the spirit of idealism and commitment to a better world which framed the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, poverty affects hundreds of millions of human beings .while torture, 'disappearances', unfair trials and unlawful killings continue. While many national leaders will mark today's historic occasion by reiterating their will to protect human rights , Amnesty International will hold up a mirror for everyone to clearly see how far the reality is from the world envisaged by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We need to look beyond the rhetoric, and see things as they are. Amnesty International's 2008 annual report documents the facts. There are at least 1.3 billion people in the world who live on less than one dollar a day, 117 governments that torture their citizens, at least 55 governments that unlawfully kill them, at least 87 that jail prisoners of conscience, at least 31 that make their citizens "disappear", and at least 40 governments that execute them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been called "the world's best kept secret", and "little more than a paper promise", but for 50 years, tens of thousands of human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations have been trying hard to make this secret widely known."

However, it was not until the beginning of the 1980s, more than 30 years after the adoption of the UDHR, that the idea emerged of the necessity to deal with the threats made against and the mistreatment of human rights defenders. We received many testimonies from Amnesty International and other international NGOs that have been the subject of threats, attacks, arrests and assassinations, disappearances as well as from lawyers, journalists, magistrates, representatives of civil society, trade unionists, and doctors.

Everyday, throughout the world, men and women were arrested, tortured, killed, gagged, banned from meeting and repressed while protesting peacefully. Some had already been likened to terrorists, a tactic which was used more commonly after that.. The press that reported their activities was gagged, and wiretapped when not placed under direct state control.

But, everyday women got up and asked what had happened to their brothers, husbands or children. Everyday, despite the repression that reigned over them and their families, men and women, driven by an uncontrollable force of conviction and magnificent courage, met to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

These men and women, often anonymous victims, freedom fighters, whether anonymous or better known activists, all met to defend the ranks of human rights victims. Many had been adopted by Amnesty International groups, quoted in NGO reports, had been the subject of letter campaigns and diplomatic pressure and their names mentioned during high-level contacts with state representatives.

Therefore, as a result of being included in the reports of Amnesty International, the FIDH and other NGOs, the issue of human rights defenders themselves becoming victims of abuses progressively took shape. NGOs in particular considered this even beyond the scope of their work and suggested the need to develop guidelines and recommendations aimed at providing the necessary protection for human rights defenders.

The United Nations Declarations on Human Rights Defenders: A slow and drawn-out drafting process

Few people remember today and indeed for many human rights activists, it is often a real surprise to discover; but it was long before the adoption of this Declaration that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights took on the issue - in February 1980, over 18 years before the adoption of the final text in December 1998. The Commission, in a resolution, called on "*all governments to encourage and support individuals and organs of society exerting their rights and responsibilities to promote the effective observation of human rights,*¹ *subject to respect for articles 29 and 30 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*"² A year later, the same Commission continued in the same direction by adding that it disapproved of rough treatment and punishments against individuals, groups and organizations that defended human rights. In the same text, the Commission demanded that the Sub-Commission³ take up the issue and study all desired measures on the matter, making sure to include the interdependence between civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, therefore demonstrating the priority that it had already given to those involved with economic and social rights.

The following year, in March 1982, the Human Rights Commission asked the United Nations Secretary-General to present the Sub-Commission with information to help with the drafting of a set of principles on "*The Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups, Organs and Society, to Promote and Protect Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.*"

A year later in 1983, the Sub-Commission asked Ms. Erica-Irene Daes⁴ (Greece) to draft a project on a set of principles and added this point to the agenda of subsequent sessions. Ms Erica-Irene Daes submitted her report entitled "*The Promotion, Protection and Restoration of Human Rights at the National, Regional and International Level: A Set of Principles and Guidelines on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups, and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*", which became known as the Daes Report. This founding text contained 52 paragraphs, some of which are general principles, e.g. the acknowledgement of the dignity or indivisibility of human beings. Others contained specific rights for individuals and groups, e.g. the right to self-determination, life and health. A set of paragraphs focused on the responsibilities of individuals, groups and organizations to promote and protect human rights and respect for national laws, provided they do not contradict international standards.

