

**PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL
30TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE
19 OCTOBER 2011**

GENEVA, CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE CONFÉRENCE GENÈVE CICG



PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

**«PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS –
HOW CAN INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS CONTRIBUTE
TO THEIR PROTECTION?»**

Simultaneous translation in English and Spanish

Background, Goal and Content of the Conference

This conference will bring together Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), civil society organisations working to protect HRDs, policy makers, government human rights specialists and UN staff to share the different ways in which they can improve the prevention of attacks against and protection for HRDs. It is one of three complementary conferences organised by PBI Switzerland, PBI Germany, and PBI Catalonia to mark PBI's 30th anniversary. The recommendations these conferences produce will be consolidated into a single document which, we hope, will contribute to improving the effectiveness of prevention and protection mechanisms for HRDs.

HRDs play an important role in society and politics promoting and defending the fundamental rights enshrined in the United Nations Charter and other instruments and mechanisms that together make up the body of international and, increasingly, domestic law. HRDs contribute significantly to processes of change by promoting and defending human rights and advocating for social justice. The reevaluation of past and recent human rights violations and the call for an end to impunity are examples of the impact of their work. Nevertheless, the daily threats they face reduce their room for action. Protection for HRDs is therefore integral to the development of peaceful societies.

The importance of protecting HRDs is internationally recognised. Examples of this are the 1998 UN declaration on human rights defenders and the 2004 EU guidelines (updated in 2008), the UN Rapporteurship on HRDs and the recently created OAS Special Rapporteur on HRDs. These developments have been accompanied by a growing understanding of population groups who have a right to protection, such as defenders of economic, social and cultural rights, women HRDs and those who defend and promote LGBTI rights.

Despite these efforts, in many countries there has been no discernible improvement in the circumstances in which HRDs develop their work. This brings into question the efficiency and sustainability of existing mechanisms and highlights the importance of continued efforts to develop processes and instruments to protect the working environment of HRDs and to combat the threats they face.

HRDs operate in diverse political, cultural and socio-economic contexts. The absence of official constitutional structures and deeply rooted cultures of impunity often impede access to justice and adequate legal representation for the victims of human rights violations. Under such circumstances HRDs are frequently the targets of threats and attacks, and influential elites are increasingly implementing new strategies involving the criminalisation and defamation of HRDs.

Over recent years HRDs, activists and the international community have been actively engaged in reviewing existing human rights mechanisms. These initiatives include the

ongoing review of the Human Rights Council and the UN Special Mechanisms. There is a growing consensus that there is a disturbing gap between the recommendations made to states and their effects on the ground; there is also increasing concern at the reprisals to which HRDs who cooperate with international human rights bodies are frequently subjected.

These developments, along with the increasing visibility and importance of international protection mechanisms for HRDs, form the background to this one-day conference. What improvements have activists and representatives from Switzerland, PBI project countries, the UN, and NGOs seen over the last 30 years? How can we work together to improve international protection mechanisms for HRDs in the various contexts where they work?

The main instrument that Peace Brigades International has successfully implemented in many different countries during its 30 years of existence is protective accompaniment provided by international volunteers backed up by an international network of supporters and allies and systematic advocacy activities. This conference, which coincides with our 30th anniversary, offers an important opportunity to discuss the concept of protective accompaniment and other protection mechanisms and to evaluate whether threats emanating from state and non-state actors can be effectively deterred. We hope the debates and discussions - and especially the outcomes - of this conference will contribute to improving the protection for HRDs.

Goal:

Analyse the effectiveness of existing prevention and protection measures for HRDs and recommend ways to improve them:

- Analyze current challenges and future trends
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing protection measures
- Propose improved and more appropriate strategies

Outputs:

- Conference report including recommendations to improve the actions of policy makers and organisations working to protect HRDs
- Networking among HRDs, civil society organisations working to protect HRDs, policy makers, government human rights specialists and UN staff
- Improved awareness of the needs of HRDs working in particularly hostile environments
- Encouragement of South-South networking
- More effective and efficient prevention and protection for HRDs

Target group:

The main targets of the conference are human rights specialists from civil society, governments and the UN, but the event is also open to interested members of the public and to participants in PBI's triennial General Assembly, which is taking place in Switzerland in the same week.

Core issues:

- What is the best way to monitor the prevention and protection needs of HRDs, especially in relation to a) the complex environments they work in, and b) existing and emerging threats and attacks, including those emanating from non-state actors?
- What lessons may be learned from the experiences of HRDs and activists that can be transformed into new and viable ways of improving protection for HRDs nationally or regionally and internationally?
- What new threats do HRDs face when carrying out their work? What mechanisms

might contribute to the reduction of existing and emerging risks? How might protection measures be optimised?

- How effective are international standards for the protection of HRDs? What opportunities do they offer? How successful are they? How might they be improved? What is the role of the international community?

