

Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders to the Human Rights Council on the positive change achieved by human rights defenders

Response from the child advisors of Child Rights Connect's global Children's Advisory Team

This is a combined submission of inputs from 7 current and previous members of Child Rights Connect's global [Children's Advisory Team](#). The Team is formed of 12 child advisors from across all regions, who are child human rights defenders (CHRDs) and are being empowered to take forward their own human rights initiatives at the local and national level and to engage in advocacy activities with Child Rights Connect at the international level. Such activities have ranged from developing [a child-friendly Guide](#) on the Rights of Child Human Rights Defenders, undertaking advocacy for the United Nations to better mainstream child rights, or building a [process for children](#) across the world to inform the upcoming UN Secretary General's Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming. The Children's Advisory Team is the only platform for CHRDs to undertake advocacy at the United Nations level.

Since setting up the Children's Advisory Team in 2018, we have seen multiple examples where child advisors have acted as child human rights defenders to generate positive impact at the local, national and international level. The [first examples](#) were included in the outcome report of the 2018 Day of General Discussion of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. As the child advisors and broader groups of [CHRDs have told us](#), "The impact may be big or small but we all fight for what we believe in."

A clear example of positive impact achieved by the Children's Advisory Team is the decision by the UN Secretary General to develop a [UN Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming](#). Together with the advocacy from the Child Rights Connect network, the Children's Advisory Team undertook a series of activities calling on the UN to better respond to the unprecedented and increasing mobilization of children globally who are acting as human rights defenders and claiming more space and attention to their rights and views. They developed material for social media and co-organised an [event during the UN General Assembly](#) to raise awareness about the urgent need for the UN system to ensure the application of a child rights approach in all its work and support the actions of child human rights defenders.

However in our activities to empower the child advisors and CHRDs globally, we continue to face an environment where CHRDs are [not recognised as human rights defenders](#) and as a result, cannot access the same rights as adult defenders nor the special set of rights they should be afforded through the UNCRC due to their age and specific vulnerabilities. Where CHRDs face risks and reprisals due to their actions, protection mechanisms in place at the various levels are not set up for children; they are not child-friendly, they are not proactive and equipped for supporting children to understand that their rights as defenders are being breached and to report such violations, and there are no child-friendly systems in place once they have reported a rights violation.

We call on the Special Rapporteur to ensure that this upcoming report on the positive change achieved by human rights defenders has a clear focus on CHRDs and highlights their positive impacts, the risks that they face and their recommendations on how the report can help to call for stronger recognition, empowerment and protection of CHRDs globally. Next year will be Child Rights Connect's 40th anniversary and to mark this occasion, a project will be initiated on countering anti-child rights movements across the world and changing the narrative around the role and impact of child human rights defenders in achieving positive societal change. This upcoming report of the Special Rapporteur with a strong focus on CHRDs will be actively used by our global Network in the context of this project.

Submissions of current and previous child advisors of Child Rights Connect

1) Iria, 13, (current child advisor) and Fran (Iria's peer), Croatia

"Sustainable tourism for all, let's protect our planet"

Through the project of our Children's City Council Opatija we have organized several actions of cleaning the sea and our seaside, to explore different ways of protecting our animal and plant world.

We strongly believe in advocating for Children's Rights, and 1 of our rights, protected by the UNCRC is to have a clean and healthy environment, water and food.

We have organized several workshops for adults and children in our school together with our mentors to learn more about protecting the planet, but also Children's activism.

We designed different campaigns and came up with different solutions on how to promote and implement global goals: for example, we have written several letters to big companies who destroy our seaside and asked them to come on our Children's City Council session. We have asked them to stop the plastic production and start using bio materials which are healthier and easier to decompose in nature.

Also, we have organized a children's fair of exchange in which children could exchange books and toys to stop the mass production of children's unnecessary toys.

We have celebrated different dates important for protection of our species and our planet and encouraged adults to sign petitions on reducing the water consumption.

What were any risks that the CHRDs faced in speaking up about these rights?

We did not receive any negative feedback. We have informed Mayor of City of Opatija and his deputies, adults from our city in a survey and our promo stand. Adults in our city are familiar with children's participation and actively spreading out our opinions and projects.

We have written letters to big pollution companies and asked them for a meeting. We are still waiting for responses.

We had several follow-up actions for cleaning the seaside and adults joined us. We are currently implementing a project on revival of children's playgrounds as a result of joint efforts of children and adults.

