



## **Closing Statement**

**adopted by the**

**Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions at its 2016 annual conference**

**“CURRENT CHALLENGES TO HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION”**

**Geneva, 23 March 2016**

On 23 March 2016 national human rights institutions (NHRIs) from all regions of the world met in Geneva for the Annual Conference titled “Current Challenges to human Rights Protection”. The Conference was organized by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) – formerly known as the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

NHRIs from all regions together with international experts, member states and representatives of civil society discussed human rights challenges resulting from conflicts, massive displacement and intolerance, racism and xenophobia and how NHRIs could address these challenges by applying their mandates under the Paris Principles.

NHRIs participating in the Conference adopted the following Statement:

We, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) as the international association of independent NHRIs, guided by the Paris Principles of the United Nations and representing more than 100 NHRIs from the four world regions – Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe –, take this opportunity to collectively express our deep concern with regard to the devastating impact that widespread situations of armed conflict, the massive displacement of people, as well as the increase in racism and intolerance often leading to violent extremism have on the protection of human rights everywhere in the world.

At the same time, we are encouraged by an ever growing and interconnected global civil society that is committed to the vision of the United Nations towards a planet of peace and freedom where the promise of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948 (UDHR) is fulfilled and that every member of the human family enjoys their inherent, inalienable and indivisible rights.

Fully aware of the complexities of the current challenges and also of the complex nature of the answers to these challenges, we state with confidence that human rights and their underlying principles, such as participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency and the rule of law, offer guidance to finding solutions and the right balance in situations of crises. In this context, we particularly encourage all state and non-state actors around the globe to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 in the spirit of and based on human rights. By last year’s adoption of the Merida Declaration on the role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, GANHRI and its members have documented their commitment to the SDGs and will do their part in the SDG implementation process in line with their mandates as independent actors for the promotion and protection of international human rights standards. This will include policy advice, human rights training and awareness raising, analyses and impact assessments, as well as individual complaint handling. GANHRI and its members invite all state and non-state actors to actively approach “their” NHRI or NHRI network and engage in dialogue and benefit from NHRI’s human rights expertise.

We have examined and discussed NHRI experiences, instruments and cooperation for preserving human rights in the face of (1) situations of large-scale violations of human rights in the context of armed conflict, (2) an ongoing worldwide massive displacement of people resulting in high levels of vulnerability for uprooted individuals and families, and (3) growing nationalism, intolerance, racism and xenophobia, which threaten to undermine the vision and achievements once triggered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As outcome of this examination and discussion we have identified the following roles, tasks and actions for NHRIs when engaging in the three areas of concern:

(1) With regard to large scale violations of human rights caused by or related to armed conflict,

We re-affirm our commitment expressed in the Seoul Declaration on the role of NHRIs on upholding human rights during conflict and while countering terrorism of 2004 and the Kyiv Declaration on the role of NHRIs in conflict and post-conflict situations of 2015.

We, therefore, embrace the UN Secretary General's Human Rights Up Front Initiative and will – individually and collectively – strive to systematize and make more effective our function as early-warning mechanisms by, inter alia, further professionalizing our internal and external knowledge and information sharing, by intensifying our monitoring function domestically and by facilitating a culture of human rights dialogue at the national, regional and local levels.

We further stress the importance of ensuring that NHRIs, whilst operating in conflict situations, can continue to work independently, free from reprisals and other acts of intimidation, and free from violence and undue interference.

(2) With respect to massive displacement of people,

We renew our commitments expressed in the Santa Cruz Declaration on the role of NHRIs and migration of 2006,

We welcome the commitments expressed in the Belgrade Declaration on the protection and promotion of the rights of refugees and migrants of 2015, as further specified in the Thessaloniki Regional Action Plan on the Refugee/Migrants Crisis and Human Rights in February 2016,

We also take note of the Malta Declaration on Migration adopted on 10 March 2016 by the 28 members of the Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen,

We affirm our intention to make use of every function and instrument our respective mandates provide us with, in order to

(a) uphold and realize the human rights guaranteed by international and regional human rights instruments, as well as the Geneva Refugee Convention (with particular emphasis on the principle of non-refoulement), for every migrant, refugee, asylum-seeker and displaced person at all times, upon arrival, during asylum procedures, returns, and their stay both in the country of arrival and in receiving states, and

(b) turn law and policy makers' attention towards protection measures for the most vulnerable among migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

We encourage governments, parliaments and every public servant to view and treat every migrant, refugee and asylum-seeker as an individual having the right to have his or her case examined and reviewed individually. In light of the principle of non-discrimination, international human rights law does not allow for arbitrary categorization, generalization or collective expulsion and, thus, prohibits selectivity as well as the use of strict numeral limitations with regard to access to an asylum procedure.

(3) With regard to intensified intolerance, nationalism, racism and xenophobia in many countries, often paired with an increasingly hatred-fueling style of public debate, we take to heart the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and will contribute to it through our actions at home. Here, too, we will bring in all elements of our mandates, with special focus on awareness raising and capacity building for media

personnel, in order to (re-)establish ways to debate that are based on mutual respect and human dignity. We consider it our responsibility to strengthen the human rights narrative within public debate.

These three areas of concern are interdependent and intertwined. A consistent and systematic human rights approach in each area promises to have a positive impact in the other ones. In light of this, we see our task in mainstreaming human rights in all policy fields, facilitating alliances and partnerships among state and non-state actors and holding governments and parliaments to account. Fulfillment of this task will include bringing issues from the domestic sphere to the UN and regional organizations and, in turn, bring the views, recommendations and decisions of the international sphere home. In this context, we renew our commitment to advocate for ratification and implementation of all international human rights treaties by the State. As NHRIs in line with the Paris Principles we are in a unique position to advise, to cooperate with all actors and rights holders, to investigate, monitor and report, and to cooperate at regional, cross regional and global levels through our coordinating networks. We will fulfill our responsibilities to the best of our abilities, and we encourage governments, parliaments, judges, civil society actors, the business sector and all other stakeholders to do the same – in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.