

L'OBSERVATOIRE

pour la Protection des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme

THE OBSERVATORY

for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders

EL OBSERVATORIO

para la Protección
de los Defensores de Derechos Humanos

PRESS RELEASE

ADOPTION OF EU GUIDELINES ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Paris, Geneva, Brussels – July 8, 2004 - The FIDH and OMCT, within the framework of their joint programme, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, welcome the adoption by the Council of the European Union of Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders on June 15, 2004. Recognising the role of Human Rights Defenders and supporting the principles contained in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the guidelines provide for a set of “ways and means” to “effectively work towards the promotion and protection of human rights defenders in third countries, within the context of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.”

The adoption of these Guidelines is a genuine step towards the protection of Human Rights Defenders around the world and represent a very important achievement for NGOs that have worked to establish mechanisms for their protection. The Observatory has systematically transmitted relevant information to the EU as regards the situation of Human Rights defenders at risk and regularly calls on the EU to make the issue of Human Rights Defenders and freedom of assembly an integral part of its external relations.

Since the 2000 EU Forum on human rights, the Observatory, as well as FIDH and OMCT, have been working towards the adoption of an European Union protective mechanism. The Observatory first submitted a set of recommendations to the members of the EU Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM) in March 2004. More recently, on May 12, 2004, the Observatory, along with other international NGOs involved in the protection of human rights defenders, participated in a meeting convened by the Irish Presidency in Dublin, entitled “Towards the Development of an EU Policy on Human Rights”.

The Guidelines provide for:

- an important role for EU Heads of Missions, which are to address the situation of Human Rights Defenders “in their reporting, noting in particular the occurrence of any threats or attacks against defenders” and which “should make recommendations to COHOM for possible EU actions, including condemnation of threats and attacks against human rights defenders, as well as for demarches and public statements where human rights defenders are at immediate or serious risks”.
- an important role for EU Missions in third countries (Embassies of EU Member States and European Commission Delegations), which will “maintain suitable contacts with human rights

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fidh

International Federation
For Human Rights
17, Passage de la Main d'Or
75 011 Paris, France

OMCT

World Organisation
Against Torture
Case postale 21 - 8 rue du Vieux-Billard
1211 Genève 8, Switzerland

defenders, including by receiving them in Missions, and visiting their areas of work [and] appoint specific liaison officers, where necessary on a burden sharing basis, for this purpose”;

- the inclusion, “where relevant”, of the situation of human rights defenders in “the human rights component of political dialogues between the EU and third countries and regional organisations. The EU will underline its support for human rights defenders and their work, and raise individual cases of concern whenever necessary”;
- “the strengthening of existing regional mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders”;
- efforts to ensure that human rights defenders in third countries can access resources, including financial, from abroad”.

In addition the Guidelines provide that the COHOM will “keep under review the implementation and follow-up to the Guidelines” and report to the Council of Ministers.

The Observatory wishes to express its support to the EU in its efforts to protect HRDs and offers its assistance in the implementation of these Guidelines. Our organisations believe that the Council Secretariat should identify a coordinator responsible for a permanent follow up between the COHOM sessions, guarantying a permanent coordination and an effective implementation of these Guidelines.

Finally, the Observatory regrets that the Guidelines make no reference to the granting of temporary visas to human rights defenders at grave risks or to the facilitation of asylum procedures. In this regard, the Observatory encourages EU Member States to develop and implement temporary admission programmes for human rights defenders at risk at both national and European levels.

The Observatory will ensure that the guidelines are widely distributed to Human Rights Defenders across the globe as well as to its 400 partner organisations.

For more information about the Guidelines please see the website of the Council of the European Union at <http://ue.eu.int>

The full text of the Guidelines is available at <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/GuidelinesDefenders.pdf>

For further information, please contact :

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OMCT: 0041.22.809.49.24