We would like to encourage States and businesses to provide an environment to enable other human rights defenders to achieve successes similar to the ones we achieved.





2) Mariam, 18 (previous child advisor), Egypt

In my own country, I was part of the data collection process for the periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as part of the CRC reporting cycle. My role was to create question prompts to ask a diverse group of children that were brought in to share their experiences so that they could be added to the report. The question prompts covered health, education, family life as well as specific questions for each group of children. Because of this work, vulnerable groups including homeless children, children with disabilities, child labour workers, children in school (both public and private schools) took part in the data collection process that would not have otherwise, giving the UN a more complete knowledge and understanding of the situation of children in the country.

Also, I was the child representative in the launch meeting: 'How to Advance Children's Rights with Children.' where I was given the opportunity to talk about the importance of child participation in decision making and how that highlights the need for child-friendly material. With Child Rights Connect children's advisory team, we worked on drafting child friendly versions of reports such as the

report on CHRD's rights that children have told the Team has been very helpful in understanding their rights as defenders.

Luckily I have not come across any problems yet. However, I am aware of the risks that come with bringing about this change. We have also had to take precautions as children to make sure that we can be safe in our activities. For example, using pseudonyms and only using our first names. We also need to take a look at the different risks before we act so that we can try to avoid any risks that often come about because we are children.

Raise awareness on children's rights, encourage and empower children to defend their rights, educate children about the things that they can do both locally and on a larger scale to bring about a change and provide a safe, secure environment where children can do this without feeling threatened and finally including children in the decision-making process, especially for things that will greatly affect them (such as the climate change crisis)

3) Sameer, 16 (current child advisor), Trinidad and Tobago

1) While the change effected cannot be accurately measured, I was involved in the creation of several youtube videos focused on spreading awareness regarding children's rights. In addition, posters and other materials were distributed at several schools nationwide, containing information regarding knowing one's rights as a child.

2) The spreading of information was achieved using online means such as the internet and social media, which allowed me to reach a larger number of people. By spreading information regarding children's rights, misconceptions are cleared up, and adults become aware of how to respect the rights of the child, and the children themselves become familiar with their rights, and will therefore be able to recognize and report child rights violations

3) During this process, I was subject to no risk.

4) I was supported by the Gender and Child Affairs division of the Trinidad and Tobago Office of the Prime Minister, which is a government organization. This assistance was in the form of providing information regarding the rights of the child.

5) I think that focus should continue to be placed on promoting child participation, as through involving children, it becomes easier to spread awareness and information to other young people, especially since the internet can be used as a tool to reach a large number of people.

4) Jorge, 18 (current child advisor), Bolivia

1. In accordance with the sustainable development model, what I was able to do in my management in the Committee on the Rights of the Child of my municipality was the dissemination of information, given the scarce means available during the pandemic.

2. Through social networks and virtual media, for the aforementioned topic. The impact is difficult to measure, but awareness of the problem has reached different areas. A direct impact was the proposals that we made as a committee for the 2021 poa (poa = annual operating plan).

3. There is a silent repression in the country. I don't dare to talk much about politics, but current rights defenders are conditioned by certain precedents of a political nature. In my management it could be appreciated a little but not in a substantial way.

4. Act2gether was one of the organizations that greatly facilitated the work.

5) Reece, 19 (previous child advisor), South Africa

1. I have worked with my friends to implement recycling initiatives in schools in my city (Cape Town, South Africa). This is a small victory as we introduced a new culture among some students and their families to recycle. This would affect children's rights by providing them a clean environment. We also made the collected recycling and plastics into early childhood development games, which contributed to the rights to education for children at the preschools we worked with.

2. We did this by using the resources around us, that being litter pollution and bins. The impact is that the children and families affected have access to recycling, which they didn't before, and can become environmental advocates in their own rights. They also benefit from the ECD games that will enhance their education, making it easier to cope in schools.

3. Yes. The areas we worked in are prone to gang violence, but this is an everyday threat to the children living there. We weren't subject to risk because of our work, rather we were at risk based on the area we were working in.

4. We receive support from our own schools, as well as the ones we were working with. They provided information on how to help, how to be safe in that area, transportation and advice. A lot of these schools were registered as NGOs.

