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Supporting Human Rights Defenders Together

Guidelines of the Finnish
Foreign Service

Ministry for Foreign
Affairs of Finland

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Supporting Human Rights Defenders Together

Guidelines of the Finnish Foreign Service

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland Helsinki 2023

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Supporting Human Rights Defenders Together Guidelines of the Finnish Foreign Service

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Abstract

Supporting human rights defenders is a key part of the implementation of Finland's human rights-based foreign policy.

The guidelines on supporting human rights defenders are intended especially for Foreign Service employees in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and in Finland's missions abroad. Additionally, the guidelines can be of use to other authorities and to representatives of the private sector and civil society.

The guidelines describe the activities and status of human rights defenders around the world. They give a number of practical examples from projects supported by Finland and encourage active efforts to support human rights defenders by providing many examples. The guidelines illustrate the challenging, and in many cases dangerous, environment where an increasing number of human rights defenders daily operate.

The Foreign Service published its first guidelines on supporting human rights defenders in 2014. The first guidelines were based on the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and were mainly intended for Finland's diplomatic missions and consulates. The updated guidelines take into account, on the one hand, developments in the field of human rights defenders' activities and, on the other hand, the recommendations outlined in an independent report in 2017.

The 2021 Government Report on Human Rights Policy outlines in more detail the premises and priorities of Finland's human rights policy.

Provision

This publication is a translation of the original Finnish version. Although best efforts have been made to ensure a good quality translation, this version might differ in some parts from the original publication. In case of a discrepancy, please refer to the original Finnish publication: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-281-350-3>.

Keywords

Human rights defenders, human rights, human rights activists, human rights policy, human rights organisations, civil society

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Tuemme yhdessä ihmisoikeuspuolustajia Suomen ulkoasiainhallinnon ohjeet

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Tiivistelmä

Suomen ulkopolitiikka on ihmisoikeusperustaista ja ihmisoikeuspuolustajien tukeminen keskeinen osa sen toimeenpanoa.

Ohjeet ihmisoikeuspuolustajien tukemisesta on suunnattu erityisesti ulkoasiainhallinnon toimijoille ulkoministeriössä ja Suomen ulkomaanedustustoissa. Ohjeita voivat kuitenkin hyödyntää kaikki viranomaistoimijat samoin kuin yksityisen sektorin ja kansalaisyhteiskunnan edustajat.

Ohjeissa kuvataan ihmisoikeuspuolustajien toimintaa ja asemaa eri puolilla maailmaa. Niissä myös annetaan useita käytännön esimerkkejä Suomen tukemista projekteista ja kannustetaan lukuisten esimerkkien keinoin aktiiviseen toimintaan ihmisoikeuspuolustajien tukemiseksi. Ohjeet havainnollistavat haastavaa ja monissa tapauksissa vaarallista toimintaympäristöä, jossa lisääntyvä määrä ihmisoikeuspuolustajia päivittäin toimii.

Ulkoasianhallinto julkaisi ohjeet ihmisoikeuspuolustajien tukemisesta ensimmäisen kerran vuonna 2014. Ohjeet pohjautuivat Euroopan unionin ihmisoikeuspuolustajia koskeviin suuntaviivoihin ja olivat pääosin suunnattu Suomen edustustoverkolle. Päivitetyissä ohjeissa on huomioitu yhtäältä kehitys ihmisoikeuspuolustajien toimintakentässä ja toisaalta vuonna 2017 julkaistun riippumattoman selvityksen suositukset.

Valtioneuvoston ihmisoikeuspoliittinen selonteko vuodelta 2021 linjaa tarkemmin Suomen ihmisoikeuspolitiikan lähtökohdista ja painopisteistä.

Klausuuli

Tämä julkaisu on käännös alkuperäisestä suomenkielisestä versiosta. Vaikka käännös on tehty parhaan osaamisen mukaan, on mahdollista, että se eroaa joiltain osin alkuperäisestä julkaisusta. Kaikkien eroavaisuuksien osalta pyydämme tarkistamaan tiedot alkuperäisestä suomenkielisestä julkaisusta: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-281-350-3>.

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Tillsammans stöder vi människorättskämpar Anvisningar för Finlands utrikesförvaltning

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Referat

Finlands utrikespolitik utgår från de mänskliga rättigheterna och stödet till olika människorättsförfvarare är en central del av genomförandet av utrikespolitiken.

Anvisningarna om stöd till människorättsförfvarare är riktade särskilt till aktörer inom utrikesförvaltningen vid utrikesministeriet och Finlands beskickningar utomlands. Anvisningarna kan emellertid utnyttjas av alla myndighetsaktörer, liksom även av företrädare för den privata sektorn och civilsamhället.

I anvisningarna finns beskrivningar av människorättsförfvararnas verksamhet och ställning i olika delar av världen. Anvisningarna ger också flera praktiska exempel på projekt som stöds av Finland och sporrar, genom många exempel, till aktiv verksamhet för att stödja människorättsförfvarare. Anvisningarna åskådliggör den utmanande och i många fall farliga situation som allt fler människorättsförfvarare dagligen är verksamma i.

Första gången utrikesförvaltningen offentliggjorde anvisningar om stöd till människorättsförfvarare var 2014. Anvisningarna var baserade på Europeiska unionens riktlinjer om människorättsförfvarare och var huvudsakligen riktade till Finlands beskickningsnätverk. I de uppdaterade anvisningarna har man beaktat å ena sidan utvecklingen inom människorättsförfvararnas verksamhetsfält och å andra sidan rekommendationerna i en oberoende bedömningsutredning som publicerades 2017.

Statsrådets människorättspolitiska redogörelse för 2021 innehåller närmare riktlinjer för utgångspunkterna och prioriteringarna för Finlands politik för de mänskliga rättigheterna.

Klausul

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FOREWORD

Everyone has the right to defend human rights, as stated in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted in 1998. Human rights defenders work peacefully and non-violently to promote and protect the rights of others. They play an important role in promoting human rights, safeguarding democracy and supporting sustainable development. The work of human rights defenders improves justice in all countries.

The UN Declaration requires states to protect human rights defenders. Nevertheless, the work of many human rights defenders has become increasingly dangerous. In addition to state authorities, other influential actors such as armed groups and private corporations may seek to prevent the activities of human rights defenders. In recent years, human rights defenders have also faced new challenges. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many states have used emergency measures as a pretext for suppressing human rights activities. While new technologies facilitate networking of human rights defenders, they can also expose them to harassment and surveillance. The dramatic change in the European security environment also has diverse impacts on the daily work of human rights defenders.

Finland considers human rights defenders important partners in our efforts to promote human rights across the globe. They reinforce the implementation of the objectives of Finland's human rights-based foreign and security policy and development policy on practical level. We pay special attention to promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls, and of persons and groups in the most vulnerable situations, as well as to human rights defenders belonging to these groups. Finland condemns all harassment and violence against human rights defenders and supports their capacities in various ways.

The valuable work carried out by human rights defenders requires more attention and their voices need to be heard. During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2019, Finland visibly promoted such dialogue when I invited four women human rights defenders to speak about their views with a group of foreign ministers at the unofficial Gymnich meeting. Human rights defenders must be able to speak freely everywhere, including in multilateral forums, without fear of reprisals. Finland also supports human rights defenders' right to make their voice heard in the UN Human Rights Council, of which Finland is a member in the 2022–2024 term.