In 1985, during its 44th session, the Commission on Human Rights decided⁵ to establish a working group to draft a declaration on human rights defenders

It is interesting to note that this working group, which was established in 1986 under the presidency of R. Roberts (Australia), was made up of 43 of the Commission's Member States, 8 non-member States, the ILO, and 8 non-governmental organizations, including Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists. A few years later, they were joined by the International Service for Human Rights and by the FIDH.

¹ Resolution 23 (XXXVI)

² Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

³ The "Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities" was a subsidiary body of the Commission on Human Rights. The Human Rights Council replaced the Commission on Human Rights and the Consultative Committee replaced the Sub-Commission.

⁴ A member of the Sub-Commission, Erica-Irene Daes would later become President of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

⁵ Decision 1985/112 of 14 March 1985

The minutes of the work done during the first meetings makes for compelling reading. The tone was set from the outset and the disagreements continued for 12 years. It showed the depth of the wide ideological differences facing the Commission on Human Rights at that period. It was well before the fall of Communism, but already at the early stage of Perestroika. The position taken by the USSR, Byelorussia, the GDR, Cuba, China and Algeria, supported a weaker role for NGOs within the United Nations and opposed attempts by Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, and Canada to produce a text allowing a stronger active role for civil society on the international stage.⁶ One of the longest debates, and one that lasted many years up to the adoption of the final text in 1998, concerned the dangerous attempt, led by the GDR, Bulgaria, Senegal and other countries of the former Eastern Block, to place a series of duties alongside the rights, following the example outlined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.⁷ Curiously, we would find the same debate on rights and responsibilities in "The Declaration on Human Duties and Responsibilities", an attempt led by Richard Goldstone and supported by many heads of state, which was presented before the United Nations in 1998 as a text to complement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But, under the impetus of its President R. Robertson, who was replaced in 1993 by the Norwegian Jan Helgesen, the working group tried to overcome the ideological divides, without necessarily ignoring the existence of major debates. He did a methodical job, which resulted in a draft text which did not distort the original objective and which aimed at assuring better protection for human rights defenders. However, there was still a split between members of the working group, notably between those who thought that a declaration would enable everyone to have rights and that human rights defenders should be protected, and those who thought that the Declaration would enable better control and would restrict action.

As soon as the work was underway, members approved the draft on the structure of the document presented by R. Robertson. It was progressively merged with a fairly similar and elaborate proposal made by Canada and Norway, both then becoming two of the text's strongest supporters. It was decided that the text should have 4 of its own characteristics, which once completed would be legally binding from that point on:

1. It should be short, concise and practical;
2. It should not attempt to create new rights and responsibilities no more than it should attempt to interpret existing laws;
3. It should try to strengthen existing international instruments, and
4. It should be limited to a single mandate.

At the start of 1990, to speed up the work, an informal editing group was given the responsibility of meeting regularly and producing a draft text based on the discussions of the working group. This flexible work method made it possible in particular for the small cluster of NGOs meeting round a group to undertake major alternative editing of explanatory texts, informal meetings with permanent missions to avoid the pitfalls of the wording of some texts and to anticipate future debates. In this respect, we highlight the important academic work that the International Service for Human Rights and Amnesty International's Legal Office did for Geneva. From 1992, its director Nigel Rodley noted that *"since the inauguration of the working group, there has been constant tension between those who want the new tool to strengthen existing laws as they apply to human rights defenders and those who aim to restrict the freedom of action of non-governmental organizations by measures which set down duties and limitations on individuals and groups."*

⁶ The debate continues today, notably at the OSCE, where Russia and Belarus dispute the participation of NGOs in supplementary Human Dimension meetings.

