

Baroness Catherine Ashton  
High Representative of the Union for  
Common Foreign and Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE**

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## **TEN YEARS ON: THE EU MUST REINFORCE ITS ACTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

Dear Baroness Ashton,

Saturday June 14 marks the ten year anniversary of the adoption of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).<sup>i</sup> Human Rights Defenders are individuals, groups of people or organisations who promote and protect human rights through peaceful and non-violent means. This is often at great personal risk. On this anniversary, Amnesty International calls on the EU and its member states to take stock of the effectiveness of the Guidelines to date and to renew their commitment to translate them into meaningful action.

In line with the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU and its member states have committed to intensify political and financial support for HRDs, and to strengthen EU efforts against all forms of reprisal. While important progress has been made over the past decade, the implementation of the Guidelines remains inconsistent and lacks transparency.

On this landmark anniversary, it is time to take measures to systematically and consistently implement the Guidelines and to strive for higher standards and greater depth of action to support HRDs. Some concrete steps include defining clearer roles and responsibilities for key officials in EU delegations and member states' representations in third countries; ensuring EU and member states' personnel have clear political backing, resources and time to work on and with HRDs and setting strategic objectives for action on HRDs with identifiable outcomes and measurable indicators, enabling systematic data collection and transparent reporting.

Concrete action like trial monitoring and public statements is essential to provide support and visibility to HRDs. This must be reinforced by adopting a systematic and sustained approach that seeks more transparency and accountability for how the Guidelines are implemented in practice.

At the same time, the EU and its member states must strengthen coordination and collaboration to ensure strategic and impactful support to HRDs.

The EU and its member states should mark the tenth anniversary of the Guidelines by publicly reiterating the EU and member states' commitment to act in support of the crucial role HRDs play to promote and protect human rights worldwide.

They should also:

- Proactively and in close contact with HRDs, make full and strategic use of all modalities of EU and member state action to support HRDs, taking concrete steps such as trial monitoring and providing visibility for their work through public action or statements
- Reinforce practical and action-oriented training for EU and member state personnel on the EU Guidelines on HRDs and complement this by ensuring that civil society in third countries is familiar with the Guidelines and consulted in EU and member states' strategies on HRDs
- Regularly engage with a wide range of HRDs working on civil, cultural, economic, social and political rights in different areas of countries including rural and remote areas, with appropriate attention to women HRDs

- Use political and human rights dialogues as well as other channels of communication to remind third countries of their duty to protect HRDs, and ensure involvement of HRDs in these processes
- Provide systematic and public feedback to HRDs, civil society and the public on EU and member state action on HRDs, encouraging meaningful public debate on how to reinforce these vital efforts

We look forward to your response and stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Sincerely,



Ivana McGowan  
Director of Programmes

Cc:

Suvi Seppalainen, Member of Cabinet, HRVP

Stavros Lambridinis, EU Special Representative for Human Rights

Wojciech Wiesocki, Policy Officer, Human Rights Policy Guidelines and Multilateral Cooperation,  
European External Action Service (EEAS)

Engelbert Theuermann, Chair, Council working group on human rights (COHOM)

Patrice Lenormand, Deputy Head of Unit Governance, Democracy, Gender and Human Rights, DG  
DevCo

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<sup>i</sup> “Ensuring protection: European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders,”  
[http://eeas.europa.eu/human\\_rights/guidelines/defenders/docs/16332-re02\\_08\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/guidelines/defenders/docs/16332-re02_08_en.pdf)