



Joint submission
to the report on
Raising their voices:
**HRDs respond to the
human rights crisis**

*of the UN Special
Rapporteur on Human
Rights Defenders*

to the **61st Session** of the
Human Rights Council to be
presented in February 2026



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Background

Many LGBTIQ+ activists working on SOGIESC issues have intersecting identities that inform their personal and political commitments to broader social justice and human rights movements. As a regional organisation, ILGA Asia strives to represent the diversity of our membership by platforming their stories, advocacy, challenges, and successes.

ILGA Asia, Afghanistan LGBTIQ+ Organization (ALO), One Future Collective, and Queer Friendly Chers, welcome the opportunity to make a joint submission to the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders' final report, exploring our identities as activists and human rights defenders and how we navigate the current landscape for LGBTIQ+ advocacy, which is systematically shrinking all across the world and at all levels.

Motivation rooted in lived experiences

The lived experiences of queer lives and bodies are represented throughout and inform our advocacy and activism. ALO is working in exile to empower Afghan LGBTIQ+ individuals, extend financial assistance and resource accessibility, and amplify their voices. Queer Friendly Chers' lived experiences and sense of justice are at the core of their activism, reflected through public speaking at protests, podcasts, speaking at forums as a panelist, closed door conversations with the Singaporean state, and UN engagements. As a constituent-led organisation of survivors and queer individuals based in India, many team members of One Future Collective have faced systemic exclusion and discrimination firsthand which has translated into collective action.



Shrinking spaces for LGBTIQ advocacy

Advocacy landscapes across Asia are shifting with the rise of state authoritarianism and shrinking civic spaces. LGBTIQ communities and individuals continue to face crackdowns in Malaysia and Indonesia.⁵ In Nepal and Bangladesh, states which at one point adopted progressive and gender-inclusive policies, recent political upheaval has shifted government priorities making it more difficult for civil society to engage in advocacy meaningfully.⁶ Identifying multiple points of intervention and changing strategies, like leveraging economic arguments for LGBTIQ inclusion and pink tourism, have shown promise.⁷

One Future Collective is creating more space by framing their work in ways that align with broader social priorities such as leadership development, institutional transformation, and community well-being by embedding human rights values into areas like education, workplace equity, and mental health access. For example, their initiatives on gender equity and inclusion in workplaces allow them to address systemic discrimination framed as constructive engagement with institutions. They have also been building networks of local defenders; by investment in grassroots leadership, they can strengthen a collective ecosystem of voices that is more difficult to silence than a single organisation.

⁵ ILGA Asia, *Malaysia: Government bans books with LGBTIQ themes to safeguard “Malaysia’s multicultural values”*, 2025, <https://ilgaasia.org/news/malaysiabriefingnotemar2025/>; ILGA Asia, *Indonesia: Public flogging of gay men in Aceh highlights a larger trend of surveillance into and criminalization of LGBTIQ lives*, 2025, <https://ilgaasia.org/news/indonesiaapril2025/>; ILGA Asia, *Indonesia: 75 people arrested in discriminatory raid on alleged “gay party”*, 2025, <https://ilgaasia.org/news/indonesiajul2025/>

⁶ ILGA Asia, *Bangladesh: Student Protests, Government Transition, and Implications for LGBTIQ Communities*, 2024, <https://ilgaasia.org/news/bangladesh-protests-implications-for-lgbtqi-communities/>

⁷ ThePinkNews, *This stunning country set for \$2 billion ‘rainbow tourism’ boost after adopting marriage equality*, 2024, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/11/15/thailand-lgbtq-tourism-equal-marriage/>



Activism and impact

LGBTIQ+ rights advocacy is multidimensional and multisectoral. Our organisations have been working at different levels and capacities, and with different modalities. As activists, we are proud of our contribution to strengthening the ecosystem of LGBTIQ+ activism and intersecting human rights advocacy by centering care, solidarity, and collective power.

Welfare support and care:

The Afghanistan LGBTIQ+ Organization (ALO) has helped protect and amplify the voices of some of the most at-risk communities under Taliban rule. They provided life-saving cash assistance to LGBTIQ+ people in Afghanistan and neighboring countries and documented grave human rights violations, ensuring that their stories were not silenced or forgotten. For ALO, the most meaningful part has been creating a space where the invisibilised Afghan LGBTIQ+ people can be heard and supported, whether through emergency aid, advocacy, or raising their stories on the global stage.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, One Future Collective provided critical support to mental health workers, many of whom were frontline defenders navigating immense personal and professional strain, safeguarding their ability to continue providing essential care to communities most impacted by the crisis.

