



Statement on Human Rights Defenders

At the fifty-third session of the UN General Assembly, a resolution was adopted known as the [Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#). The resolution importantly sets out the international standards to protect human rights defenders. It recognises that promoting human rights is essential and elaborates upon the duties, responsibilities, and roles of various stakeholders. Human rights defenders are accorded various protections owing to the nature of their work and their vulnerability to reprisals. In essence, the declaration called upon all members of the international community, including sovereign states, to ensure that laws and policies support and enable their work.

All the 53 Commonwealth member states supported the resolution. This is in keeping with many declarations and communiqués that welcome cross border support for the promotion of human rights defenders. Recently on 15 June 2015, Norway delivered a joint statement concerning human rights defenders on behalf of a cross-regional group of 60 states at the 29th Session of the UN Human Rights Council. The statement reads that, “human rights defenders play a crucial role in promoting and protecting human rights in all countries. As governments, we may not always agree with them, but their ability to work safely and without fearing retaliation is a key element in maintaining sustainable, open, and democratic societies.” Despite Commonwealth’s commitments to protect human rights defenders, forty-six of its members did not endorse the statement. The List is given below:

Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and The Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Malta, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu