Priorities

According to the respective declaration, adopted by the United Nations in 1998, human rights defenders are those individuals, groups and organs of society that promote and protect universally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms without resorting to violence.

They seek the promotion and protection of civil and political rights as well as the promotion, protection and attainment of economic, social and cultural rights. They advocate and mobilise by peaceful means to defend the rights of others. However, it often happens that the defenders of human rights are themselves targets of attacks and threats and that their rights are violated. It is therefore important to ensure their safety and protection. This has always been a key component of the external policy of the European Union in the field of human rights. Through the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, the EU aims to further improve its action in this field.

Did you know?

Through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the EU supports human rights defenders against repression and the arbitrary exercise of power, and aims at providing swift assistance to human rights defenders at risk. It also aims at reinforcing their capacities to do their human rights work in the medium and longer term.

Support for the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council is another important component of EU policy on human rights defenders. These include the establishment of a United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and regional mechanisms to protect them.

In parallel, the European Parliament has been an outspoken supporter of human rights defenders. Since 1988, the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is intended to honour exceptional individuals who combat intolerance, fanaticism and oppression in particularly difficult circumstances.

In October 2013 the prize was awarded to Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani campaigner for girls’ education.

Top 3 Facts

EU support is aimed at providing assistance and protection.

The EU Guidelines on human rights defenders provide an overview of the EU’s role and aspirations and have been translated into local strategies for EU missions in third countries. The guidelines provide for intervention by the European Union when human rights defenders are at risk, and propose practical means of supporting and assisting these individuals and non-governmental organisations (like trial monitoring or visits to human rights defenders in remote areas).

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Main links:

EEAS - The EU’s work with human rights defenders

EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders

European Commission – Democracy and Human Rights – Human Rights Defenders
http://www.eidhr.eu/human-rights-defenders