5. I suggest they encourage community leaders or authorities to give recognition to the work of human rights defenders. This can create awareness among communities, and encourage them to see the importance of their work

They can encourage these entities to work and communicate with human rights defenders on issues that concern them. Working together is easier than competitive work, and the desired outcome will be reached quicker.

6. Miriam, 17, (current child advisor), Lebanon

1) On a national level, I personally have witnessed CHRDs excel in advocating for their rights and demanding improvements. For example, once, a group of children created a song on child rights and started performing it in malls and public spaces to spread awareness with the help of an NGO called Himaya. The public asked questions and we were able to share more information about child rights. Also, I found my own program for children entitled as The Civic Engagement Program to teach children on the importance of civic contribution and its positive impact on their well-being. I created a booklet on activities that children can do as CHRDs in their communities, and I go into schools to present the booklet and carry out activities. Children are using the booklet and telling me about their new activities to support their communities and now I am planning to reach more schools and more children with the program.

On an international level, I am a child advisor for Child Rights Connect's Children's Advisory Team. This is a great example of positive impact being made by CHRDs across the world. For example, we helped to set up a process for children to inform the UN Guidance Note on Child Rights Mainstreaming which has been very successful this year and has allowed the UN to listen directly from children on the issues affecting them and their calls for the Guidance Note. Being part of the Team, we have also shared our recommendations directly with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, during its opening session in August 2022 or during Child Rights Connect's General Assembly in June 2022. The Committee is now considering some of our suggestions like putting in place a Children's Advisory Team in the Committee. As child advisors, we are also working closely with our peers to review child-friendly documents which also helps more children to learn about the UN and child rights and the rights of CHRDs.

2) My Civic Engagement Program achievement was accomplished by the support of non governmental organizations that provide children with the financial and educational resources to implement such a project, through small-scale funding. I think there should be more NGOs like this that help CHRDs to create their own projects on child rights.

Child Rights Connect has helped me to become part of their Children's Advisory Team and to empower me to think of new ideas for our activities and to be part of many activities at the UN. For example, I recently took part in an event with Plan International for the International Day of the Girl which would not have been possible without them.

3) No. In my Civic Engagement Program I have not faced any risks in my activities. But, as a child advisor, I am aware of the risks that can face CHRDs worldwide. We always have to think about the risks we face when we take forward our work and to be careful in sharing our personal information, because we know that CHRDs can be targeted for speaking up. There are child advisors that have had to leave the Team because they have been targeted by oppressive authorities because of the CHR action they have taken forward in their country, even facing long jail sentences. When CHRDs do not act because they fear the risks they will face, it means that children are silenced in their views and opinions on human rights, and we cannot achieve change.

4) Yes, NGOs were mainly contributing to providing the needed protection and resources. They gave children the financial assistance they need and built them a social platform to express their thoughts freely.

5) We should start by educating them on how to ask for help and from whom. By having such knowledge they will be able to access their plans easily.

Maybe we should propose that idea more often in meetings within these states and businesses like parliaments , executive committee meetings...etc. Mentioning a child human rights defender policy within the agenda of such businesses and states will oblige them to attain its implementation.

7. Gloria, 15, (current child advisor), Cameroon

1. The socio-political context in Africa is characterized by an escalation of violence and insecurity perpetrated by terrorist groups like Boko Haram, Al Shabaab and the various affiliations of Al-Qaeda which are relatively well known both regionally and globally. These terrorist groups have been imposing over several decades a heavy toll on several African Countries over the past decades, including Cameroon. In order to address this situation, I have been appointed as project manager at Children for Peace in 2015, Children for Peace (C4P), a girl led movement aiming to increase the number of children participating in peacebuilding and public policies.

C4P mobilizes children in/from complex cultural and religious background and affected areas by war to define and implement actions plans and several local and nation-wide activities and such as (1) advocacies towards governments and local authorities for the respect of UN Convention on Child Rights, Convention against Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UNSCR 1325 and 2250; (2) creation/production of documentaries and Cartoons.

Children for Peace has been involved, participated, contributed to several global, regional projects, initiatives and events both with United Nations, Governments, local elected and civil society organizations. Children for Peace has been involved in the project "The Youths Voices of the Sahel speak!", which is the first online public debate organized by UNICEF West and Central Africa gathering young people from the 10 Sahel countries to exchange with experts and politicians around climate change. The organization has also contributed to the Adolescent Girls Listening Session with the U.S.