⁷ In this respect, see Articles 17-29 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

In 1993, the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, which was responsible for examining the progress made since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, wasted no time in demanding that ⁸ *"the draft Declaration on The Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms be quickly completed and adopted"*

Thus, year after year, the informal editorial group and then the Commission on Human Rights resumed discussions, which made progress with the text and put aside some of the more controversial points to be dealt with at a later date. In this regard, we should highlight the crucial role played by Jan Helgesen, who with his talent for negotiation, knew to make important compromises to advance the draft declaration, by conceding at times on some points of secondary importance, to keep the most important articles of the text.

Article after article, chapter after chapter, the text would then be thoroughly examined in many steps until 1997.

In February 1997, thanks to the obstinacy of Jan Helgesen and the will of a few states, a consolidated text was presented to the working group and approved. For many states and NGOs, it was considered a text of compromise, the lowest possible common denominator without compromising the original intention. However, there were still 4 major issues to decide: the financing of non-governmental organizations, the right to attend trials, the status of national legislations and the eternal question of rights and responsibilities.

Reading the notes and listening to the participants speak about the final session of the working group revealed serious tensions, strong words from supporter and opponents about the compromise.

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we also saw that each party had different objectives in mind. A handful of states wanted to prolong discussions, or even go back on points that had already been agreed to miss the 50th anniversary of the UDHR and to separate the two approaches. A greater number saw the adoption of the text in this particular year as the best moment and means to send a strong signal to the international community of the need to protect human rights defenders.

It was in this spirit that Jan Helgesen went before the Commission on Human Rights on 16 April 1997 regretting that he was not able to present a stronger text, but confident about the likely outcome of the final negotiations. While Chile suggested shortening the text to make a "Declaration on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders", the European Union, Madagascar, Poland and other countries expressed their disagreement with the text and their wish to see the Declaration adopted in 1998. The Swiss delegation declared *"beyond the information that they are often the only ones to give us on the situation on human rights around the world, human rights defenders play an important role in the teaching and diffusion of rights and fundamental freedoms. Like non-governmental organizations, trade unions, churches, journalists and lawyers, they are a key ingredient of democracy."*

At the same time, the NGOs presented a formal text, commending the work of Jan Helgesen and reaffirming that *"in our eyes, the text ...constitutes the bare minimum of what can be accepted"* and had already suggested the creation of a Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders. Aware of the impact of the adoption of the declaration within the context of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Commission on Human Rights then adopted a resolution calling on the working group to submit the final draft to the Commission's next session.⁹

Accompanied by a group of committed diplomats, Jan Helgesen went all out to overcome the final barriers, and to pass a resolution without vote before the Commission on Human Rights on

⁸ A/CONF. 157/23 12 July 1993

⁹ Resolution 1997/70

April 3, 1998. The draft Declaration on The Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups, Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was therefore adopted.¹⁰ He further demanded that ECOSOC - the United Nations' Economic and Social Council, the authority responsible for the dialogue with the NGOs which also maintains the vital link between the United Nations and civil society - adopt it in turn.

Then, on 9 December 1998, the eve of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR, the United Nations General Assembly in Geneva had its turn and formally adopted the resolution¹¹ "*reaffirming the importance of the observance of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations for the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons in all countries of the world,*

[...]

Conscious of the importance of the adoption of the draft declaration in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Resolution 217 A (III),

1. Adopts the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, annexed to the present resolution;

2. Invites Governments, agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to intensify their efforts to disseminate the Declaration and to promote universal respect and understanding thereof, and requests the Secretary-General to include the text of the Declaration in the next edition of Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments."

The impact of a text

Acknowledging the legitimacy of the actions of human rights defenders and affirming that they should be protected,¹² this resolution was then followed by a complementary resolution¹³ on 8 March 1999 at the United Nations General Assembly, which finally established the official concept of a human rights defender.

