



## Human Rights Day

### A call to action

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## **No implementation of human rights in the universal human rights declaration without human rights defenders**

Geneva, 10 December 2018

**Geneva, December 10, 2018 - This 10<sup>th</sup> December marks a double important Anniversary, as we celebrate the 20 years since the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**

On this Day, the OMCT, the largest alliance of human rights defenders fighting against torture, and a leading human rights defenders protection organisation, invites all of us to not lower our guard and renews its commitment to human dignity and human rights.

The OMCT with a coalition of human rights organization calls for states to turn statements into action and to endorse and implement the [Action Plan](#) that was adopted by participants of the [Human Rights Defenders World Summit 2018](#), held in Paris on 29, 30, 31 October 2018. At the heart of the action plan is the recognition of human rights defenders across the world for their communities, for social justice and many other causes including the fundamental fight against torture. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, landmark and inspirational document adopted 70 years, is as valid as ever, but without human rights defenders it would risk being deprived of meaning and means.

Over these 20 years, we have seen a significant growth of international mechanisms as well as the adoption of national human rights defenders' policies in some countries. However, these past years also witnessed a very dramatic backsliding in the actual protection of defenders. There are an ever-growing number of threats, attacks, killings, detentions and defamation campaigns across all regions of the world. States, increasingly also in Europe and North America, are passive when it comes to concrete protection for defenders, and continue to engage in acts or omissions which encroach on the dignity and personal integrity of human rights defenders. This Human Rights Day reminds us that the struggle for human rights matters, maybe more than ever, and it needs more and more support to succeed. The adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders 20 years ago was a promise of recognition and protection. It still remains an unfulfilled promise.

***“In this Anniversary, to pay a tribute to all these achievements and to the work of Human Rights Defenders (HRD) we urge states to recommit to human rights and to the protection of human rights defenders”***, stressed Hina Jilani, OMCT President and first UN Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders.

This day is a call to all of us to continue our work to protect and support defenders, to reaffirm that States must fulfil their obligations under international human rights law and guarantee the right to freedom of action for human rights defenders to accomplish their work everywhere.

We often neglect that the human rights movement is more global, more diverse and more vibrant than it has ever been. We need to pay tribute to human rights defenders worldwide and what they are achieving every day: a better world with less discrimination, marginalization, torture, disappearances, less arbitrariness and more social justice, and ultimately less conflict and more peace, security and development.

**This is what some members of OMCT Executive Council and fellow human rights defenders say on this special Anniversary:**

*"We started to forget what our grandfathers were fighting for and the idea of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. I think it is still time to remember and to act [...]"* - Olga Sadosvkaya, Russia.

*"20 years after the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, this Anniversary reminds today the crucial role they play worldwide, at a time when the space for civil society organizations and defenders continues to shrink through various legislative manoeuvres and various forms of repression, especially in the Arab world. Those men and women, in Yemen, in Saudi Arabia, or in Egypt, are threatened, sentenced, sometimes even forced into exile, for defending tirelessly rights and freedoms, particularly in the context of the fight against terrorism or under the pretext of it "* - Mokhtar Trifi, Vice-President of the OMCT, Tunisia.

*"Thousands of women and men, at the risk of their lives, mobilize in a network for a common ideal: respect for human rights. Today, it is even more important than ever to celebrate this tireless work of dedicated advocates so that the oppressed do not feel lonely"* - Aminata Dieye, Senegal.

*"Human rights defenders sustain peace and democracy all over the world regardless of reprisals and stigmatisation they face. The work of our forefathers and foremothers sustain our dream for a world where human rights are a reality, not an aspiration. As we celebrate achievements of the past 20 years, we can only hope that Generations to come will be able to continue the struggle for freedom, democracy, difference, diversity, development, respect for the Mother Nature and above all peace in a safer environment"* - Claudia Samayoa, Guatemala.

*"We are in a world today where some States, democracies or not, favouring cronyism, have absorbed democracies and civic spaces with their abuse of power and authority. On this 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, unfortunately we have moved several steps backwards when it comes to freedoms of expression, assembly and association. Dissent is the backbone of any democracy. Yet today dissent, which is a symbol of free speech and expression, is criminalised and the dissenter jailed, killed and persecuted. Today, it is a moment to remind the work of thousands of defenders across the world and to pay tribute to thousands who have left their legacies, thoughts and inspirations behind them"* - Henri Tiphagne, India.

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**Background information**

Created in 1985, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) is the main coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGO) fighting against torture, summary executions, enforced disappearances and all other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. With more than 200 affiliated organisations in its SOS-Torture Network, OMCT aims at accompanying, reinforcing and protecting anti-torture organisations in particular in erosive environments and provides a comprehensive system of support and protection for human rights defenders around the world.