White House Gender Policy Council. They have been stakeholder in several nuclear nonproliferation weapons international campaigns and projects such as the Move the Nuclear Weapons Money which aimed to increase social media campaign and the Videos for the Climate, Peace and Nuclear Disarmament and the Nuclear Games which is a project including five manga stories, a 65-minute-long animated film and an interactive platform, all about the risks and human impact of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy.

Children for Peace has been Co-organizer of the project Sister Cities of Peace for Children (in collaboration with Khaneh Sarbaz Solh Iran (The House of Iran's Peace Corps)) aiming to strengthen capacities for peace for children and their parents and to promote the culture of peace in family, to enhance safety, prosperity and quality of life and negotiate with local authorities and governments to officially recognize the new name and its terms, to provide mass media for announcements, campaigns. They have contributed in the Global Appeal of Women: Human Security for public Health, peace and sustainable development and have endorsed the document.

Regarding the outbreak of COVID19, Children for Peace implemented the project Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for girls and the project Girls Voice Against COVID19. They have also contributed to the implementation of the regional project African Youth Resilience Initiatives Against COVID19 and pandemics with African Network of Young Leaders for Peace and Sustainable Development.

Others important projects implemented by Children for Peace are the project African Parliament of Girls for Peace, the project Silence the Guns and the project Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Technology for ex child soldiers (DDR-Tech). Silence the Guns is an integrated citizen engagement project led by girls, aiming to realize a conflict free Africa by engaging children and girls to mobilize all stakeholders to prioritize efforts on peace, children and girls' rights, effective socioeconomic development. It aimed to democratize and reshape local governance and conflict management, thereby unleashing grassroots approaches and innovative solutions to build peace and improve children's rights in war-affected areas. The First part of the Project was implemented in far North Cameroon from December 2019 to February 2020 before the outbreak of COVID 19. And the second part has been implemented from February to July 2022 in several areas of Cameroon, namely, the south west, the north west and the north and the far north.

The project Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Technology for ex child soldiers (DDR-Tech) is an application aiming to fight against enrolment of Children in armed groups and contributing to the restoration of security by disarming ex-children soldiers and providing them with viable socio-economic reintegration opportunities in civilian life. The software is still under development.

The project African Parliament of Girls for Peace is an official forum for girls to look at local and global problems, and come up with their own solutions. Through African Parliament of Girls for Peace, girls organized a variety of social and educational activities in their schools and communities including democracy, communication, painting, environment, health activity, health, independent observation, capacity building, mentoring, monitoring, advocacy activities and legal assistance for victims of girls/children's rights violations. The project involved teachers, parents, community members and teachers, human rights defenders who are life coaches, psychologists, leadership graduates and therapists. It focuses on protecting and helping children in a way that results in them becoming aware of their capacity to realize their wishes and goals their goals within their schools and local communities.

Children for Peace has also been involved as expert and speaker in several global events and webinars such as the United Nations Virtual Civil Society Briefing entitled "Childhood after Atrocity Crimes: Hope

for Peace, Dignity and Equality”; the International Peace Day celebration and the International Peace Day Observance; the International Conference of ‘May 18th 40th Anniversary Seoul Commission.

One of the specificities of Children for Peace is the use of cartoon-oriented approach in addressing violent extremism. The idea of activities and projects driven cartoons is justified by the concern to address language barrier which are an issue when it comes to spreading a national message of peace in Cameroon, central and west Africa (our main areas of actions) that are home to a diverse mix of cultures, languages and dialects. Thus, to reach their targets and impact communities, the girls have created frameworks where children are initiated to art work. They produce, cartoons, comic strips, drawing and painting boards inspired from stories of children who have experienced/witnessed violence. Cartoons, comic strips, drawing and painting are one of the best materials they use to engage stakeholders.

Children for Peace mobilizes children/teenagers in/from complex cultural and religious background and affected areas by war to define and implement actions plans and local and nation-wide activities/projects-based cartoons. Cartoons explain the challenges of peacebuilding, the horrors of violent extremism and early/wrought marriage on girls through the stories of boys and girls who have experienced/testified sexual violence and early/wrought marriage. They are used as a key tool in advocacy, capacity building, awareness raising activities, in our social media activities, as well as in their peacebuilding marches, campaigns and sportive activities regarding to children and girls’ rights and against violent extremism, Child soldier’s phenomenon, early marriage and gender-based violence in areas affected by conflicts. They emphasize on the role of youths, parents, governments and community leaders in our patriarchal system regarding our secular traditions and the rights of the most vulnerable.