These guidelines for supporting human rights defenders are intended as a practical tool to support everyone in the Finnish Foreign Service in their daily work. They have been prepared in wide consultation with the Foreign Service personnel, as well as with the civil society.

The world has changed since the publication of the original guidelines in 2014. These updated guidelines pay wider attention to issues such as supporting human rights defenders through multilateral cooperation and to their role in protecting the environment. These guidelines also encourage promoting dialogue between companies and human rights defenders as part of Team Finland cooperation.

A human rights-based approach means that human rights are an integral part of everything we do in the Foreign Service. I encourage everyone, regardless of your duties, to actively and boldly support human rights defenders!

Pekka Haavisto
Minister for Foreign Affairs

1 Introduction

Supporting human rights defenders and their activities is an integral part of Finland's human rights-based foreign and security policy. These public guidelines on supporting and protecting human rights defenders are intended especially for Foreign Service personnel. They are based on the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders¹, and have been prepared in accordance with the goals of Finland's human rights-based foreign and security policy and the policies laid out in the Government of Finland Report on Human Rights Policy². The original guidelines published in 2014³ have been updated based on the Foreign Service's internal needs assessment and in consultation with the civil society. Non-governmental organisations and parliamentary parties have participated in the process in the context of the Advisory Board for International Human Rights Affairs (IONK). In 2017, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs commissioned an independent report on Finland's work in supporting human rights defenders⁴. The recommendations of the report were taken into account when updating these guidelines.

The purpose of these guidelines is to encourage the entire Foreign Service to actively support human rights defenders in order to improve their working environment and situation, as well as to promote human rights. Recommended measures for supporting human rights defenders and their work, targeted especially at the Finnish missions abroad, are presented at the end of these guidelines. List of indicators and contacts that the missions can utilize and turn to when reporting on human rights and monitoring the situation of human rights defenders are included in the appendices to these guidelines. These recommendations and indicators can be utilized in many ways also in the broader context within the Foreign Service. These guidelines can be applied in bilateral communication at all levels, as well as in multilateral human rights forums. Moreover, an internal toolbox with useful material and good practices concerning support for human rights defenders is being prepared for the Foreign Service.

The European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders are based on the United Nations' (UN) Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted in 1998⁵. The EU also has many other strategies programmes and guidelines supporting the promotion of human rights⁶ that can be utilised in practical human rights advocacy. The EU plays a key role in global action in protecting the work of human rights defenders.

Government of Finland Report on Human Rights Policy

Published in 2021, the Government of Finland Report on Human Rights Policy provides long-term guidance for Finland's human rights policy and the Government's fundamental and human rights activities. The report examines changes in the operating environment of fundamental and human rights and specifies general targets and approaches with which Finland can contribute to strengthening human rights development and the rule of law internationally, at the EU level and nationally. The report discusses also the situation of and support for human rights defenders.

Photo 1. Pekka Haavisto, Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Federica Mogherini, European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, greet human rights defenders at Finlandia Hall during the Informal Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers (Gymnich), in 2019. © Lauri Heikkinen/Prime Minister's Office.



2 The valuable work of human rights defenders and challenges they face

| *“Stand by our side.”*

A woman human rights defender at the ‘Supporting women, protecting rights’ seminar, organised by Amnesty, the European Parliament and the KIOS Foundation in Helsinki in 2019

Human rights are enshrined in international and regional human rights treaties. The most important of these have been negotiated within the context of the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe (CoE). Parties to human rights treaties are required to respect, protect and fulfil these rights, in other words, to implement their treaty obligations⁷.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders⁸ focuses on rights specified in human rights treaties relating specifically to the work of human rights defenders. Human rights defenders require special attention and support due to challenges they face because of their activities. States have the primary duty to protect and fulfill the rights of human rights defenders. It is also important that other actors, such as corporations, understand and support the role of human rights defenders.

Who is a human rights defender?

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted in 1998, is the most important international document concerning human rights defenders. Article 1 of the Declaration states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”. Based on the Declaration, a human rights defender is anyone who, alone or in association with others, works through peaceful means to promote and protect human rights. The Declaration urges states to create appropriate conditions for human rights advocacy. Human rights defenders call for effective implementation of the Declaration to improve their situation.

Human rights defenders are individuals, groups and organs of society that non-violently promote and protect universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. Human rights defenders promote and safeguard the realisation of civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as rights whose legally binding status is being discussed, such as the right to a safe, clean and healthy environment. They specifically promote and protect the rights of persons and groups in vulnerable situations. Human rights defenders and activists include members of human rights organisations, trade union and environmental activists, lawyers, journalists, authors, teachers, students and social media influencers, for example. Some defend human rights as part of their profession, while others are involved on a voluntary basis.

Human rights defenders carry out valuable work to promote human rights in their societies and communities, including when working outside their countries and in international organisations. They uncover human rights violations and advance their investigation. They offer legal, psychological, medical and other assistance to the victims of violations. They demand accountability and raise awareness of human rights and their defenders⁹. Human rights defenders also uncover cases of abuse of power, bribery and fraud. They play an important role in situations where information is difficult to access, for example in conflict zones or in areas under authoritarian control. The questions human rights defenders focus on depend on the local and national situation.

“We are living under a climate of fear, threats, intense insecurity and growing desperation”

Ilwad Elman, a Somali human rights defender, at the HRC side event organised by Finland, Norway and the ISHR, focused on women human rights defenders in conflicts and post-conflict situations

While the work of human rights defenders has become better known worldwide over the decades, they continue to face serious challenges and threats. False accusation, unfair trial and conviction, arbitrary detention, harassment, intimidation, freezing of assets, attacks against family members, public humiliation and targeting, dissemination of false information in the media, loss of work, risk of arrest upon return to the country, travel bans, torture and violent attacks are examples of such threats. In the worst case, the safety and life of human rights defenders and/or their family members come under threat.

Human rights defenders in a particularly vulnerable situation and in need of support include those working in fragile states and conflict areas, women human rights defenders, environmental and climate human rights defenders, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, human rights defenders belonging to sexual and gender minorities (LGBTIQ¹⁰),

as well as human rights defenders facing multiple forms of discrimination. Actors who visibly defend the enforcement of fundamental and human rights, uncover political and economic abuses or criticise those in power are under particular risk and threat. They include inter alia journalists defending freedom of expression, whistle-blowers and human rights defenders fighting corruption, environmental human rights defenders, as well as Indigenous Peoples who defend their ancestral lands, culture and traditions, connecting both human rights and environmental perspectives.

Death threats and killings of human rights defenders

As reported by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a total of 1,323 human rights defenders were killed in at least 64 countries between 2015 and 2019¹¹. According to reports by NGOs, at least 358 human rights defenders, 18% of them women, were killed in 2021¹². Environmental human rights defenders are particularly threatened, with as many as 227 reported to have been killed in 2020.¹³ In practice, death threats and killings exceed the numbers reported.

According to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, attacks against human rights defenders often come in a context of structural violence and inequality, and are fuelled by impunity.¹⁴ Amnesty International reports that violent attacks against human rights defenders are usually preceded by smear campaigns, surveillance, threats and harassment. Had these been addressed, more serious attacks could possibly have been prevented.¹⁵ Violence against human rights defenders is also addressed in the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16, which focuses on peace, justice and good governance, and identifies the number of cases of killing, kidnapping, disappearance and arbitrary detention and torture of human rights defenders as indicators¹⁶.

