

Input to UN Secretary-General's report (General Assembly resolution 72/247) on the 20th anniversary and promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

- Women human rights defenders are activists who work tirelessly to uphold, promote and secure the human rights of women and girls and in doing so are the frontrunners in the movement for gender equality. The progress we have seen in achieving gender equality could not have been achieved without the contributions of the women's movement and women human rights defenders.
- A safe and enabling environment that supports the work of women human rights defenders is crucial to achieving gender equality. States have an obligation to protect women human rights defenders and ensure a safe and enabling environment for their work. On 27 November 2013, the General Assembly adopted by consensus a landmark resolution on women human rights defenders (resolution A/RES/68/181). This was the first time that a resolution was dedicated to women human rights defenders. The resolution recognizes the work of women human rights defenders, the threats and challenges that they are facing and calls on States to take measures to prevent discrimination and violence against women human rights defenders and to ensure that they can exercise their human rights work freely. Prior resolutions on human rights defenders in the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have also referred to women human rights defenders, such as GA resolution A/RES/66/164 (December 2011) and Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/22/6 (April 2013).
- UN Women deeply values the work of women human rights defenders and is strongly committed to support women human rights defenders in line with our mandate to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women considers women human rights defenders to be close and strategic partners in all regions.
- Rooted in the universal mandate of the SDGs and UN Women, the organization continues to serve as a global convener to develop new and inclusive strategies of engagement, especially in light of shrinking spaces for civil society and women's rights activism in countries.
- In this context, UN Women is engaging with civil society to develop a strategy to support women human rights defenders who have seen a concerted pushback in many spaces, including through intimidation and violence. The development of this strategy - to be rolled out in the fourth quarter of 2018 – will include a set of recommendations to support and promote the work of women human rights defenders.
- UN Women includes women human rights defenders on its country and regional Civil Society Advisory Groups - an institutional mechanism of regular dialogue and engagement with civil society, as well as two members in the Executive Director's Civil

Society Advisory Group (EDCSAG). The EDCSAG has also provided guidance to the development of UN Women's strategy of support for women human rights defenders.

- In Latin America, UN Women, together with the University of Los Andes, University of Berkeley, Oxfam, Diakonia and others, is supporting the Center for Justice and International Law - CEJIL to develop a protocol of standards for the investigation of cases of threats and violence against human rights defenders, journalists and justice officials with a specific emphasis on women human rights defenders. This instrument, titled "*Protocolo de La Esperanza*", is framed as a soft law document that will establish guidelines based on international and regional legal norms on the investigation of threats against human rights defenders.
- UN Women facilitates advocacy efforts and capacity building for women human rights defenders in a number of countries, including Cambodia, Georgia, Congo, Jordan, Guatemala, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Tajikistan and others.
 - In Georgia, UN Women supported the development of a training manual for human rights defenders, while in Cambodia UN Women helped to establish a Cambodian Young Women's Leadership Network to inspire emerging female leaders and advocates, including women living with HIV. UN Women has also been using its convening role to create spaces for dialogue between civil society and the government, including civil society review and inputs on the draft CEDAW report and national dialogues on the strategy to promote women's leadership in the civil service.
 - In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan and Tajikistan, gender equality advocates were supported by UN Women in their efforts to advocate for gender-sensitive law reforms in the areas of political participation and labor.
 - In Jordan, UN Women and UN Volunteers worked with young women's rights advocates and trained 48 young persons on human rights and gender equality issues, including CEDAW. After the training, these young persons conducted a field assessment to identify the human rights issues faced by women in that country.
 - UN Women supported the Rural Women's Movement in South Africa in advocacy against discriminatory practices and policies that have a negative impact on rural women's rights and their livelihoods.
 - In Zimbabwe, UN Women supported advocacy meetings between gender equality advocates and community level policy makers, including traditional leaders, focused on advocating for enhanced access to natural resources by rural women belonging to minority groups.
 - In Guatemala, UN Women supported the Mesoamerican Alliance for the Access of Women to Justice, consisting of women human rights defenders from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to meet with officials of the Ministerio Público de Guatemala to discuss the implementation of the regional observatory on progress of justice, the application of gender-sensitive research protocols and measures contributing to the prosecution of perpetrators of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations.
 - UN Women trained 33 human rights defenders and supported them with equipment and ongoing coordination in Papua New Guinea. Trainings also engaged service

providers including police (Family Sexual Violence Unit), welfare institutions, safe house operators, church groups, crisis helpline operators, hospitals (Family Support Centres) and clinics. Local networks were established to enhance accountability and facilitate access to services.

- UN Women serves as the substantive Secretariat of the Commission on the Status of Women, which in recent years has voiced its support for the work of women human rights defenders. This has been the case, for example, at the Commission's sixty-second session (March 2018), in conjunction with the Commission's outcome on its priority theme.
- In its agreed conclusions on **Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (CSW62)**, the Commission welcomed the major contributions made by civil society, including women's and community-based organizations, feminist groups, women human rights defenders, girls' and youth-led organizations and trade unions in placing the interests, needs and visions of women and girls, including those living in rural areas, on local, national, regional and international agendas, including the 2030 Agenda. It also recognized the importance of having an open, inclusive and transparent engagement with civil society in the implementation of measures to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (para 42). Related to this, the Commission urged Governments and called on other actors to support the important role of civil society actors in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms of rural women; take steps to protect them, including women human rights defenders, and to integrate a gender perspective into creating a safe and enabling environment for the defense of human rights and to prevent violations and abuses against them in rural areas, inter alia, threats, harassment and violence, in particular on issues relating to labour rights, environment, land and natural resources; and combat impunity by taking steps to ensure that violations or abuses are promptly and impartially investigated and that those responsible are held accountable.
- This commitment expanded upon the outcome at CSW61, where the Commission had already welcomed the major contributions made by civil society, including women's and community-based organizations, feminist groups, women human rights defenders and girls' and youth-led organizations, in placing the interests, needs and visions of women and girls on local, national, regional and international agendas, including the 2030 Agenda, in conjunction with that year's priority theme of women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work.