



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

*The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) cordially invites you to a side event at the 27th session of the Human Rights Council:*

**Promoting a safe and enabling environment for human rights  
defenders – The OSCE/ODIHR Guidelines on the Protection of  
Human Rights Defenders**

**15 September 2014**

**13.00 – 15.00**

**Room XXVII**

**Palais des Nations**

**Geneva**

Speakers will include:

Omer Fisher

Deputy Head of the Human Rights Department, ODIHR

Michel Forst

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Oleksandra Matviichuk

Centre for Civil Liberties, Ukraine

Florian Irminger

Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF)

*Panel presentations will be followed by an open debate with opportunity for questions and interventions from the floor.*

*Sandwiches and refreshments will be provided*

## **BACKGROUND**

Human rights defenders around the world continue to be exposed to serious risks and, sadly, many are frequently targeted for their human rights work. On the occasion of the International Day of Democracy on 15 September the side-event will pay tribute to the essential work of human rights defenders.

Within the context of the OSCE, the largest regional security arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok, States have consistently reaffirmed – since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1975 – the right of individuals to know and act upon their rights. At the 1990 Copenhagen Meeting of the CSCE, participating States recognized the right of the individual to seek and receive assistance from others in defending human rights and to assist others in defending those rights. At the Budapest Summit in 1994 they emphasized, with reference to the drafting of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the need for protection of human rights defenders. They reiterated at the OSCE Summit in Astana in 2010 the important role played by civil society and free media in helping them ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.

Despite these commitments, the environment for human rights defenders to operate freely appears to have become increasingly restricted over the years. Against this background, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights developed the OSCE/ODIHR Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders with the broad participation of human rights defenders, partners from other intergovernmental organizations – including the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders – and in consultation with OSCE participating States. They were launched in Berne, Switzerland, on 10-11 June 2014 at a Conference organized jointly by ODIHR and the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship with the support of the incoming Serbian OSCE Chairmanship. At the side event on 15 September ODIHR will present the Guidelines to the NGO-community, representatives of States and other international organizations at the Human Rights Council.

As part of the joint effort of ODIHR, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and civil society, the side event seeks to highlight the importance of the work of human rights defenders, provide an opportunity to examine current trends concerning the environment they operate in and to discuss actions needed to strengthen their protection at the international, regional and national levels.

Following presentations and remarks by panellists the side event will provide space for an open discussion, questions and comments from the floor and answers by panelists.