The work of human rights defenders is being restricted and the space for civil society narrowed through legislative or administrative provisions around the world. Examples of such efforts include preventing the registration, activities and financing of organisations. The use of legislation restricting the freedom of assembly and expression, as well as counter-terrorism measures to target human rights defenders and criminalise their work has increased. In addition to state actors, other actors, including armed groups, religious and political extremist groups, or private corporations can threaten human rights defenders and their activities. A 2021 report by the UN Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises urges corporations to cooperate with civil society. According to the report, a cultural shift is necessary to ensure that states and businesses see human rights defenders as essential allies.¹⁷

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the situation of human rights defenders

The work of human rights defenders is especially challenging in crisis and conflict settings. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has emphasised that the emergency measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 onwards must not be used to restrict the activities of human rights defenders and civil society. Nevertheless, citing the pandemic, many states have enacted national emergency measures, enabling the imprisonment of individuals such as political demonstrators. According to several independent reports, the situation of actors promoting human rights and democracy, in particular, has weakened in a number of countries during the pandemic^{18,19}. Human rights defenders have been imprisoned or disappeared, they have been placed under home arrest and subjected to violence after pointing out the human rights implications of crisis measures. Restrictions on mobility and assembly have caused difficulties to many civil society organisations, especially in countries and regions, where access to digital communication services is limited. Human rights defenders and civil society are also affected by the negative economic impacts of the pandemic. However, human rights activists are not just victims but also active agents and important allies in efforts to find sustainable and human rights compliant solutions to the challenges and problems caused by the pandemic.

Changes in the operating environment require human rights defenders and their supporters to work consistently and in novel ways. Digitalisation, for example, may offer human rights defenders opportunities for increasingly efficient networking and influencing. However, in digital environment human rights defenders are more exposed to online harassment and threats, as well as to unlawful monitoring and surveillance. Therefore, it is important to strengthen and support human rights defenders' knowledge and skills in safe use of digital tools.

Photo 2. In 2018, a wheelchair marathon was organised in Kyrgyzstan to encourage discussion about the rights of persons with disabilities and defend their right to be heard, participate in society and live on an equal basis with others. The wheelchair marathon advocated for the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in Kyrgyzstan. © Abilis.



3 Finland's priorities in human rights advocacy and support for human rights defenders

Finland consistently supports the activities of human rights defenders as part of its human rights-based foreign and security policy²⁰. Supporting human rights defenders is also a key element of Finland's development policy and is included in its priority areas²¹. Finland's human rights policy is based on the respect for human dignity and universality of human rights.

Finland's international human rights policy emphasises non-discrimination and gender equality, as well as the promotion of the rights of persons and groups in the most vulnerable situations. Protecting the operating space and participation rights of civil society and human rights defenders is an important goal in itself, but it is also a prerequisite for achieving Finland's other foreign and security policy and development policy goals.

The principles of Finland's human rights-based foreign and security policy

- **Rights:** Finland's engagement is based on human rights defined in human rights conventions and treaties and Finland supports the rules-based international system.
- **Participation:** Finland's own representation and support provided for other actors promotes gender equality and non-discrimination.
- **Resources:** sufficient resources are allocated for the implementation of a human rights-based policy.
- **Reality check:** competent authorities in ministries as well as Finnish missions abroad are responsible for active and coherent human rights activities, taking into account the challenges and opportunities of their respective operating environments.

Finland places particular emphasis on supporting the participation rights and capacity of human rights defenders representing or promoting the rights of persons in the most vulnerable situations.²² They include women and girls, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons and Indigenous Peoples. Support provided for human rights defenders takes account of themes that are increasingly significant to Finland's human rights and development policies, namely climate change and biodiversity loss, taxation and illegal cash flows, corporate human rights responsibility as well as the opportunities and challenges associated with the digital environment.

“Sexual violence and the threat of it are used to silence women human rights defenders.”

Nedal Al-Salman, a woman human rights defender from Bahrain, at the Supporting women, protecting rights seminar, organised by Amnesty, the European Parliament and the KIOS Foundation in Helsinki in 2019

Supporting women human rights defenders: what to take into account?

Supporting the activities of women human rights defenders is one of Finland's priority areas. Women human rights defenders are in a vulnerable situation and face various additional risks and challenges due to their gender. The problems they deal with are related to gendered power structures, discriminatory attitudes and practices, including multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination (such as disability or sexual orientation), as well as sexual and gender-based violence and harassment. Questions related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are often gender-related. Women human rights defenders face often barriers and challenges such as attempts to silence and discredit them. Online harassment has increased the threats to them all around the world.

When supporting women human rights defenders, it is important to consider the specific challenges affecting their work and, to the extent possible, help them overcome these obstacles and secure their participation in decision-making processes. The means to do so depend on the context, which makes it important to engage in regular and continuous dialogue with women human rights defenders, as they have the best insight into the need for and effectiveness of support measures.

4 How does Finland support human rights defenders?

Finland appreciates the work of human rights defenders and condemns all violence against them. Finland provides political and financial support to the work of human rights defenders. The objective is to influence the operating environment so that human rights defenders can act safely and freely. At its best, consistent support to the work of human rights defenders does not only promote their situation and their opportunities to participate and take action, but also the rights they strive to protect and advance. This, in turn, contributes to a general improvement in the country's human rights situation.

Photo 3. In 2018, the Finnish Embassy in Berlin organised a joint event together with Artists at Risk, a Finland-registered international organisation supporting artists who are at risk of persecution or oppression. Pictured is the Deputy Head of mission at the time, Antti Kaski, who made the opening remarks at the event. © Embassy of Finland, Berlin.



Finnish missions abroad actively participate in the EU's human rights activities and engage in dialogue with the authorities and non-governmental organisations of their host states. Missions provide diverse support to human rights defenders and their work. Finland also works actively and proactively in regional and international organisations to bolster the status and participation opportunities of human rights defenders and the civil society. Moreover, Finland annually grants substantial financial support to human rights defenders around the world.

Support for environmental human rights defenders

The work of many human rights defenders, especially those who represent Indigenous Peoples, focuses on the environment, natural resources, biodiversity loss and climate change. The UN defines environmental human rights defenders as individuals and groups who, in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment, including water, air, land, flora and fauna.

Environmental human rights defenders often face threats and violence because of their work. Finland is committed to supporting environmental human rights defenders under its action plan for climate smart foreign policy. In its high-level speeches, Finland has drawn attention to the challenges faced by environmental human rights defenders and has promoted their participation in high-level panels. Finland channels its support to environmental human rights defenders through national and international non-governmental organisations. This support is used, for example, to promote the safety and networking of environmental human rights defenders and to improve their capacity to report human rights violations.

4.1 The activities of Finnish diplomatic missions

“Human Rights work requires a constant balance between using our brains, hands and heart - not just practicing human rights paperwork and laws.”

Naly Pilorge, Human rights defender, Cambodia

Supporting the work of human rights defenders and cooperating with them is an important part of the work of Finnish missions abroad. Human rights defenders and their situation should be taken into account in the missions’ annual planning. It is important to take into consideration what kind of cooperation missions can engage in with local and regional human rights actors in their host states and countries with side accreditation²³. The missions can utilise the recommendations and indicators presented in these guidelines for their planning. Secure information exchange and coordination with the Ministry’s regional department, the Unit for Human Rights Policy, and other relevant parties is of key importance.

