



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic



CIVIC SPACE COHORT

Using the Anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders to Strengthen Support to and Recognition of Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society

COUNTRY LEAD: NORWAY

SUPPORTED BY: ARMENIA, CANADA, THE CZECH REPUBLIC, DENMARK, ESTONIA, GERMANY, KOSOVO, LATVIA, MALTA, THE NETHERLANDS, SLOVAKIA, SWEDEN, THE UNITED KINGDOM, AND THE UNITED STATES

Civil society activists, journalists, artists, lawyers, academics, and others who promote and protect human rights for all, play important roles in safeguarding democracy, rule of law and sustainable development. Through their activities they may contribute across multiple fields, such as documenting and ensuring accountability for human rights violations and abuses, redress to victims and survivors, protection of the environment, stronger and more inclusive institutions, and better public policies and laws.

Notwithstanding, human rights defenders are often exposed to stigmatisation and smearing owing to their work, which are contributing and sometimes enabling factors for other violations and abuses, including threats, harassment, surveillance and attacks, online and offline. Women human rights defenders are even more at risk and are disproportionately impacted by threats and attacks, which are often more gendered and sexualized than threats against their male counterparts, due to how they challenge social gender norms and stereotypes.

2023 marks 25 years since the adoption, by consensus, of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in the General Assembly. It is also the 75-year anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders will present achievements of human rights defenders in her forthcoming report¹ to the Human Rights Council. The report will be presented at the 52nd session, in March 2023.

¹ [A/HRC/52/29](#)

We propose to use these anniversaries to strengthen the awareness of human rights defenders' contributions to the realisation of human rights, rule of law, democracy, peace and inclusive and sustainable development. This is important to counter negative stereotypes and narratives.

We have developed the following call to action:

1. Promote policies and public statements, for example joint statements, demonstrating the positive and legitimate role of human rights defenders in promoting human rights, democracy, the rule of law, peace and sustainable development on the occasion of the 25-year anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
2. Publicly support the campaign launched by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to release all who are arbitrarily detained for exercising their human rights.
3. Encourage and support national-level monitoring efforts by, inter alia, A-status national human rights institutions in co-operation with human rights defenders, to further the implementation of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and its underlying rights and to enable official national statistics on the situation of human rights defenders.