

Vital UN human rights work under threat

The UN Human Rights Council's Special Procedures are under threat. These are independent human rights experts, who examine issues globally, or focus on specific places, or on particular groups such as human rights defenders or migrants. They are currently under review, and their independence, expertise and ability to respond quickly are at risk.

Amnesty International and 16 other non-governmental organizations have launched a global petition calling on UN member states to maintain and strengthen the system of Special Procedures. Their work is critical for the safety and lives of individuals all over the world.

GLOBAL REACH

Drawing their authority from the UN Charter, the Special Procedures can respond to allegations of violations occurring anywhere in the world.

“During my last [mission] as Special Rapporteur, a large number of human rights defenders were detained. I went to visit them at the Makala Prison in Kinshasa, but the army officers did not allow me to see them ...

They heard our discussions and for the first time realised that someone was concerned about them. They started to knock at the doors and bars and shout out their names. Finally, I was able to interview one of them, Golden Misabiko, and another one that I knew had suffered severe torture.

Four months later, I attended an international meeting of human rights defenders in Dublin. Golden was there and he could not hold his tears when he saw me. He told me he had been released a few days after that interview and according to him that visit saved his life. I couldn't hold my tears either.”

Roberto Garretón, former Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

“The Special Procedures played an important role amongst other things in the release of my brother from an uncertain fate. ... [they] weighed heavily on the decision making process that ultimately resulted in the President ... sparing an innocent life.”

Amjad Hussain, brother of Mirza Tahir Hussain, who was imprisoned for 18 years in Pakistan following an unfair trial and faced the death penalty

INDEPENDENT

Special Procedures mandate-holders come from all regions of the world and serve in an independent capacity. Their ability to work without interference from governments is critical.

“In an environment of intense politicisation, the Special Rapporteurs are able to rise above this; to level criticism where it is due, whatever the country in question, and to commend positive developments wherever they occur. In a world ravaged by grave human rights violations, it is of the utmost importance that independent experts are able to challenge the powerful as well as the weak.”

Gemma Mortensen, human rights consultant and broadcaster

The global petition runs until 18 June 2007. Visit and sign up at www.actforspecialprocedures.org



FAST AND FLEXIBLE

Special Procedures can respond fast; they make hundreds of urgent interventions each year on behalf of thousands of individuals at risk.

“The immediate intervention of the Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders after my arrest ... reminded the authorities that their practices were under close scrutiny and certainly deterred them from going too far in their persecution.

It is very important for human rights defenders like me to know that the Special Representative is here to protect and support us and also to feel that we will not be alone if we come under threat. It gives us more confidence and empowers us ... It works like a protection shield, a guardian-angel for us.”

Samira Trad, Director, Frontiers-Ruwad Center, who was harassed and detained in 2003 due to her work on migrant issues, Lebanon

“This mechanism can become an alarm and a way to prevent revenge attacks against our work, which we have experienced several times.

Usman Hamid, Commission for Disappeared Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras), Indonesia

INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

Special Procedures bring human rights violations, including emerging crises, to the attention of the international community.

“For human rights defenders in Guatemala, the UN Rapporteurs are a vital mechanism to support our work and protect our lives. In particular their actions on our behalf not only provide us with solidarity and protection but also elicit action from our government that we could not obtain alone.

The Rapporteurs ... creat[e] an important space for victims, thereby empowering them and amplifying their voices on an international scale.

Ruth del Valle, Executive Director, National Movement for Human Rights in Guatemala

EXPERTISE

Special Procedures provide expert advice to assist governments in meeting their human rights obligations.

“A number of civil society organizations ... drew the [Police Service] Commission’s attention to the findings of the Special Rapporteur regarding the weakness of the Commission in fighting police abuse. The Police Service Commission has resolved now to strengthen its oversight over police misconduct, and to undertake direct investigation of police misconduct.

Joseph Chu’ma Otteh, Executive Director, Access to Justice, Nigeria

“The Special Rapporteur ... brought the weight and influence of an international mandate to bear on our case. The Special Rapporteur added an extra dimension ... because he emphasized the relevance and applicability of international standards to our call for a public inquiry.

Michael Finucane on behalf of the Finucane family, UK