Missions engage in political dialogue in their host states to promote the situation of human rights defenders in accordance with the obligations of international human rights treaties. Questions concerning human rights defenders can be raised in bilateral discussions with the host state’s authorities. This also applies to high-level meetings and other bilateral discussions, including political consultations. In the event that human rights defenders come under immediate threat and persecution by state or non-state actors, the mission, based on its country-specific insight, evaluates which parties it should seek to influence, on a case by case basis.

At the country level, Finland cooperates with EU Member States, Nordic countries and other like-minded countries in human rights issues. It is essential to be actively involved and take initiative in cooperation concerning human rights. The EU Delegation’s Human Rights Working Groups are an example of good practices. It is important to coordinate the groups’ activities with the EU’s other influencing efforts, including the cooperation between heads of missions. Nordic cooperation offers Finland a natural channel for action. As part of Finland’s human rights activities, missions can also participate in the UN’s and regional organisations’ country-specific work supporting human rights defenders.

The missions can support human rights defenders by meeting with them, organising joint events, giving statements and showing public support for their work. In coordination with other countries, the missions can also take part in monitoring the trials of human rights defenders and bringing the cases up in different contexts. In some countries, diplomats

are prevented from observing trials, but the mere attempt to enter the courtroom, demanding the authorities for access or following the trial outside the courthouse sends a powerful message to both authorities and human rights activists. Visits with detained or imprisoned human rights defenders in prison or requests for such visits from the authorities also serve as a strong signal, even if visit permits are not issued. Meetings with the family, friends and colleagues of imprisoned human rights defenders can also be an important expression of solidarity.

Recognising and showing public appreciation for the importance of human rights defenders' work help keep the issues they advocate on the political agenda. It is also important to help human rights defenders participate in public discourse, for example by inviting them to various events as participants or speakers. Public recognition and attention are particularly important in situations where influential actors aim to smear and target human rights defenders. In challenging situations, efforts to influence public opinion, for example through campaigns and education, are important to foster more positive attitudes towards human rights defenders. Human rights defenders themselves often highlight the importance of versatile cooperation and support.

It is important for Finnish diplomatic missions to recognise, identify and take into account the risks faced by human rights defenders. Since human rights defenders are the ultimate experts of their own situation, it is essential to listen to and respect their assessment of the situation. In some cases, contact with a diplomatic mission and international attention can provide human rights defenders with added security and protect them against reprisals. However, in other cases, visible support and publicity can pose a risk to their safety. Based on the diplomatic missions' local and regional knowledge, an assessment must be made in each individual case to determine whether silent or public diplomacy is the most effective method of exerting influence.

“Human rights defenders continue their work despite being afraid because they want to see a fairer world.”

Climate activist Marinel Ubaldo in a virtual panel discussion on the work of human rights defenders organised by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Amnesty Finland and the KIOS Foundation in 2020

Guidelines for emergencies

Diplomatic missions occasionally receive messages regarding human rights defenders in danger. In the most serious cases, the human rights defender's life may be at risk. The diplomatic mission, at their discretion, should forward information on such cases to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, using secure communications, including secure e-mail messages. As a rule, these types of situations call for cooperation with the EU and other like-minded countries. However, sometimes national action may be justified based on family or other connections to Finland, for example. Cooperation with human rights networks and organisations is often necessary to help human rights defenders under threat. In emergencies, missions can also guide human rights defenders to contact actors offering help. These include Protect Defenders, maintained by the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism²⁴, Lifeline Fund²⁵, the emergency contact services of the Front Line Defenders²⁶, OMCT's support service for victims of torture²⁷, the digital security helpline of Access Now²⁸ and the Council of Europe's platform supporting journalists²⁹.

Even if the operating environment is challenging, human rights defenders often wish to continue their work in their own or a neighbouring country. In such cases, the diplomatic mission may, where possible and within the limits of the law, help the human rights defender relocate within the country or to another country. If a person requests help from Finland, cooperation within the Foreign Service and between different administrative branches is needed.³⁰

Under its refugee quota, Finland admits persons recognised as refugees by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and other foreign nationals in need of international protection, some of whom may be human rights defenders. An application for asylum in Finland can only be submitted within Finland's borders. A person may not apply for asylum at a Finnish diplomatic mission abroad.

Finland has adopted the Schengen visa, provisions on which are issued in the Visa Code. For a visa to be granted, the requirements laid out in the Code must be met. A Schengen visa is not suitable for long-term stay, as it allows the holder to stay in the country for a maximum of 90 days within a 180-day period. A Schengen visa can also be issued for multiple entries and for a maximum period of five years. Under Article 25 of the Visa Code, a Schengen visa with limited territorial validity can be issued on humanitarian

grounds if the normal conditions for a Schengen visa are not fulfilled. Provisions on the application for a Schengen visa, the application process and multiple entry visa are issued in the Visa Code³¹. The government of Finland has launched legislative preparation for a humanitarian visa in September 2022. The Government's proposal is scheduled to be submitted to Parliament in Autumn 2023³².

Taking human rights defenders into consideration in Team Finland activities

Finland is committed to promoting the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)³³. In connection with Team Finland activities, Finnish diplomatic missions around the world can help Finnish companies survey stakeholders and consult with human rights defenders about potential adverse human rights impacts as part of their due diligence process. At best, supporting dialogue and partnerships between businesses and human rights defenders can prevent adverse human rights impacts caused by business operations, boost companies' awareness of human rights impacts, strengthen civil society and promote sustainable business. Host states can be encouraged to develop national action plans on businesses and human rights. Finland's National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UNGPs can be used as an encouraging example in this respect. The good practices of Finnish companies and national legislation can also be shared³⁴. Missions should pay attention to and monitor any strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP³⁵), which companies may use to silence voices critical of them. To ensure the realisation of human rights, it is also important to adhere to the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)³⁶. Local trade unions often serve as good partners on questions concerning the realisation of labour rights.

Non-governmental organisations supported by Finland carry out important work to support human rights defenders, especially in questions related to companies' adverse impacts on human rights and the environment. Further information about businesses and human rights in the context of Foreign Service activities is available in internal online learning course.

4.2 Cooperation with the EU and other regional intergovernmental organisations

Cooperation within the framework of the EU is a key advocacy channel for Finland, also in political dialogue related to human rights defenders. Finland participates proactively in the EU's work and initiatives focusing on human rights defenders, including as part of the EU's Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM).

Support for human rights defenders is a long-established element of the EU's external action and policy on human rights. It is a key element of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. Moreover, the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders³⁷ offer practical recommendations for consolidating the EU's actions to support and protect human rights defenders.

Finland supports the work of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and engages in close cooperation with the Special Representative. Within the EU's bilateral and multilateral human rights dialogue, Finland stresses the importance of paying attention to the rights of the persons and groups in the most vulnerable situations. Finland emphasises the importance of discussing international human rights matters throughout the EU, including at the highest political level.

