Progressing Human Rights at the UN:

Strengthening National Implementation of Multilateral Commitments

Public Webinar
Thursday, 1 September 2022
8:30am – 10:00am Eastern | 2:30pm – 4:00pm CEST

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that human rights serve as the “foundation of freedom, justice and peace” around the world.¹ In the nearly 75 years since the adoption of this watershed declaration, UN member states have made large gains in advancing human rights standards through the adoption of treaties, conventions, and thematic resolutions. But despite essential normative strides, the implementation of human rights commitments differs significantly across domestic contexts, with the potential for regression a constant threat.

Pervasive human rights issues like violence against women and girls (VAWG) and abuse of human rights defenders (HRDs) demonstrate the need for consistent and effective national action to be taken by all countries. The reality remains that one in three women around the world are subjected to physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime,² with recent studies showing online violence to be even more prevalent.³ Similarly, human rights defenders continue to face severe risks as global civic space shrinks,⁴ including arbitrary detention, online abuse, physical attacks, and killings.⁵

In a 2022 report, **Strengthening Human Rights: Translating Multilateral Commitments into Action**, the Stimson Center examines how member states can further bridge the gap between human rights commitments made at the United Nations and subsequent domestic implementation. Using a country case study approach,⁶ the report identifies common obstacles and opportunities for progress in ending VAWG and protecting HRDs, shining a light on where follow-up action by member states could be most impactful. Potential areas include framing of human rights, regional mechanisms, government capacity

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⁵ Between 2015 and 2019, no less than 1,323 defenders were reported killed in 64 different countries. United Nations General Assembly, *Final warning: death threats and killings of human rights defenders*, UN Doc A/HRC/46/35, 24 December 2020, p. 3 and 5.
⁶ This report examines the approach of six member states from different regions in tackling VAWG and the abuse of HRDs. They are as listed: Canada, Colombia, Liberia, Malaysia, Norway, and the United Kingdom.
and funding, data and transparency, civil society engagement, justice and accountability, intragovernmental communication, and gender-responsive policies. Through a complementary toolkit, Stimson also offers practical strategies and ideas for how governments, permanent missions to the UN, and civil society organizations can support the translation of human rights commitments into action.

To examine these issues further, the Republic of Liberia, the United Kingdom, UN Women, and the Stimson Center will co-host a public webinar on Thursday, 1 September 2022 from 8:30am to 10:00am Eastern. The event will address how action undertaken at the UN in New York and Geneva can better motivate and support member state efforts to eliminate VAWG and protect HRDs in domestic contexts. The webinar will also offer an opportunity for member states and civil society experts from around the world to exchange views on how they can enhance collaboration to tackle human rights issues, both in-country and at the UN.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

Development of human rights commitments

- How can member states strengthen their engagement on human rights issues at the UN?
- How can thematic resolutions in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly’s Third Committee better prompt implementation by member states?

Implementation of human rights commitments

- What should governments prioritize in their approach to human rights?
- How can governments create or reform laws, policies, and initiatives that further align domestic and regional institutions with multilateral commitments?

Civil society engagement

- How can civil society be called upon to help advise the development of human rights commitments, as well as to support their timely implementation?
- What actions can civil society undertake to hold member states accountable to their commitments?

Further Information

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