Some impacts and results of our work can be showcased as follows:

- Over 50 000 girls trained/mentored and 5 000 000 people sensitized on thematic related to violent extremism, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, migration and human rights (focusing on children, girls and women rights, gender equality), illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and COVID 19;
- Over 5 000 girls and children have been fruitfully directly engaged in related topics through local, nation and continent-wide activities and through 80 gender-environment-peace clubs (led by girls);
- Over 50 000 girls trained/mentored and 5 000 000 people sensitized on thematic related to violent extremism, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, migration and human rights (focusing on children, girls and women rights, gender equality), illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and COVID 19;
- Over 5 000 girls and children have been fruitfully directly engaged in related topics through local, nation and continent-wide activities and through 80 gender-environment-peace clubs (led by girls);
- Over 50 000 girls trained/mentored and 5 000 000 people sensitized on thematic related to violent extremism, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, migration and human rights (focusing on children, girls and women rights, gender equality), illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and COVID 19;

- Over 5 000 girls and children have been fruitfully directly engaged in related topics through local, nation and continent-wide activities and through 80 gender-environment-peace clubs (led by girls).

2. Given the current state of insecurity and violence across Cameroon due both to Boko Haram and North West and South West crises, my organization and I launched the #ArtforPeace and #ArtistsAsHRDs campaigns which explore the vital role artistic HRDs play in promoting peace and protecting human rights.

The campaigns also explore some of the challenges artists' HRDs face and how the featured artists' HRDs navigate some of these challenges to remain resilient in their human rights work. This contributed to the mobilization of more than 300 artists.

Also, my organization Children for Peace and I have decided to work with several human rights organisations as African Network of young Leaders for Peace and Sustainable Development to increase the scope of our actions. After the adoption of the law no. 2014/028 on the repression of acts of terrorism by the government, we noted that the effects of that law have been particularly stark for journalists and civil society activists, for whom coverage of events related to Boko Haram and the anglophone separatist movement have been equated by with the promotion of terrorism and charged as such. That broad and vaguely-worded terrorism law of 2014 was rather used to justify excessively punitive measures against defenders and stifle freedom of expression. With several organisations, I have contributed to the elaboration of several joint statements calling on the governments to respect the law 1990 on freedom of association, to cease the judicial harassment of journalists, bloggers, online content creators who are critical of the government.

We have co-organized several trainings with African Network of Young Leaders for Peace and Sustainable Development for lawyers and HRDs to create synergies and connect them to access African human rights systems. The training had a particular focus on how to access the African Commission on Human and Peoples' rights.

In preparation for election monitoring, our organisation trained an initial group of seventy-five (75) human rights monitors on monitoring, reporting and documentation that equipped them with the necessary skills on monitoring and documentation of human rights violations, the submission of evidence-based reports and localized intervention at community level. Among data collected are the political, civil, social, cultural and economic factors that impacted on their working environment, human rights violations and electoral malpractices observed. We proposed corrective action to be taken and to ensure greater participation of various groups in the election process. The reports also provided recommendations to various actors involved in the electoral process. We have identified, trained and deployed 105 HRD monitors from among the diverse HRDs membership and networks that included youth, women, men, persons with disabilities and gender minorities. The monitors continue to monitor human rights violations. Defenders Coalition relies on the information shared by monitors and utilizes the findings of the monitoring exercise to guide on further actions particularly on investigations, rapid response missions, issuance of advisories and reports with key findings and recommendations.

In order to bring the light on several massacres violating human rights in Cameroon, after issuing a public statement that, (based on verification and cross-checking, including rigorous investigations on the ground), showed that certain soldiers were behind these massacres and calling for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry, the President of the Republic of Cameroon, promised that light would be shed on several massacres (both regarding Boko Haram, the Anglophone

crisis) that had taken place in Ngarbuh, Donga-Mantung department in the north-western region of Cameroon. He finally set up a commission of inquiry which had just made its findings public. The Government of Cameroon finally acknowledged the responsibility of certain elements of the Cameroonian army in these abuses.