Finland supports the human rights defender activities of regional intergovernmental organisations and strengthening the opportunities for civil society participation in the activities of such organisations. Regional human rights norms should aim at a level of human rights protection that exceeds that attained in the UN context. In addition to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (ODIHR, OSCE) has prepared public Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. In the Council of Europe, the most important work on human rights defenders is conducted by the Commissioner for Human Rights, whose mandate includes providing concrete support for human rights defenders. Among other things, the Commissioner has the right to intervene as a third party in the proceedings of the European Court of Human Rights. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe also maintains a procedure whereby human rights defenders can report reprisals against them directly to the Office of the Secretary General. The recommendation adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in 2018 strengthens civil society space in Europe³⁸ and protects human rights defenders. The implementation of the recommendation in Member States is monitored.³⁹

Gymnich meeting – human rights defenders’ recommendations for effective support

Supporting and protecting the work of human rights defenders were among Finland’s priority areas during the country’s Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2019. Finland called attention to the situation of human rights defenders, for example at the unofficial Gymnich meeting for the EU’s foreign ministers when Pekka Haavisto, the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs, invited several women human rights defenders representing the global north and south to present their views on human rights defenders’ needs for support. Federica Mogherini, High Representative for the EU, also attended the meeting.

The human rights defenders gave several recommendations to EU countries and institutions concerning support for human rights defenders. They urged the EU to maintain active contacts with human rights defenders, consistently address human rights in bilateral discussions, as well as systematically implement both the EU and national guidelines on human rights defenders in all situations. The human rights defenders also called for enhanced information exchange and coordination between the EU institutions, Member States, civil society and political parties in matters concerning human rights. Donors should chart any possible blind spots in support for human rights defenders. Human rights defenders should always be consulted when considering any support measures.

Finland received a great deal of positive feedback for organising the Gymnich meetings from EU i4 has encouraged other countries holding the EU presidency to organise similar meetings with human rights defenders.

Finland supports a comprehensive and functioning monitoring system for the implementation of international and regional human rights treaties and encourages other states to ratify and implement human rights treaties. Finland has expressed its support for the San José Guidelines against Intimidation and Reprisals⁴⁰, drawn up by the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies, and encourages human rights defenders to engage in the process of monitoring the implementation of human rights treaties. Finland also provides voluntary funding to support the functioning of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Many of the Court’s judgments whose execution is being supervised concern human rights defenders. Finland participates actively in the supervision of the execution of judgments and defends the system of the European Convention on Human Rights and its integrity.

Journalists as human rights defenders

The state of freedom of expression and media freedom has declined in many countries as a result of authoritarian use of power. Journalists have become targets of harassment and attacks when reporting on topics such as human rights violations. Freedom of expression and media freedom as well as the safety of journalists are important themes in international and regional organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE, in whose work Finland actively participates. Finland is involved in the activities of a group of countries promoting the safety of journalists in the context of, for example, the OSCE and UNESCO. Finland supports consistently media independence and diversity also by channelling funding to UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). Within the context of the IPDC, UNESCO monitors the safety of journalists and the state of impunity, for example. In addition, Finland is involved in the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) that promotes media freedom and the safety of journalists and issues joint statements on the state of press freedom and the conditions of journalists in different countries.

4.3 Advocacy in the UN and multilateral cooperation

“We are often the first credible source for information but rarely involved in strategic design, global advocacy and policy development. To bridge connection from the local to the global is something that is really important.”

Ilwad Elman, a Somali human rights defender, at the HRC side event organised by Finland, Norway and the ISHR, focused on women human rights defenders in conflicts and post-conflict situations

Carrying out activities through the UN and other international nongovernmental organisations often increases their effectiveness. Finland participates in international organisations' efforts to advance and implement human rights norms. Finnish representations and missions in international organisations and cooperation organs play an important role in promoting support and protection of human rights defenders in multilateral fora. Among other things, Finland calls attention to the status of human rights defenders in statements, by joining declarations, and by participating in meetings

and thematic work related to the topic. Finland also advocates actively to highlight the situation of human rights defenders in EU's positions, for example during resolution negotiations. Finland supports and promotes civil society's participation and right to speak in international arenas, including at meetings of international organisations.

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) is the most important intergovernmental body focusing on human rights. According to its mandate, the HRC discusses thematic human rights issues and the human rights situations in individual countries. In addition to regular sessions, the HRC may convene for special sessions, as required. In the Council, the recommendations made to countries in connection with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) provide an opportunity to raise concerns related to human rights. Finland pays attention to the state of civil society and the situation of human rights defenders in its overall assessment concerning UPR recommendations for the country under review.

Finland values highly the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and also supports the work of other UN Special Procedures and mandated investigations. Finland encourages and supports the interaction of human rights defenders with the treaty bodies that monitor the implementation of the UN's human rights instruments.

Finland's membership in the UN Human Rights Council

Finland is a member of the UN Human Rights Council in 2022–2024. Made up of 47 states, the Human Rights Council, which meets in Geneva, is the UN's most important intergovernmental human rights body. The Human Rights Council is tasked with protecting and promoting human rights around the globe by addressing serious human rights violations, for example. In the HRC decision-making processes, Finland defends and promotes the multilateral rules-based system and universal human rights. Finland supports the work of UN's independent human rights experts and the participation of civil society and human rights defenders in the Human Rights Council. Finland works in close cooperation with both Finnish and international non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders in questions related to the Human Rights Council. It is important to make the opinions and competence of civil society, national human rights institutions, researchers and the private sector heard and seen in the work of the Human Rights Council.

4.4 Forms of financial support

“Supporting women human rights defenders also means ensuring them a seat at the table.”

Pooja Patel, International Service for Human Rights, at the HRC side event organised by Finland, Norway and the ISHR, focused on women human rights defenders in conflicts and post-conflict situations

As stated in the *Report on Development Policy Across Parliamentary Terms*, protecting and supporting human rights defenders is a key element of Finland’s development policy. Finland supports human rights defenders as part of its cooperation with both international and Finnish non-governmental organisations. In addition to funding organisations, the role of human rights defenders should be considered in development policy more widely. Human rights defenders and civil society play a significant role in the assessment of human rights impacts related to development cooperation and in pointing out shortcomings. They are important partners in both national and international dialogue. Their role is also focal in development projects concerning private sector and especially in the implementation of corporate human rights due diligence.

Finland uses a variety of financial instruments to support the work of human rights defenders. Many of these are only available for projects related to development cooperation. The target countries’ own legislation, such as provisions restricting the operations of human rights organisations and defenders, may affect funding opportunities.

The work of human rights organisations can be supported by Local Cooperation Funds (LCF) managed by Finnish diplomatic missions. Local NGOs can apply for LCF funding from respective diplomatic missions, where available. According to the LCF guidelines of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the selection of LCF projects should take into consideration the priorities of Finland’s human rights policy, including the promotion of the rights of women, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, minorities and Indigenous Peoples.

It is important to support human rights defenders who defend the rights of persons and groups that are vulnerable to exclusion and discrimination also in rural areas and far from the capital. LCF funding and NGO cooperation provide effective tools for this, as organisations can often reach even remote areas by using their networks. Through the organisations it supports, Finland helps local and regional human rights actors in challenging situations and countries, who are often in a particularly vulnerable situation

and exposed to discrimination. The support is diverse and can include safety training (physical and/or digital safety), the construction and provision of safe spaces, support for legal processes, as well as advocacy and public policy training.

