



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on the 10th Anniversary of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders

*FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting
Luxembourg, 23 June 2014*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. On the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the EU Guidelines on human rights defenders, the Council reiterated its strong support to human rights defenders all over the world and paid respect to their efforts to promote and protect human rights in often difficult environments. The right of every individual to exercise their freedom of expression, opinion, association and assembly to promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms is indisputable.
2. Human rights defenders play an important role at the local, national, regional and international levels in the promotion and protection of human rights, but frequently find themselves the target of oppression and coercion. The EU will therefore intensify its political and material support to human rights defenders and step up its efforts against all form of reprisals, and will actively support the strengthening of UN monitoring in this regard. The EU is particularly committed to improve its support to vulnerable and marginalised human rights defenders. The EU will intensify outreach to those operating in remote and rural areas. Particular attention is paid to women human rights defenders.
3. The Council called upon all states to create a safe and enabling environment in which human rights defenders can operate free from hindrance and insecurity. The Council expressed its particular concern about the introduction of legal and administrative provisions in some countries, which have hindered or unduly limited the legitimate work of human rights defenders and endangered their safety. The Council noted with regret the shrinking space for civil society in an increasing number of countries. Online surveillance methods are often abused by governments to undermine the work of human rights defenders. An independent, diverse and pluralistic civil society is indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies.

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4. The Council noted with satisfaction that the EU's policy on human rights defenders has become more effective and coherent since the adoption of the Guidelines. Through the High Representative/Vice President, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and EU Delegations and Member State embassies on the ground, the EU actively engages with human rights defenders, issues demarches and statements, observes trials, visits prisons, and supports human rights defenders that have been arbitrarily arrested and detained.
 5. The Council highlighted the crucial role of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in the effective implementation of the Guidelines and noted with satisfaction the effective use of emergency EIDHR grants for human rights defenders at risk, which since 2011 has become a swift and efficient tool for addressing the needs of human right defenders under imminent threat. Through projects worth more than 150 million euro since 2007 the EIDHR has supported both individuals and organisations. The Council welcomed the strengthened focus of the renewed EIDHR for 2014-2020 on Human Rights and their Defenders where they are the most at risk.
 6. The Council stressed the need to further raise awareness about the purpose and operational utility of the Guidelines among all relevant stakeholders. EU institutions and Member States will step up their efforts in training their staff on the Guidelines and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, in close co-operation with civil society.
 7. The Council highlighted the importance of the role of international human rights mechanisms in promoting and protecting the work of human rights defenders, notably the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organisation of American States and the African Union. The EU pays particular tribute to the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the crucial role this mandate has played in implementing the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and enhancing the protection of human rights defenders throughout the world. The EU welcomes the recent adoption of the OSCE Guidelines for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and stands ready to assist the OSCE in follow-up activities to promote the Guidelines. The EU also calls upon all states to refrain from reprisals against human rights defenders engaging with international human rights protection mechanisms.
 8. The Council invited the Council Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) to continue to regularly review the implementation of the Guidelines."
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