The adoption of this text was met with a jubilant reaction throughout the world; and the press commended this major initiative, while at the same time highlighting its shortcomings and the challenges now facing it to ensure an effective protection for Human Rights Defenders. For many international NGOs, it was real recognition that not only was the work of civil society important, a fact which the United Nations agencies were continuously repeating, but also that governments were responsible to protect them. Credit for the outcome of this long process is certainly due to states such as Norway, which saw the process through to the very end. But the context of the fall of the Berlin Wall and particularly the tremendous impetus from the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have certainly contributed in a huge

¹⁰ Resolution 1998/7 of the Commission on Human Rights

¹¹ General Assembly Resolution 53/144

¹² *The newspaper 'Le Monde' noted " in addition to the fact that no measures were put in place to concretely ensure the application of these principles, twenty-six states (including fourteen member states of the Arab League) have reaffirmed, through an 'interpretative declaration' presented by Egypt, that national law supersedes all international principles."*

¹³ *"Invites governments, organs and organizations of the United Nations and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to intensify their efforts to disseminate the Declaration and to promote universal respect and understanding thereof, and requests the Secretary-General to include the text of the Declaration in the next edition of Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments". Article 2 Assembly General Resolution 53/144*

way to the adoption of this major text, despite the reticence which was expressed openly at this time.

Antoine Bernard of the FIDH wrote in the report by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders *"this was the first time that a group of states have so openly expressed a credo that could not be any clearer: to protect states against human rights defenders, and not the defenders against the arbitrary nature of the State."*

It was certainly imperfect and incomplete, but by adopting this standard, the United Nations Member States acknowledged that the ideals enshrined in the UDHR can only materialize if everyone participated in implementing it, and if those people working to promote these ideals can act without facing intimidation, threats, interference or other obstacles.

The governments acknowledged that the work of human rights defenders, which involves observing and monitoring the situation and making suggestions to improve it, was compatible with the states' obligations, which should conform to national and international human rights standards. In addition, they acknowledged that the work of human rights defenders contributed considerably to ensuring these obligations are respected.

The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders calls on governments to protect those rights, which play a fundamental role in the work of human rights defenders. The right to freedom of expression, to peaceful assembly, to start collective actions and to demand change non-violently, as well as the right to receive and disseminate information and to communicate with national and international organizations have all been recognized as basic rights for these activists.

Human rights defenders often put themselves in danger when they criticize the State or others in positions of power. Governments are therefore obliged to ensure that they can act freely without fear of interference, discrimination, threats or reprisals.

In the event of allegations of such acts, human rights defenders have the right to file a complaint with an independent, impartial and competent authority (legal or other), and if the violation is proved, they are entitled to compensation.

According to the Declaration, governments should play a role in promoting fundamental rights, notably through:

- * the dissemination of information on human rights;
- * education on human rights;
- * the creation of national institutions for the defence of human rights.

The Commission on Human Rights called on governments to implement the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and to produce reports on the measures taken to this end. It also called on all United Nations agencies and mechanism dealing with human rights issues to consider the measures included in this text.

Defenders' Summit, Palais de Chaillot (8-11 December 1998)

It was really during the preparation of Amnesty International's international campaign, aimed at preparing the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that the idea of the need to force a change in the current situation, and to mark international public opinion, governments, and the United Nations with a bold event, was born. I remember during one of the meetings of the Section Heads at Amnesty International in

March 1997, Secretary-General Pierre Sané and I, then Director of Amnesty International in France, suggested holding the first Human Rights Defenders' World Summit at Palais de Chaillot in Paris on 10 December 1998 as another way of celebrating the 50th anniversary, and to show the world the reality of the terror, oppression and misery in which human rights defenders were living. The idea did not receive unanimous support and was discussed and questioned. I remember the heated debates in December 1997 in Cape Town, South Africa, during a meeting of the International Council which brings together all the sections of Amnesty International, and which also decides on the direction of the movement. I had to fight, gather the support of the sections one after the other to pass a resolution on human rights defenders, which was presented by the French Section of Amnesty International. From the end of 1997, we created an NGO coalition in France, which we named "Article One", and which, with the slogan "Great National Cause 1998", led a whole series of activities on human rights throughout the world. At the same time, we had suggested to the FIDH, ATD Fourth World, and France Liberté that they join us in preparing the first Human Rights Defenders Congress.

