

Center for Women's Global Leadership, Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development

**STATEMENT IN RELATED DEBATE:
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

On behalf of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development, we express our grateful appreciation for the work and most recent report of the Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders.

We are particularly grateful for the Special Representative's attention to "defenders at particular risk", including women human rights defenders as well as those who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, or HIV-positive.

It is imperative for UN agencies, as well as the Human Rights Council in particular, to address head on the experiences of marginalized groups. We are specifically not using the term vulnerable here, but marginalized. Marginalized people are *made* to be marginalized, with a consequent heightened vulnerability to human rights abuses, there is an actor involved in *creating* that marginalization. All too often, that marginalization is compounded by intersecting forms of discrimination.

Women human rights defenders face particular risks because of the intersections between their advocacy and their gender. We congratulate the Special Representative on her work to help launch an international campaign on women human rights defenders which culminated in a groundbreaking consultation in Sri Lanka in 2005, where women defenders representing over 70 countries came together to promote an analysis of human rights and their experiences as defenders.

This analysis acknowledges that defenders of human rights of women, and women defenders who defend *any* human rights (not just those related to gender) are at particular risks. Violations against women human rights defenders are perpetrated by state and non state actors (including members of families and communities), and are often experienced in relation to political and cultural climates informed by increasing fundamentalisms, militarism, and attacks on women's sexuality.

Defenders of the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS, and of groups marginalized because of their actual or perceived HIV status, are also targeted because of, among other things, stigma and discrimination associated with their work and assumed HIV status. The resulting infringements of human rights also undermines public health by hindering HIV prevention efforts.

We also note the particular targeting of human rights defenders because of their identities or work related to sexual rights and explicitly those related to defenders' real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. From threats to physical safety to denials of freedom of assembly – and from the death penalty to the closing of civil society groups – rights of defenders of sexual rights are at risk, in both the Global South and the Global North.

We emphasize the importance of addressing these violations, especially in light of the fact that still in 2007 there are those who claim that these communities and practices do not exist within their state borders, and therefore the abuses, the coffins, the bruises are figments of people's imaginations. As if the violations cannot be real because the people who experience them are made to be invisible.

Universal application of human rights means exactly that. And States have responsibilities to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of *all* people, including those who are defenders of rights - *any and all* human rights.