Finland's support for local human rights actors is a concrete expression of our international human rights policy: We support grassroots work aimed at promoting non-discrimination, participation, inclusion and the universal human rights of persons and groups in the most vulnerable situations. This in turn contributes to peace, social stability, rule of law and democracy, realisation of human rights and the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Photo 4. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) provided basic health services to human rights defenders as part of the project funded by Finland through local cooperation funds, in 2020. © LICADHO.



Support through local cooperation funds

The Embassy of Finland in Thailand has employed local cooperation funds (LCF) to support the work of human rights organisations in Cambodia, with an emphasis on human rights defenders. The country's human rights situation has worsened significantly in recent years, leaving little latitude for civil society. Human rights defenders and activists face various threats. The pandemic has been used widely to silence civil society.

The Embassy granted LCF funding to the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) in 2020 and 2021. Operating as a network across the country, the organisation is one of Cambodia's best known and longest operating human rights organisations. In 2020, the funding was allocated to the provision of basic health services to human rights defenders, activists and a number of groups in vulnerable situations, such as prisoners. During the project, data were also collected on acts of violence and health threats against human rights defenders and activists, and healthcare visits were made in areas where a risk of political violence exists because of demonstrations. The 2021 project monitored and reported on the impacts that government policies, such as pandemic restrictions, had on human rights defenders and activists, as well as on their operating conditions. Legal help was also provided to them.

In 2021–2023, the Embassy is also providing LCF support to the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (CCHR), another well-known human rights organisation, which focuses especially on civil and political rights, as well as questions related to democracy and the rule of law. During its project, the CCHR will collect observations made by the country's civil society for Cambodia's universal periodic review (UPR) in 2024. It also aims to increase awareness about the UPR procedure within the country, for example through meetings with NGOs and communication.

Finland supports the human rights and democracy work of international non-governmental organisations (INGO). They are key supporters of human rights defenders and important partners for Finland. Cooperation with INGOs is central to achieving the objectives of Finland's human rights policy. INGOs have several partner organisations at country level with which they support the work of human rights defenders at the local level. Networks and partnerships with INGOs increase the influence and protection of local human rights defender organisations. INGOs also carry out significant advocacy work at the UN level and in regional intergovernmental organisations.

International non-governmental organisations as partners

Finland uses development cooperation funds to support international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) that advocate for human rights. Supporting human rights defenders is one of Finland's priorities in its cooperation with INGOs. Support for women human rights defenders is particularly emphasised. In 2021, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs granted a total of EUR 6.3 million for INGOs' activities during 2022–2024 to support human rights defenders in developing countries. Funding was granted to the following four organisations: Access Now, Front Line Defenders, International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). These organisations grant direct support to human rights defenders and organisations representing them, in addition to which they help make the voices of human rights defenders heard in international human rights forums.

As an EU Member State, Finland supports the Union's Protect Defenders mechanism. Finland also supports the work of human rights defenders through the Global Equality and Lifeline funds managed by the US Department of State. A considerable part of Finland's support to the funds is allocated to directly supporting human rights defenders at risk in the global south. Finnish non-governmental organisations, such as KIOS, also support the work of human rights defenders as part of their state-funded projects.

Finnish development cooperation is human rights based. This means that the human rights impacts of all development cooperation projects are assessed. Human rights defenders are important stakeholders and partners in the assessment of these impacts. In addition to projects focusing specifically on human rights, human rights defenders and organisations can be involved in projects carried out in different sectors as partners or consultants.

5 Monitoring and reporting

Communicating and cooperating with human rights defenders is an effective way of obtaining information about the human rights situation in different countries and about current issues related to human rights. Up-to-date monitoring and reporting by diplomatic missions concerning the situation of human rights defenders, their possibilities to work, as well as any threats they may face in the country, is needed to support Finland's political advocacy. The information obtained from reports helps target the support provided to human rights defenders and anticipate changes in the operating environment.

Effective and fit for use monitoring calls for continuity and trust-based relations with local actors. Cooperation and information exchange with various stakeholders (including the EU delegation and Member States, UN organisations, non-governmental organisations, independent and impartial human rights institutions) is of essence and particularly useful in side accreditation states where Finland does not have a mission.

Monitoring and reporting on the situation of human rights defenders should be included in the annual objectives and planning of diplomatic missions as well as their routine human rights monitoring and reporting. This is particularly important in countries where human rights defenders are in a difficult situation. Moreover, missions should report on their practical actions to support human rights defenders. The indicators in Appendix 2 are recommended for use when reporting on the situation and operating environment of human rights defenders, as well as on the support provided to them. Examples of topics to be addressed and monitored in reporting, as well as information sources are listed in Appendices 1 and 3.

Where possible, monitoring and reporting should be supported by trips and visits including meetings with human rights defenders whose activities are far from the capital. Close monitoring of local and international media is also important for reporting purposes.

It is important that Finnish diplomatic missions and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs actively distribute information through their communication channels about current human rights issues and Finland's actions to support human rights defenders.

6 Support and guidance

In addition to these guidelines, the key instruments for Finnish diplomatic missions and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs include the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy and the Government of Finland Report on Human Rights Policy. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs is also preparing an internal toolbox for supporting human rights defenders, as well as online learning course on Business & Human Rights for Finnish Government employees.

In the Ministry, the Unit for Human Rights Policy provides instructions and support in questions concerning human rights defenders in cooperation with other relevant parties (such as regional departments, Legal Service, Consular Services), as needed.

The Ministry engages in active cooperation and organises meetings, events⁴¹ and trainings⁴² with organisations and human rights defenders. Diplomatic missions are also encouraged to reinforce similar cooperation. The Unit for Human Rights Policy provides further information on matters such as the country level activities of international non-governmental human rights organisations funded by Finland.

Financial and human resources affect the latitude of action of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions. Similarly significant is whether Finland has a diplomatic mission in the state or whether representation is realised through side accreditation. In its activities, the Foreign Service as a whole must also pay attention to any possible safety threats against Finland and its employees.

The resources and capacity of human rights defenders and organisations representing them must also be considered while liaising and collaborating with them.

| “By defending one we defend all.”

Irina Birjukova, a Russian human rights lawyer, at the Supporting women, protecting rights seminar, organised by Amnesty, the European Parliament and the KIOS Foundation in Helsinki in 2019

6.1 Actions for supporting the work of human rights defenders, recommended especially for Finnish diplomatic missions⁴³

With human rights defenders

- **Meet** with human rights defenders and **take part** in events organised by them.
- **Organise** meetings and events on human rights issues and **invite** human rights defenders as speakers. **Pay attention** to the diversity of invited speakers.
- **Ensure the safety of human rights defenders and address their safety-related wishes** in the arrangements and communication of in-person and virtual meetings and events.
- **Release information** about meetings and events involving human rights defenders as agreed with them.
- **Help** human rights defenders gain access to safe spaces.
- **Monitor** trials of human rights defenders, to the extent possible, and request information about or visits with imprisoned or detained human rights defenders. **Note** any strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) and how they can be intervened in.
- **Inform** human rights defenders about their rights and the tools available to them.

Photo 5. Participation in Pride events by the personnel of diplomatic missions is an effective way of supporting the work of human rights defenders advocating for LGBTI rights. © Kosti Keistinen/Prime Minister's Office.