This first Human Rights Defenders Congress, which took place at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, was one of the elements in the international dynamics which succeeded in creating a wide international coalition around the idea that the best way to protect human rights is to ensure that those who defend human rights daily in their country, and often at the risk of their own life, were protected. The first meeting gathered 350 ground activists from over 110 countries, who were able to testify before each other for the first time of their fear, the threats of arrest and torture, or the convictions that make their struggle so difficult, and it left an indelible imprint on the minds of many people. This meeting was carefully prepared through regional meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America. During these meetings testimonies, as well as suggestions for ensuring better protection for human rights defenders were logged in a "complaints book." Among the recommendations, two were recurrent: a better use of the United Nations protection mechanisms, of which little is known and which is misused by many defenders, as well as the implementation of a mechanism that would allow the specificity of human rights defenders' work methods to be taken into consideration.

I remember the jubilation that gripped the big room of the Palais de Chaillot when the United Nations General Assembly announced the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. The 350 human rights defenders, guests, the press, and diplomats immediately made the connection with British Home Secretary, Jack Straw's decision to make the request for Pinochet's extradition to Spain run its course. At the same time, we had the United Nations' recognition of the work of human rights defenders, and the perspective the figure that represented repression against activists would be brought to justice"

Regional declarations.

Obviously, from a legal perspective, this United Nations declaration is a non-binding text. Nonetheless, it allows us to build the base progressively for more institutional mechanisms; starting with those within the United Nations moving onto regional intergovernmental ones.

In Africa

It was on 16 April 1999 that the first Ministerial Conference of the African Union on Human Rights adopted the Mauritius Declaration. It highlights the role of non-governmental organizations in promoting fundamental rights and recommends that their activities are encouraged. It notes in Article 19 *"the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders by the 54th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights marks a significant turning point, and calls on African governments to take appropriate steps to implement the Declaration in Africa."* But, it was only years later in 2004 that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted the Resolution on Human Rights Defenders in Africa, which called upon Member States to give "full effect to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders."

In the Americas on 7 June 1999, the Assembly General of the Organization of American States adopted a resolution on Human Rights Defenders in the Americas. Each year after that it adopted a resolution on the same theme thus highlighting its commitment to protect human rights defenders.

In Europe on June 15, 2004 the European Union adopted guidelines on Defenders of Human Rights, calling on all members to harmonize their practices and their policies to ensure the effective defence and protection of threatened defenders. It reiterated that *"Support for human rights defenders is already a long established element of the European Union's human rights external relations policy... human rights defenders can assist governments in promoting and protecting human rights. Taking part in the consultation processes they can play a key role in helping to draft appropriate legislation, and in helping to draw up national plans and strategies on human rights. This role too should be recognised and supported. The EU believes it is important to ensure the safety and protect the rights of human rights defenders."*

The European Union (EU) has made a public commitment to protecting human rights defenders. These guidelines, known as The European Union Guidelines on Human Right Defenders, established a framework to support and protect activities of human rights defenders undertaken by EU states in non-member states. These activities include supporting the work of activists during multilateral meetings, interventions in favour of threatened activists and support for the international and regional mechanisms to protect the rights of human rights defenders. The EU has launched worldwide campaigns on human rights defenders' issues, such as the right to freedom of expression and the rights of female human rights defenders.

They called on EU member state embassies to open up to defenders, to support their work and to participate in meetings that they organise as part of their activities.

In Asia: In November 2007, the signatories of the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) expressed their commitment to establish a regional organization to defend human rights. A group of experts was nominated to draft a preliminary version of the organization's mandate. Amnesty International and regional organizations of civil society led a working campaign for a strong, professional and representative human rights organization that is capable of implementing international standards.

