

Human Rights Defenders' Working Group Launch at the IHRFG meeting - July 13, 2011 Minutes

On the occasion of the launch of the human rights defenders' working group (WG), IHRFG members shared ideas and priorities in relation to the mission, future activities and structure of this new working group. A memo regarding options for its parameters and mandate was prepared and circulated prior to the meeting by the EMHRF, UAF and FGHR. This document compiled preliminary suggestions which have surfaced in several *fora* where relevant human rights defenders' issues were discussed for the past two years.

The launch of the WG was particularly welcomed with quite a wide and collective audience attending (approx. 30 participants). A spreadsheet was circulated in which members present shared information regarding the work they are doing and their strategies on HRDs (grants, training, advocacy, etc.) – cf. enclosed document.

During the meeting, the participants emphasized their interest in sharing information, learning from best practices and methodologies as well as increasing collaboration and coordination on human rights defenders' issues.

In particular, the main suggestions and recommendations expressed with regard to the mission and future activities of the WG were the following:

- **The WG should provide the space to discuss different political realities and how these affect the work of human rights defenders.** When unfolding and critical situations for HRDs are occurring on the ground – such as in the Arab region presently - the WG could thus share analysis, try to adapt and react to new and emerging needs.
- **The WG should be the place for coordination and resource sharing on specific issues and programs related to human rights defenders. Donors and human rights defenders could thus have access to mechanisms they had not developed or didn't know about.**
 - The **IHRFG mapping project** with the Foundation Centre is still ongoing (some members should still submit their data) and it should be finalized in spring 2012. This project will aim at getting an idea of the landscape and scope of human rights funding (online visual mapping, report on strengths, gaps, challenges, specific issues/areas). The IHRFG will look at the possibility of adding “human rights defenders” for key word searches. Based on this survey, other specific mapping could be made down the line.
 - **Specific issues for which further coordination and resource sharing was considered necessary were: human rights defenders respite - in exile (European shelter cities); worldwide harmful legislations against human rights defenders; as well as protection and security of human rights defenders:** Regarding the latter issue, Borislav Petranov has finalized a study for the Ford Foundation looking at the field and identifying substantive and resource gaps (some of the major gaps mentioned were, among others: the need for studying challenges and mechanisms at the national/local levels, the functioning of intergovernmental institutions and mechanisms, the lack of flexible and long term funding, the lack of policy and guidelines at pre-crisis stage, the need for long term rehabilitation at post-crisis stage). An executive summary will be

prepared and circulated by the Ford Foundation and the WG will thus sponsor a conference call with Q&A on the report on this occasion.

- **The WG commits to developing Guidelines/Principles/Best Practices/Pro-active models for Grantmakers** to maximize the effectiveness of donors in ensuring the safety of activists, as well as guarantee that they are aware of the resources available to them in times of need. Advised by HRDs, the working group will prioritize prevention, protection and funding needs. Based on the outcome of the conference call and on other relevant documents, this issue will further be discussed at the next WG meeting.
- **The WG could serve as a platform to leverage interest on human rights defenders issues to funders outside of the human rights circle.**

The WG leaders are currently discussing about the upcoming activities of the working group, in particular:

- Sponsoring two telebriefing during the period October – December 2011 (Ford Foundation’s review on security and protection of HRDs & UAF’s review on implications of counter terrorism measures);
- Scheduling a WG sponsored session on the occasion of the next IHRFG conference and meeting in San Francisco in January 23-25, 2012.

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