

About human rights defenders activities

Advocating for human rights is a high risk activity, and groups and individuals who take this course may be targets of authorities and private groups. Every year, hundreds of human rights defenders are victims of threats and intimidation, smear campaigns, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, abuse and even murder in retaliation for their activities on behalf of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international and regional instruments. The impunity enjoyed by perpetrators prevails.

Thanks to member organizations (today 297), from the beginning the OMCT has been evaluating the fundamental role of defenders in the emergence of a vibrant civil society. But alarmed by the repression faced by human rights defenders, the OMCT decided to take action to improve their safety.

OMCT has played pioneer in the protection of defenders, denouncing systematic attacks against them. In 1992, the OMCT published the first two reports on human rights violations against defenders of human rights.

Thanks to the mobilization of OMCT and other NGOs for the adoption of a text to provide protection to these groups and individuals, the "Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and protect universally recognized human rights and Fundamental Freedoms" was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1998.

OMCT has also contributed to the creation of a term of protection of human rights defenders within the United Nations, and the inclusion of this item on the agenda of major regional organizations (African Commission, Inter-American Commission, OSCE, European Union, Council of Europe, etc.). The necessity to increase awareness amongst policy makers and public opinion has also been a priority of the work.

Since October 2015, OMCT is a member of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.



OMCT acts to improve protection of human rights defenders through various activities:

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

In 1997, OMCT established the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in partnership with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), a unique collaboration based on complementary approaches of both organizations and based on their respective networks. In parallel, many meetings on this subject were held, culminating in the 1998's Forum which brought

together more than 600 NGOs from 60 countries, just before the adoption by the United Nations, of the 1998 Declaration on the Human Rights Defenders.

The OMCT and the Observatory have been instrumental in the creation of a term of protection of human rights defenders within the United Nations in 2000, and the inclusion of this issue on the agenda of the main regional organizations (African Commission, Inter-American Commission, OSCE, European Union, Council of Europe, etc.). The necessity to increase awareness amongst policy makers and public opinion has also been a priority of the work.

The Sponsorship "Defend the Defenders"

Raising public awareness on the situation of human rights defenders

In 2007, in the face of growing dangers that threaten the women and men who fight for respect for human rights, OMCT - supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs - called upon several Swiss and international personalities to put their fame in the service of the protection of human rights defenders.

The main goal of the sponsorship project "Defend the Defenders" is to protect the defenders who have become victims of persecution and acts of harassment as a result of their activities in defense of fundamental rights and freedoms.

By encouraging Swiss and international personalities to rally around these defenders, the project has created a chain of solidarity which extends beyond the restricted circle of "specialists" and aims at mobilising public opinion, the only real counterweight to the arbitrary power of States.

OMCT has so far produced three documentaries depicting the situation of defenders at risk in Mexico, the DRC and Brazil.

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OMCT Trainings

OMCT trains defenders in international and regional instruments to reinforce their capacity to act, promote the creation of national and regional protection networks (sharing and exchange of experiences, protection strategies, role of international NGOs), and develop a network of experts, lawyers and journalists who support the work of human rights defenders.

A first training was organised in Sierra Leone in 2010 in English.

A second training on regional and international human rights mechanisms took place from 17 to 20 October 2011 in Bujumbura, Burundi. It was organised in collaboration with FORSC (Forum pour le

Renforcement de la Société Civile) and gathered 16 participants from Chad, DRC, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi and Rwanda.
