

PASS THE GLOBAL VOICES OF FREEDOM ACT

Support and Protect Human Rights Defenders Worldwide

Twenty-five years ago, the United Nations unanimously adopted the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which calls upon all states to respect the role of individual citizens and civil society organizations in defending human rights.

Human rights defenders (HRDs) are people who, individually or in association with others, act to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means, in a manner consistent with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. HRDs come from all walks of life; they can be journalists, lawyers, religious leaders, survivors of human rights abuses, union leaders, environmental activists, students, women's rights activists, family member associations, or anti-corruption activists. HRDs play a key role in defending the principles of freedom, justice and dignity, which underpin the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Their work contributes directly to the realization of human rights, the strengthening of the rule of law, and fostering security and well-being in countries around the world and here in the U.S. It is also in the interest of the U.S. to ensure that these peaceful activists can do their work safely.

Human rights defenders (HRD) are routinely the target of judicial harassment, smear campaigns, intimidation, death threats, unlawful surveillance, arbitrary detention, sexual violence, assault, torture, enforced disappearances, and even assassination. Since the adoption of the UN Declaration on HRDs in 1998 until 2021, an estimated 4,814 HRDs have been killed worldwide. In 2022 alone, over 401 HRDs were killed globally. These numbers alone are shocking, but they also implicate the incalculable loss sustained by a country or community when it is deprived of the progress towards human rights and freedoms that could have been enjoyed if these brave individuals had lived to continue their work.

Amnesty International USA asks members of the U.S. Senate to co-sponsor and pass The Global Voices of Freedom Act of 2023 (S.962), introduced by the Senators Menendez, Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, and Murphy in March 2023. The Global Voices of Freedom Act would improve the U.S. government's

ability to support human rights defenders and to help prevent, mitigate, and respond to retaliatory attacks against them by:

- Developing a whole of government approach and strategy to support and protect human rights defenders abroad;
- Increasing the protections for human rights defenders to be able to participate safely at the United Nations and other multilateral bodies;
- Mandating the inclusion in the State Department's annual country reports on human rights practices information on the treatment of human rights defenders, patterns of abuse, and information related to investigations into attacks against HRDs to better inform and influence policymaking; and
- Providing training to Foreign Service Officers at Embassies and Missions around the world on how to support human rights defenders.

Amnesty International USA works tirelessly to support and protect human rights defenders, but without strong policies, programs, and public declarations of support and recognition by governments like the U.S., they will continue to risk torture, imprisonment, and even death.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDS

All Senators co-sponsor and swiftly pass the Global Voices of Freedom Act (S.962) in recognition of HRDs under attack for their peaceful work around the world.

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