In mission's activities

- **Address human rights and human rights defenders** in bilateral dialogue with the host state's authorities at different levels, delivering consistent and coordinated messages.
- **Include meetings with human rights defenders** in itineraries, including high-level meetings.
- **Cooperate and actively participate** in human rights activities (such as statements and demarches concerning the human rights situation and human rights defenders in the country) with EU Member States, Nordic countries and other like-minded countries. If there is no coordination group in the host state focused on human rights questions, be active in establishing one.
- **Cooperate with local NGOs and with Finnish and international NGOs promoting and supporting human rights advocacy in the country**, for example by supporting organisation of trainings, capacity building and safety risks assessments.
- **Support opportunities of civil society**, including representatives of human rights organisations, to participate and advocate in international and regional intergovernmental organisations.
- **Engage** civil society's representatives in projects managed by the mission and ensure that their situation and rights are adequately addressed in them.
- **Cooperate** with national coalitions of human rights defenders and independent national human rights institutions.
- **Cooperate and exchange information in human rights questions with the UN** and its agencies and country offices as well as with other international and regional organisations.
- **Cooperate with educational institutions**, for example to organise human rights training for students.
- **Participate in missions and visits and collect information** about the situation of civil society and human rights defenders, meet with human rights defenders during such trips.
- **Use Local Cooperation Funds (LCF)** to support the work of human rights defenders in countries where the LCF instrument is available.
- **Take part** in granting human rights awards and in communicating about them.
- **Participate in human rights events**, such as the celebration of the Human Rights Day (10 December), Pride parade and displaying a rainbow flag.
- **CO-organise human rights events**, such as side events at international summits and meetings.

In the Foreign Service

- **Ensure effective and timely communication** between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic mission in issues concerning human rights defenders.
- **Collaborate effectively** with the regional department, the Unit for Human Rights Policy, Department for Development Policy, Consular Services and diplomatic missions, as well as other relevant parties if a human rights defender is at risk.
- **Arrange video conferences and virtual meetings** between the diplomatic mission and the Ministry, together with human rights defenders, to discuss current issues.
- **Report** on the situation of human rights defenders and their operating environment as well the support provided to them, as a part of the missions' political and human rights reporting, using the indicators provided in these guidelines (see Appendix 2).

In communication

- **Publish web content related to human rights and human rights defenders** accessibly and, if possible, in the local language.
- **Ensure** the availability and accessibility of materials and events (for example, as appropriate, by offering interpretation into minority languages and sign language, as well as ensuring and proactively communicating that the event is accessible).
- **Indicate the human rights contact person on the diplomatic mission's website** (in countries where this is impossible, contact can be made through the diplomatic mission's general contact details).
- **On the mission's website, publish** a link to national and EU guidelines on supporting human rights defenders – in local languages, where possible.
- **Actively use various communication channels and social media** (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) to reach different target groups.
- **Communicate** through the media, such as newspaper articles and radio programmes.
- **Acknowledge** the International Human Rights Day (10 December) and other theme days.

With the private sector

- **Ensure regular information exchange** about the human rights situation in the country/region among Team Finland actors (diplomatic mission, Business Finland, Chamber of Commerce/trade association, companies).
- **In export promotion**, pay attention to human rights-related problems and risks and point them out to the relevant parties. Pay special attention to the risks in challenging operating environments (conflicts, authoritarian government).
- **Actively disseminate information** about the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and highlight their recommendation to consult human rights defenders as part of corporate due diligence processes.
- **Support** companies in surveying stakeholders (including human rights defenders) and creating contacts between companies and local human rights defenders for the purpose of consultation.
- **Encourage host states** to develop national action plans on businesses and human rights, paying attention to human rights defenders.

Appendix 1. Questions for diplomatic missions for monitoring and reporting

- Which themes and topics are of key importance to human rights defenders in the country?
- Who are the human rights defenders in the country (organisations and individuals)? Are they in a vulnerable situation or do they belong to discriminated groups? What are the issues they are working with? Are they part of a national or international network of human rights defenders?
- What are the conditions and general atmosphere in the country with respect to human rights advocacy (referring for example to any restrictive legislation, operating models and practices)?
- How common is dialogue between the authorities, human rights defenders and civil society? Do the authorities facilitate the participation of civil society in public discourse and open debates?
- What measures do the state authorities implement to protect human rights defenders? Are human rights defenders protected by law? Is such legislation effectively implemented? Are national human rights defender mechanisms accessible, functional and effective? Do the authorities comply with the decisions of regional or national protection mechanisms? Does the state comply with its international obligations and commitments?
- Are there legal restrictions to the independence, freedom of assembly and of association as well as freedom of expression and opinion of human rights defenders?
- What are the concrete challenges faced by human rights defenders, such as insufficient financial resources, technical skills (e.g. digital security) or access to information (e.g. the legal and institutional protections and guarantees of human rights defenders and the latest human rights developments in the country concerned and internationally)?
- Are human rights defenders at risk of detention and legal proceedings, threats, enforced disappearance and killings or extrajudicial executions because of their work? How do human rights organisations, the international community and Finland react to these?
- What degree of capacity and willingness do the authorities have to investigate violations against human rights defenders (including the prevalence of impunity)?
- What is the status of the country's legislation on corporate human rights responsibility and does it address human rights defenders?
- To what extent do UN country offices, other international and regional intergovernmental organisations and other diplomatic missions work to promote the protection of human rights defenders in the country? Do these parties address the country's human rights situation? Why and how frequently?

Appendix 2. Indicators for monitoring and reporting on support for human rights defenders:

- Support for human rights defenders (amount and description)
- Meetings with human rights defenders (number and description)
- Organisation of meetings and events related to human rights defenders, helping to make their voices heard in different forums and in public, participating in events organized by them (number and description)
- Meetings with human rights defenders included in itineraries (number and description)
- The situation of human rights defenders addressed in public, speeches related to human rights defenders (number and description)
- Observation of trials of human rights defenders (number and description)
- Participation in statements of the EU and/or like-minded countries (number and description)
- Projects supporting human rights defenders (number, resources and description)
- Effectiveness of Finland's support (e.g. Finland's support has enabled human rights defenders to influence local policy processes; Finland's support has enabled human rights defenders to influence local legislation to improve freedom of expression and assembly)
- Support for individual human rights defenders in acute situations (number and description)
- Recommendations related to human rights defenders made in the UPR process, in consultation with human rights defenders (yes/no and description)
- Human rights defenders addressed in the Head of Mission's strategic plan (yes/no)
- Human rights defenders included in the mission's work, finance, resource and Team Finland planning (yes/no)
- Ambition, strategic nature and consistency of support: e.g. consistently addressing the situation of a human rights defender at risk at different levels and in different contexts as well as publicly communicating about it, providing long-term support where required, reacting to feedback from human rights defenders

Reports on these indicators should ideally also describe if the support has targeted human rights defenders defined as priority groups for Finland (women, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, Indigenous Peoples).