The adoption of complementary or restrictive mechanisms.

In addition to these declaratory texts, which are not legally binding, the main NGOs continued to argue the case for the implementation of a real mechanism capable of ensuring a more effective protection for human rights defenders in the world.

Their painstaking work resulted in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights creating the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the situation of Human Rights Defenders on 26 April 2000. The United Nations Secretary-General appointed the Special Representative for 3 years.

As of August 2000, Hina Jilani, a Pakistani lawyer at the Supreme Court, (see box below) took up this position for two consecutive mandates, before vacating the post in 2008. As soon as she took up the position, she was faced with many requests for intervention. She also argued consistently for the regional mechanisms and her own position to be complementary to each other. She thus argues the case incessantly for the establishment of regional rapporteurs in all regional intergovernmental organizations.

A lawyer dedicated to the cause of human rights defenders, co-founder of the Pakistani Commission on Human Rights, Hina Jilani took up the matter with the major non-governmental organizations involved in supporting human rights defenders: Amnesty International, FIDH, the International Service for Human Rights in Geneva, Frontline and the International Commission of Jurists. She gets guarantees of support for a strong and technical policy¹⁴, which she completed with significant diplomatic support from a few governments who were committed to supporting the mandate she was given. In addition to the international recognition that she gained in the world, Hina Jilani's major achievement was elevating the mandate given to her by the United Nations Secretary-General, to a high level thus paving the way for her successor Margaret Sekaggya, a colleague of mine.

In 2001, the Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission decided to create a Human Rights Defenders Unit following an Organization of the American States (OAS) Resolution, which called on the Commission to closely monitor the issue of protection for human rights defenders. This Unit acts as a real link with organizations, individuals and groups and provides them with information. It also ensures coordination with the Representative to the UN Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders.

Then, in 2004, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights created a position of Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders responsible for examining the situation of human rights defenders, publishing reports of each of the Commission's sessions, cooperating with governments, national institutions and NGOs and for promoting the cause of human rights defenders in Africa.

Finally, it was the turn of regional European organizations, notably the Council of Europe and the OSCE which held a series of consultations aimed at implementing a European mechanism to protect human rights defenders. In 2006 the OSCE opened an office in Warsaw to liaise with human rights defenders and the Ministerial Committee confirmed the authority and capacity of the Human Rights Commissioner to act and establish a unit to liaise with human rights defenders within its office.

For their part, the NGOs remained active on all 5 continents. The major international NGOs such as Amnesty International, FIDH with the "Observatory for the Protection for Human Rights Defenders" - its joint programme with the OMCT (World Organization Against Torture), the International Commission of Jurists, Franciscans International and Service International continued to increase the number of protection programmes, which were largely supported by the press and specialist networks.

This increase in the number of declarations and protection mechanisms only highlighted all the more the situation of these men and women, who either alone or in association throughout the world are committed to making the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a reality throughout the world.

These men and women who, throughout the world, relentlessly denounce human rights violations everyday, wherever they take place, and regardless of who the perpetrators are, they make the public aware of their rights and the necessity for these rights to be protected. All these defenders, whether anonymous or well-known, work daily in the shadows of fear. Their courageous work for the respect of fundamental rights still make human rights defenders targets of choice by repressive states, armed opposition groups, death squads, or even private interest groups. The methods of repression are becoming increasingly varied. They change

¹⁴ These NGOs were very generous with their support for Hina Jilani, placing staff at her disposal voluntarily, facilitating her trips by inviting her to meetings and publishing her policy paper and speeches.

according to the country. They can be visible and violent or insidious and pernicious. The next chapter - and the 20 portraits included in this book - show the paths of these men and women who, in their diversity, are united by the same objective: to defend human dignity. Ten years after the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, at the end of a long struggle and at the moment when we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the time has come to pay them homage with this book.

Michel Forst, July 2008.

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