

ENNHRI Annual Conference
25 October 2018, Athens, Greece

***‘National Human Rights Institutions as Human Rights Defenders:
Enabling Human Rights and Democratic Space in Europe’***

Objectives

- Raise awareness of NHRI’s role as Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) towards the wide range of human rights stakeholders in the region.
- Highlight NHRIs added value in a context of shrinking space in Europe and identify avenues to strengthen their role, including in the promotion and protection of HRDs.
- Take stock of the threats faced by NHRIs as HRDs and identify, in cooperation with stakeholders from the region, concrete steps on how to bolster support to NHRIs under threat.

Context

In recent years, the European region has faced shrinking democratic space, as well as numerous threats to human rights and the rule of law. This has been visible in legislation restricting the financing and activities of human rights NGOs, the killing of journalists during the exercise of their profession, attacks on freedom of assembly, and interference in the independence of the judiciary.

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) play a crucial role in promoting and protecting the democratic space in their national contexts. They monitor the implementation of human rights at national level, advise the state on compliance with human rights, and promote a culture of rights. NHRIs act as important bridge-builders between civil society and government and between the latter and rights holders, including through supporting Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). NHRIs are also recognised as HRDs by the UN, and may encounter various threats as they speak up for all individuals’ human rights in challenging and politically polarised contexts.

The ENNHRI 2018 annual Conference provides a special occasion to bring together key human rights stakeholders from across the region to debate avenues through which NHRIs can support democratic space and HRDs in the current climate. The ENNHRI Conference will offer the opportunity to take stock of good practices across the region and to identify avenues to support and strengthen NHRIs’ work as HRDs.

A Strong Framework to Apply

This year, 2018, marks an exceptional year for HRDs, including NHRIs:

- 70 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights;
- 25 years since the adoption of the UN Paris Principles on NHRIs;

- 20 years since the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- 10 years since the Council of Europe Recommendation on HRDs; and

In addition, the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders set out practical suggestions for EU actors to support and assist HRDs, including NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles. The OSCE Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders emphasise the importance to strengthen NHRIs' role and enhance their dialogue with HRDs, and makes specific reference to protect these two actors from threats.

NHRIs are becoming increasingly active in their vital work to promote and protect human rights, and their defenders, in the context of threats to rule of law and democratic space in Europe. The 2017 ODIHR study on the implementation of the OSCE Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, as well as the Council of Europe CDDH.INST study and compilation of good practices, highlight this important role. However, in order for the full potential of NHRIs' work in this area to be realised, it is important that stakeholders understand the added value that NHRIs can bring, as well as the threats that they might face in their work.

Approach

The ENNHRI Annual Conference will gather European NHRIs, regional and international organisations, and human rights defenders from wider Europe. NHRIs will share good practice examples of their work. Participants will include representatives from UN OHCHR, UNDP, OSCE/ODIHR, Council of Europe, EU institutions and FRA, as well as civil society actors. The programme will include high-level panels as well as interactive roundtables for open dialogue and debate. The conclusions will inform concrete future actions by ENNHRI to help strengthen NHRIs to promote and protect HRDs across Europe.

Further Information

The full agenda will be posted in the coming months, and registration will open from August 2018. If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the ENNHRI Secretariat: info@ENNHRI.org

ENNHRI and NHRIs

[ENNHRI](#) brings together 42 National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) from across wider Europe. ENNHRI's mission is to support, strengthen and connect NHRIs to promote and protect human rights across wider Europe, in line with Paris Principles. NHRIs are independent state bodies, with a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights. They are trusted actors within the human rights framework, at local, national and international levels, given their regular accreditation by reference to the UN Paris Principles to ensure their independence, pluralism, accountability and effectiveness.

