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GANHRI

Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions



COVID-19 AND NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

A STUDY BY GANHRI, OHCHR AND UNDP.

3/31/2021

GANHRI

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INSTITUTIONS**

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FOREWORD

The figures are stark: over 60 per cent of countries have regressed on basic rights in 2020 as a result of measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic¹. And the pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of the least protected and most marginalized. In these unprecedented circumstances, the pivotal role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to promote and protect human rights is perhaps more important than ever before in recent history. UN Member States have outlined the important role and contributions NHRIs have made in COVID-19 response and have been called upon to support them as they discharge their mandates and functions, including through the provision of adequate resources. The United Nations (UN) system and its partners have provided tailored support to NHRIs across the world including through capacity-building and the provision of much-needed resources—boosting their ability to monitor and engage Governments in rights-based responses to COVID-19. This new study by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) analyses the role and activities of NHRIs in addressing the human rights dimensions of COVID-19. It aims to provide an overview of good practices, experiences and lessons learned during a time of immense challenges for human rights.

NHRIs have worked tirelessly during the pandemic to put people first. They have supported the most vulnerable and marginalised. They have received and acted on complaints. They have supported outreach, advocacy, and communications to populations—outlining their rights and their means of redress. They have monitored places of detention. And they have provided vital advice to Governments to help ensure that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled while combating the pandemic. Yet, NHRIs have also been severely impacted by the pandemic. In some cases, it has curtailed their operations, methods of working and day-to-day functionality. Most significantly, lockdowns and social distancing have made it much more difficult for NHRIs to maintain contact with the communities they serve – including those on the margins of society. It has also restricted their links with decision-makers, making it more difficult to ensure that the responses to the pandemic comply with human rights. In some countries, as front-line human rights defenders, they have faced intimidation and reprisals as a result of carrying out their mandates.

Despite these challenges, this study of 75 per cent of NHRIs globally finds that the institutions have been remarkably resilient. They have rapidly adapted to COVID-19, finding a range of innovative ways to fulfil their vital mission—to promote and protect human rights. As a result of the pandemic, many NHRIs have even forged closer links with decision-makers and public agencies, as well as with civil society and other NHRIs, consolidating their position as the cornerstones of national human rights systems. In this new reality, NHRIs have a leading role to play in ensuring that human rights are made an intrinsic part of the socio-economic recovery in every country². As the UN Secretary-General has said, *“In building forward together, we have a unique and historic opportunity to forge a world where every person is afforded dignity; where every society can withstand crises; where everyone’s future is built upon a foundation of inalienable rights”*³. To this end, the UN system, GANHRI and our partners will continue to provide concrete support to NHRIs across the globe as they drive progress across the Sustainable Development Goals. And this new study is a clear reflection of our joint commitment to work together to help NHRIs to fulfil their mandates and stand-up for human rights at this global turning point.



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ACRONYMS

APF	Asia-Pacific Forum for National Human Rights Institutions
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ENNHRI	European Network of National Human Rights Institutions
FIO	Iberoamerican Federation of Ombudsman
GANHRI	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IOI	International Ombudsman Institute
NANHRI	Network of African National Human Rights Institutions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NPM	National Preventive Mechanism
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPCAT	Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RINDHCA	Network of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Americas
SERF	UN Framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group



1. INTRODUCTION

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