



Summary of recommendations on the protection of human rights defenders in the OSCE region suggested at the side event at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on 29 September 2011 in Warsaw

On 29 September 2011, the Human Rights House Foundation, Front Line Defenders and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH - OMCT) in cooperation with the Youth Human Rights Movement, which is a part of the International Civic Initiative for OSCE, organized a joint side event on the protection of human rights defenders in the OSCE region. Representatives from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation addressed the main issues related to security of human rights defenders and discussed best and less successful practices of their protection.

The panelists of the side event were Valentsin Stefanovich from the Human Rights Centre Viasna (Belarus), Olga Sadovskaya from the Committee Against Torture (Russian Federation), Rasul Jafarov from Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan), Nazi Janezashvili from the Article 42 of the Constitution (Georgia) and Valerian Vakhitov from the Citizen Against Corruption (Kyrgyzstan).

During the presentations the panelists mentioned closing and abolishment of offices of human rights organizations, tax and police inspections, arrests and charges against human rights defenders, disbarment of and threats against lawyers, as well as their discredit and hindering of their professional activities, and smear campaigns as some of the tools used by authorities to hinder the work of human rights defenders. On the other hand, the panelists mentioned good practices to be followed, like solidarity actions by human rights defenders, (ex., the mobile group of national human rights defenders to Northern Caucasus), establishment of urgent response centers (like the case in Russia), trainings in security and international missions attending events of human rights defenders in the regions.

During the interventions of the human rights defenders in the panel and audience, several measures were suggested to improve the protection mechanisms by OSCE and its participating states in order to protect human rights defenders at risk. The following recommendations to OSCE Chairmanship, participating states and OSCE institutions were suggested at the side event:

- to encourage the future OSCE Chairmanship to give priority to the protection of human rights defenders;
- to develop mechanism for monitoring situation of human rights defenders, including human rights lawyers and for ensuring their safety through;

- to work towards the creation of a permanent mandate of OSCE Representative on Human Rights Defenders, similar to the mandate of the OSCE Representative on the freedom of the media;
- for the OSCE Chairmanship to work towards the establishment of the OSCE Special Representative on human rights defenders, equivalent to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders (i.e. ability to conduct country visits and to react on individual cases of human rights defenders at risk);
- to work towards adoption of OSCE Guidelines for Human Rights Defenders, which will be used by OSCE Participating states and OSCE Field Offices like guiding principles and adapt guiding for their policy towards protection of human rights defenders similar to the EU Guidelines on Protection of human rights defenders;
- to work towards the development of OSCE Minimum Standards on Protection of Human Rights Defenders (similar to OSCE guidelines on freedom of assembly),
- to ensure further visibility to the work of human rights defenders (incl. trial observations, visits to detention establishments and events held by human rights defenders, travels to the regions, regular and visible contacts with a wide range of human rights defenders at the local level and support for human rights awards); and to further communicate publicly and timely on cases of human rights defenders at risk;
- to encourage OSCE missions and OSCE Participating States' embassies to organize trainings, including security trainings, for human rights defenders.
- to pay greater attention to the situation of human rights lawyers and journalists in the OSCE region;
 - among others, to look into the possibility to ensure moral support to human rights lawyers during the trial process, including presence and support of lawyers from other countries;
- to work towards the establishment of early warning and emergency mechanisms at the OSCE level to address cases of human rights defenders at risk, including the support of a voluntary risk fund for human rights defenders in danger.

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