Appendix 3 Examples of potential partners and information sources:

Cooperation partners:

- Local human rights defenders and human rights organisations, as well as organisations representing specific groups and their rights (e.g. organisations of persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ organisations, organisations of Indigenous Peoples)
- Local trade unions
- National and regional networks of human rights defenders
- Independent national human rights institutions
- UN offices and organisations, particularly the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN special advisers and special rapporteurs on issues related to human rights
- Regional and international human rights organisations
- Diplomatic missions of like-minded countries, EU delegation
- National public institutions (government ministries, legal ombudsmen, special advisers, committees), national research institutes and universities
- Finnish non-governmental organisations and foundations promoting and supporting human rights advocacy

Information sources:

- UN reports and recommendations, particularly materials produced by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
- Materials related to the UPR process under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, including the country's own reporting recommendations by Finland and other countries, and UN reports
- Information on the websites of international and regional organisations concerning human rights defenders
- Reports and recommendations produced by regional mechanisms
- Reports, bulletins, newsletters and mailing lists of national, regional and international human rights organisations
- Global and regional networks of independent national human rights institutions (GANHRI etc.)
- Remarks and initiatives by the authorities in national and international fora
- Human rights reporting in local and international media

Useful links:

European Union

[European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders](#)

(https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/02_hr_guidelines_defenders_en_0.pdf)

[EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline](#)

(https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/09_hr_guidelines_expression_en.pdf)

[EU Guidelines to Promote and Protect the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex \(LGBTI\) Persons](#) (https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/07_hr_guidelines_lgbti_en.pdf)

[EU Guidelines on EU Policy Towards Third Countries on Torture and other Cruel,](#)

[Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/05_hr_guidelines_punishment_en.pdf)

[EU Guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls and Combating All Forms of Discrimination Against Them](#)

(https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/03_hr_guidelines_discrimination_en_0.pdf)

[EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues with Partner/Third countries](#)

(https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/human_rights_dialogue_guidelines_0.pdf)

[Protect Defenders – the EU Human Rights Protection Mechanism](#)

(<https://protectdefenders.eu/>)

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe OSCE

[OSCE/ODIHR Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#) (<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/1/119633.pdf>)

Council of Europe

[Council of Europe procedure on human rights defenders](#) (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/procedure-human-rights-defenders>)

[Website of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights concerning human](#)

[rights defenders](#) (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/human-rights-defenders>)

Council of Europe platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists (<https://fom.coe.int/accueil>)

Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)14 on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on Council of Europe action to improve the protection of human rights defenders and promote their activities, adopted on 6 February 2008 (https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d3e52)

Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making, adopted on 27 September 2017 (<https://rm.coe.int/guidelines-for-civil-participation-in-political-decision-making-en/16807626cf>)

Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe (https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=09000016808fd8b9)

Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE): Protecting human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States, Resolution 2225 (2018) (<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/24932/html>)

Decision of the Committee of Ministers on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe, adopted on 17 May 2019 (CM/Del/Dec(2019)129/2) (https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=090000168094787f)

United Nations

UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Translation.aspx>)

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the guidelines and other materials available on the Special Rapporteur's website (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/SRHRDefendersIndex.aspx>)

Guidelines of UN treaty bodies concerning cooperation protecting human rights defenders (<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/Reprisal.aspx>)

UNESCO human rights procedure for complaints concerning alleged human rights violations falling under UNESCO's competence (e.g. journalists, teachers, students and authors) (<https://en.unesco.org/about-us/procedure104>)

International Non-governmental Organisations

Access Now, digital security helpline: (<https://www.accessnow.org/help/>)

Child Rights Connect: (<https://childrightsconnect.org/>)

Front Line Defenders: (<http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/>)

Indigenous Work Group for Indigenous Affairs: (<https://iwgia.org/en/>)

International Commission of Jurists: (<http://www.icj.org>)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH): (<http://www.fidh.org/en/>)

International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA): (<http://ilga.org/>)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR): (<http://ishr.ch>)

ISHR guidelines for missions: (<https://ishr.ch/defenders-toolbox/resources/strengthening-diplomatic-initiatives-for-the-protection-of-human-rights-defenders-2/>)

Minority Rights Group: (<http://www.minorityrights.org/>)

Reporters Without Borders: (<http://rsf.org/en>)

World Organisation Against Torture: (<http://www.omct.org>)

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- 4 Human rights defenders are facing increasing intimidation – how should Finland's support for human rights defenders be developed? Susan Villa, 2017, Ministry for Foreign Affairs. [The report is available on the Foreign Ministry's website](https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/UM_lhmisoikeuspuolustajat_EN.pdf/dee453a1-73e4-3bfa-5c4f-6ebcc16d0668?t=1528805051857) (https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/UM_lhmisoikeuspuolustajat_EN.pdf/dee453a1-73e4-3bfa-5c4f-6ebcc16d0668?t=1528805051857).
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- 6 Incl. EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline; Guidelines to Promote and Protect the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Persons; EU Guidelines on Torture and Other Cruel Treatment; EU Guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls; EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues with non-EU Countries.
- 7 [Read more about human rights instruments on the website of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs](https://um.fi/human-rights-conventions-and-reporting) (<https://um.fi/human-rights-conventions-and-reporting>).

- 8 Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. A/RES/53/144, March 1999. [The Declaration is available on the website of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf\)](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf).
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- 23 The recommendations and proposed measures for Finnish diplomatic missions discussed in these guidelines also apply to side accreditation states.
- 24 [Read more about the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism on the Protect Defenders website maintained by the EU](https://protectdefenders.eu/) (<https://protectdefenders.eu/>).
- 25 [Read more about the fund on the Lifeline website](https://www.csolifeline.org/) (<https://www.csolifeline.org/>).
- 26 [Read more about Front Line Defenders' emergency contact services on the organisation's website](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/emergency-contact) (<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/emergency-contact>).
- 27 [Read more about OMCT's support service for victims of torture on OMCT's website](https://www.omct.org/en/what-we-do/victim-support) (<https://www.omct.org/en/what-we-do/victim-support>).

- 28 Read more about the digital security helpline on the website of Access Now (<https://www.accessnow.org/help/>).
- 29 Read more about the Council of Europe's support platform for journalists on the Council's website (<https://fom.coe.int/accueil>).
- 30 Within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, coordination efforts can involve the diplomatic mission, regional department, the Political Department, Legal Service, Consular Services and the offices of ministers, depending on the case. Cooperation between administrative branches usually involves the Ministry of the Interior, Finnish Immigration Service and, in some cases the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.
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39 [Read more about the Secretary General's procedure on the Council of Europe's website](https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/procedure-human-rights-defenders) (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/procedure-human-rights-defenders>).

40 [Read more about the San José Guidelines on the UN website](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=HRI/MC/2015/6&Lang=en) (https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=HRI/MC/2015/6&Lang=en).

41 For example, the virtual panel discussion on the work of human rights defenders organised in April 2021 in cooperation with Amnesty International Finland and the KIOS Foundation. [Read more about Finland's support for the work of human rights defenders on the website of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs](https://um.fi/current-affairs/-/asset_publisher/gc654PySnjTX/content/suomi-tukee-ihmisoikeuspuolustajien-ty%25C3%25B6t%25C3%25A4) (https://um.fi/current-affairs/-/asset_publisher/gc654PySnjTX/content/suomi-tukee-ihmisoikeuspuolustajien-ty%25C3%25B6t%25C3%25A4).

42 Support for human rights defenders is regularly addressed in the Foreign Ministry's Training for Newly Recruited Diplomats (Kavaku), for example.

43 This chapter lists different measures that missions can use in their work to support human rights defenders. Adaptation of these measures should take into account the local conditions in the host state and the mission's resources. Many of these recommendations can be used also in the broader context within the Foreign Service.



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