One Future Collective also developed the Civil Society Wellness Protocol framework to uphold the right to dignity, care, and well-being of human rights defenders themselves.⁸ Too often, activists work at great personal cost, facing burnout, trauma,

⁸ One Future Collective, *The Civil Society Wellness Protocol: Principles for Promoting Worker Well-being*, 2024, <https://www.onefuturecollective.org/blog/the-civil-society-wellness-principles/>



and systemic neglect. The protocol positions wellness as a collective responsibility and an essential condition for sustainable human rights work.

Collectivism and network building:

ILGA Asia, through our biennial ILGA Asia Conference, brings together LGBTIQ+ activists and other stakeholders from all over the region; the last being held in Kathmandu in February 2025, which welcomed over 600 participants.⁹ The conference platformed LGBTIQ+ voices in the region and emphasised solidarity and collective strength, holding sessions that addressed the growing threats to and hardwon victories of LGBTIQ+ movements in the region.

In the past year, One Future Collective also initiated the Indian Urban Feminist Organisations Network, which fosters collective strategising, solidarity, and capacity strengthening to resist shrinking civic spaces, and calls for joint action to advance feminist demands within broader social justice and human rights agendas.¹⁰

UN Engagements:

ILGA Asia engages with the UN Special Procedures, Human Rights Council, Sustainable Development Goals, and other platforms at Asia-Pacific regional and global levels, facilitating the engagement and representation of our member organisations. We also capacitate and support activists to engage with these mechanisms; most recently we supported activists from the Society of Trans Women of the Philippines to attend the High Level Political Forum at UNHQ New York.¹¹

⁹ ILGA Asia Conference 2025, <https://www.ilgaasiaconference2025.org/>

¹⁰ Urban Feminist Society Network, <https://www.onefuturecollective.org/network/>

¹¹ Please refer to: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DNR-Z5VSqxn/>



ALO has brought Afghan voices to international accountability mechanisms, engaging with the Human Rights Council, UN Special Procedures, and other platforms, so that the persecution of Afghan LGBTIQ+ people is recognized as part of broader human rights crises. This work has been difficult and sometimes dangerous, but it has allowed survivors' experiences to shape international conversations.

Queer Friendly Chers worked with Sayoni to submit a shadow report to UN CEDAW during Singapore's periodic review in 2024 and the prevalence of discrimination in law and in practice against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women was an important part of the Committee's concluding observations.¹²

Impact of funding cuts

Volunteer-based organizations like Queer Friendly Chers were not directly impacted by recent funding cuts for LGBTIQ+ organizations in the region. These funding cuts are, however, undermining human rights work across issues and forcing organisations into survival mode, precisely at a time when this work is most urgent.

ALO has been heavily impacted by funding cuts in the past year. Since the beginning of 2025, they have not been able to provide cash assistance to LGBTIQ+ people in Afghanistan and neighboring countries, despite receiving urgent requests for help. Funding shortages have also limited their ability to continue systematic documentation of human rights violations against LGBTIQ+ people under Taliban rule weakening their capacity to ensure that their experiences are recorded and recognized at international accountability mechanisms.

¹²UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women - Singapore, CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/7, 6 June 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/6>



One Future Collective staff who engage in high-risk, emotionally and intellectually demanding work at the frontlines have also deeply felt the impact of funding cuts. This shift has directly affected their ability to expand programmes that build leadership among marginalised communities and has constrained the scope of their advocacy initiatives aimed at structural reform.

Mitigation strategies

Organisations, like ALO and One Future Collective, have opted to downscale their programmes and many staff are working at reduced pay or voluntary efforts, which is not sustainable in the long run. This kind of labour requires stronger compensation and comprehensive well-being support to sustain defenders' wellbeing and funding cuts have made this increasingly difficult.

ALO has closed or paused several programmes, focusing only on the most urgent priorities. They have been able to keep some essential activities alive, albeit at a smaller scale. They are also exploring alternative fundraising strategies, including small grants, partnerships, and community-based support.

One Future Collective is approaching domestic funders to diversify their resources and exploring innovative models that reduce dependency on volatile political and international dynamics. They are building relationships with progressive philanthropic actors within India and domestic partners willing to invest in systemic change. Another strategy is productising elements of their work to create additional sustainable income streams. For example, they developed self-paced online courses and other educational resources that allow them to share their expertise widely while generating revenue which can then be reinvested into advocacy and programmes.



Threats and risks

In many instances, social marginalisation and economic exclusion compound the vulnerability that LGBTIQ+ activists experience - leaving them at risk of financial precarity, reduced influence, and even invisibility within broader human rights ecosystems as spaces for LGBTIQ+ activism are consistently shrinking. Many HRDs may also not benefit from knowledge of or access to rapid response mechanisms for defenders at risk.

