

ICHRP ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES AND NGO ACCOUNTABILITY

*An Invitation to Dialogue by Hina Jilani
Chair of the ICHRP's Board and former Special Representative
of the UN Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders*

I have worked with NGOs all my life, often under difficult political circumstances. My work over the last few decades, and especially as the Special Representative for Human Rights Defenders, has given me an opportunity to engage with the many challenges NGOs face across the world in working freely and carrying out their activities without undue restrictions.

Civil society actors face myriad challenges today, especially to their legitimacy, and many governments continue to obstruct and harass NGOs that are doing legitimate and important work. Yet, as I repeatedly stated in my report as SRSG, NGOs have a duty to be accountable, to serve those that depend on them, to do their work well.

The ICHRP's research confirms that a broad and inclusive dialogue on accountability is necessary and should take account of human rights and should involve human rights organisations. In this Forum, we would like to discuss how human rights considerations should influence states, NGOs and donors in their mutual relationships. How do human rights principles and values determine the nature and limits of state regulation? How can human rights standards help when NGOs are compelled by undue restrictions to operate on the fringes of legality?

How can human rights assist NGOs to navigate the complex relationships they have with their constituencies? What do human rights contribute to the way NGOs speak with, for and to the people and causes they represent? So much has been written about governance and management of NGOs: what do human rights contribute in this respect?

Donors are a critical part of this dialogue and we look forward to reflections from donor organisations about how they view the relevance of human rights and accountability to their work. Specifically how do human rights assist donors to develop more meaningful and effective partnerships?

Of course, human rights will continue to evolve and this discussion can never be finished. The dilemmas about transparency and the very real tensions that arise because of different perceptions of the relationship between rights and duties are not academic and are far from easy to resolve, especially when there is a high level of public scrutiny and internal and external expectations.

My hope is that many of these questions and dilemmas can be addressed by this Forum. I hope above all that it will allow an honest reflection and provide us with ideas that help us to move forward.

It is in this spirit that I invite you, on behalf of the ICHRP, to participate and contribute to the Online Forum.

Sincerely,

Hina Jilani