3. Child human rights defenders (CHRDs), in Cameroon continue to operate in an environment characterized by threats, arbitrary arrests, judicial persecutions, reprisals and killings. There have been several attempts by state organs to constrain the civic and democratic space through punitive and prohibitive governance frameworks targeting the Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), media organizations, Constitutional Commissions among others. Threats against defenders have included smear campaigns, harassment, intimidation, physical attacks and torture by State security forces. Peaceful protests have been met with excessive force and arbitrary detention. Several journalists have been arrested and many have been increasingly practicing self-censorship. Defenders working on anglophone issues, those who speak out against government policy faced particularly high risk in their work. We are subjected to all kinds of humiliation, and, most seriously, accused of being in the pay of enemies from outside who, in exchange for funding, were receiving false, truncated and biased reports from us.

Women/girls human rights defenders incurred particular threats in their communities when speaking out on socially divisive issues such as domestic violence and early marriages in rural areas. There are concerns about violence on the grounds of gender identity, including 'corrective rape', including against human rights defenders who are not always protected. Freedom of expression, assembly and association have been curtailed and human rights defenders face harassment, intimidation, violent repression of peaceful protests, arbitrary arrest, detention and torture in the course of their work.

As a girl led organization, working on complex matters touching people believes, tradition and culture, our work is not appreciated neither by terrorist groups and allies, nor by many community members. In some places, it arose that we face hostility of some religious and traditional leaders because of the message we vehicle. They believe that we want to break their secular tradition and the religion which prescribes that the girl should go early to marriage to avoid having sexual relations before marriage. Even parents who send their girls into early marriage or to Boko Haram (to overcome financial difficulties) are not also supportive to our message.

Many religious and traditional leaders fear that our message have a negative influence on their children, diverting them from their custody and tradition. All that has been mentioned above put my work progressively in an uncomfortable and risky situation in addition to risk of being kidnapped, tortured and put into suspicious death while travelling or going to communities and conflict affected areas by train, bus and common transports on unsafety roads conditions to carry out activities.

4. I am a child advisor on the Child Rights Connect global Children's Advisory Team. and how this has given you a platform at the international level to speak up on your activities, for example, the opening speech of the CRC Committee or more recently, the Plan International event?

I am so proud of the great support of African Network of Young leaders for Peace and Sustainable Development which has been accompanying me as mentor and allie in overcoming several barriers and risks in the attainment of children for Peace goals, by offering platforms to voice out my message and get connected to youth leaders and key stakeholders at international, regional and local levels.

I am also proud of that collaborative work done with all human rights organisations at the national, regional and international levels, journalists, political activists, the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, the clergy, the Human Rights Commission of the Bar Association, the traditional

authorities of these North-Western localities, the media and journalists, who have, as one, raised their voices against these massacres and heinous crimes. We are grateful to the Commission set up by the Head of State which acted in independence, impartiality and courage in delivering its conclusions regarding the involvement of some soldiers in the massacres amidst the ongoing crises.

The search for just and peaceful societies for sustainable development is our leitmotif. We continue to advocate tirelessly so that the rule of law, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, justice and human security be a norm and not an exception.

5. What actions do you suggest the Special Rapporteur can take to:

1. Assist human rights defenders to achieve successes similar to the ones you achieved or have seen?

Protection for human rights defenders requires strict adherence to ethics and integrity. Special rapporteur shall watch that civil society and governments continue to work collaboratively to push reform within the international system, and realize that there is strength in numbers. International solidarity between civil society organisations is as important as reforming international institutions. There is a need of strong relations with civil society groups within and among countries. One of the main things is the networking and solidarity between the civil society organisations, globally speaking. This is very important. We felt that when we faced this, we felt the importance of these relations when our partners stood behind us, supported us in all means, technically, even taking care of our colleagues. This is very important.

Another layer of protection for human rights defenders comes from strict adherence to their own ethics and integrity. Civil society organisations have to maintain their house. First the transparency, the credibility. Some specific trainings and exchange workshops can be designed and implemented for HRDs organisations in order to impart them knowledge, techniques (in several key areas such as monitoring of human rights) and share them with them inspiring successful experiences and stories contributing to enable them to be more professional, gain in credibility and gain the support of their society.

The special rapporteur should watch that states better protect human rights defenders by being more vocal in their defense in international forums. States should be called upon to condemn or take action to prevent witness intimidation of HRDs.

2. Encourage States and businesses to provide an environment to enable other human rights defenders to achieve successes similar to the ones you achieved or have seen?

States and businesses should be encouraged to put in place funding to support some innovative (digital) initiatives from HRDs, aiming at promoting and protecting human rights.