In Singapore, legislation like the “Protection from Online Falsehood & Manipulation Act (POFMA)” is purported by activists to restrain freedom of expression.¹³ Furthermore, social media smear campaigns by religious fundamentalist groups and loss of employment due to lack of anti-discrimination laws and protections have impacted individuals associated with Queer Friendly Chers.

ALO are also frequently subjected to online attacks and smear campaigns due to the sensitivity of LGBTIQ+ issues in Afghanistan. Their families inside Afghanistan and Iran have faced threats and intimidation from authorities because of their work, adding another layer of personal risk to their advocacy. Severe funding cuts have further limited their capacity to respond to the many requests for help, putting their programmes and the organization itself at risk.

Relevance and effectiveness of UN Standards and Human Rights Mechanisms

International human rights standards remain critically relevant—despite the criticism for their largely postcolonial and Western framing—as a bulwark against state overreach and as a common language through which oppressed peoples can claim dignity and

¹³ Singapore, *Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act* (2019), <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/POFMA2019>



rights.¹⁴ For example, for Afghan LGBTIQ+ people who are excluded and criminalized under national laws, these frameworks have been a vital reference point for organizations like ALO to build the foundation of their work for recognition, advocacy, and accountability.

The gap between principles and enforcement, however, leaves our communities vulnerable, showing that these standards, while essential, must be strengthened and applied more effectively. These mechanisms can only be effective if the states are willing to engage. These mechanisms can, however, still serve as important advocacy tools. For example, global pressure contributed to the conditional bail of activists like Sudha Bharadwaj, detained in the Bhima Koregaon case under UAPA.¹⁵ International scrutiny can provide defenders with some measure of protection by making it harder for the state to act with complete impunity.

Access to international human rights mechanisms

While international human rights mechanisms are theoretically open to civil society and human rights defenders worldwide, widespread access remains challenging for many affected communities, defenders and organisations. Key obstacles include limited knowledge of procedures, language barriers, and the technical complexity of submissions. With these mechanisms being centered either in Geneva or New York, defenders from Global South may also face travel and visa restrictions, undermining

¹⁴ Ramesh Singisala, 'Global Feminism and Human Rights: A Critical Perspective', *ESAR- Journal of Education and Social Sciences Research*, Vol. 5 No. 2 (2024), <https://www.esarjournal.com/index.php/ESAR/article/view/66>; Shashi Tharoor, 'The Universality of Human Rights and their Relevance to Developing Countries', *Nordic Journal of International Law*, Volume 59: Issue 2-3 (1990), https://brill.com/view/journals/nord/59/2-3/article-p139_6.xml

¹⁵ Front Line Defenders, *Woman Human Rights Defender Sudha Bharadwaj released on bail*, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/woman-human-rights-defender-sudha-bharadwaj-released-bail>



their ability to safely access these mechanisms in person. ALO, as a refugee-led organisation, experiences an added layer of disenfranchisement.

ILGA Asia works with its member organizations and activists in Asia to bridge this gap by organizing capacity building trainings and travel sponsorship and support where possible, but our capacity and resources are limited.

State engagement with these mechanisms has also been inconsistent: Indian government officials often fail to respond to communications from UN Special Rapporteurs and significantly stall treaty body reviews, leading to local organisations like One Future Collective feeling isolated from the process, and lacking protection after participating due to weak national enforcement and inadequate follow-up.¹⁶

Message to the Special Rapporteur

Mandate holders of the Special Procedures mechanism present human rights defenders an open line of communication they can seek assistance from when situations turn dire. The Special Procedures is an accessible mechanism through which pressure can be placed on authorities to uphold human rights obligations. While Special Procedures communications have led to interim relief and advocacy victories in some specific instances, their impact largely depends on state responsiveness and political will, which are inconsistent across states.¹⁷

¹⁶ OHCHR, *India: UN experts alarmed by continuing abuses in Manipur, 2023*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/09/india-un-experts-alarmed-continuing-abuses-manipur>

¹⁷ Global Public Policy Institute, *Do UN Communications Make a Difference for Human Rights Defenders?*, 2019, <https://gppi.net/2019/03/26/do-un-communications-make-a-difference-in-the-situations-of-human-rights-defenders#:~:text=individual%20casework%20is%20very%20often%20effective>



Human rights violations occur due to the interplay of various dynamics and interlocking systems; caste, class, race, gender, sexuality, disability, economic injustice, and militarism. The most important message we would like the Special Rapporteur to bring to the attention of governments is that human rights work is not only about advocating for the protection and fulfillment of the human rights of everyone everywhere, but also about transforming the structures that perpetuate inequality and exclusion - including on the basis of SOGIESC.



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