Additionally:

- Photographic exhibition
- Presentation panels
- Film presentations

Conference schedule:

Time		Guests/Moderation
9.00-9.15	Welcome note Introduction, administration	
9.15-9.30	Keynote Address I: HRD	Mandira Sharma
9.35-9.50	Keynote Address II: representative UNO	Hina Jilani
9.55-10.10	Keynote Address III: representative FDFA	Ambassador Claude Wild
10.15-10.45	Coffee break	
10.45-11.00	Keynote Address IV: representative INGO	Mary Lawlor
11.00-11.15	Keynote Address V: representative PBI	Liam Mahony
11.15-12.15	Plenary Session Panel 1: Perspectives on the development of protection mechanisms for HRDs in various countries/regions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ How can the working environment of HRDs be improved? What is the nature of existing threats and attacks and what are the emerging trends? □ How effective has international and national support for HRDs been and how might it be improved)? □ Which protection measures have actually proved effective? What lessons can be learned?? 	Keynote Speakers Moderation: Manon Schick, AI Switzerland
12.15-13.30	Lunch	
13.30-15.30	Workshops: Threats, Prevention and Protection 5 Speakers per workshop; workshops have 3 parts: 1) 30 Min. Introduction of speakers 2) 30 Min. Discussion among speakers 3) 60 Min. Discussion between speakers and audience	
I.	<u>Implementation of and follow-up to reports and recommendations for prevention and protection for HRDs</u> The various prevention and protection mechanisms for human rights and HRDs produce a range of reports and recommendations on ways to improve the protection of	Roland Chauville, UPR-Info Hina Jilani, former Special Rapporteur on HRDs

	<p>human rights and HRDs. Frequently, governments argue that these recommendations are not realistic and do not take into account the challenges they face. Other recommendations are implemented but their positive effects are doubtful. For example, recommendations may be integrated into national legislation or new bodies are created but budgetary constraints or a lack of political will mean they are not effective.</p> <p>There is a serious problem of reprisals committed against HRDs who have cooperated with UN and other bodies that make protection recommendations</p> <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations on improving prevention and protection recommendations and mechanisms • Recommendations on ensuring implementation and systematic follow-up to international protection mechanisms and recommendations. 	<p>Mary Lawlor, Front Line</p> <p>Mandira Sharma, AF Nepal</p> <p>PBI representative</p>
<p>II.</p>	<p><u><i>Human rights defenders and disadvantaged population groups in remote and rural areas</i></u></p> <p>The work of grass root organisations in remote areas and with disadvantaged sectors of the population faces specific challenges and requires special attention. These HRDs often need special protection, because protection measures for HRDs may not take into account the particular difficulties faced by HRDs in remote areas, such as autonomous local power structures, powerful non-state actors, weak state institutions, a lack of international presence, vulnerable civil society organisations, lack of information, etc.</p> <p>Especially vulnerable groups are: HRDs in remote rural areas, women’s organisations, ethnic minorities, indigenous communities and organisations advocating for the protection of natural resources and ancestral territories and the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights in general.</p> <p>Non-state actors including illegal armed groups and companies operating in the energy, agro-industrial and extractive sectors are frequently associated with threats and attacks on HRDs in these regions.</p> <p><i>Outcome</i></p> <p>This workshop aims to emphasise the need for protection of HRDs in remote and rural areas and to make recommendations on how international protection mechanisms could be made more effective.</p>	<p>Michael Ineichen, ISHR</p> <p>Anders Kompass, Director of HR Operations OHCHR</p> <p>Walter Kälin, UN Special Representative on the HR of IDPs</p> <p>Danilo Rueda, CIJP Colombia</p> <p>PBI representative</p>
<p>III.</p>	<p><u><i>Swiss involvement in international protective mechanisms for HRDs</i></u></p> <p>In contrast to the EU and other non-EU states such as</p>	<p>Ursula Keller, project director at the Swiss Center for Peacebuilding KOFF</p>

	<p>Norway, Switzerland does not have any guidelines for the protection of HRDs. It is currently developing such guidelines but there are no plans to make them public. How might Switzerland contribute to the application of international recommendations and law concerning regional protective mechanisms (e.g. by working with the EU to support the implementation of the HRD Guidelines or with the Inter-American Human Rights System).</p> <p><i>Outcome</i> Make recommendations for improving Switzerland's contribution to prevention and protection for HRDs.</p>	<p>Padre Francisco Wilfrido Mayrén Peláez, Mexico</p> <p>Eric Sottas, former Secretary-general of OMCT</p> <p>Ambassador Claude Wild, Head of Political Division IV of the Swiss FDFA</p> <p>PBI representative</p>
15.30-16.00	Coffee break	
16.00-16.45	Plenary Session: presentation and discussion of workshops results	<p>Workshop leaders</p> <p>Moderation</p>
16.45-17.30	Plenary Session: conclusion and agreement on recommendations	<p>Workshops representatives</p> <p>Moderation</p>
17.30-17.45	Summary, thank you and farewell note	PBI
17.45-18.30	Cocktails	