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National bodies key to safeguarding of basic human rights – UN official



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay (file photo)

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National human rights institutions play a key role in maintaining the rule of law, preventing abuses and assisting victims of violations, the United Nations rights chief said today, citing the political unrest in North Africa and Middle East as an example of the need to ensure respect for people's liberties.

“The recent turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa has been a huge challenge for national human rights institutions,” [said](#) Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the opening session of the annual conference of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Geneva.

“It has underlined their importance, and the need for them to be able to proactively contribute to human rights protection, together with other national and international actors, to ensure and restore rule of law and provide assistance to victims of human rights violations,” said Ms. Pillay.

She said their functions were particularly crucial in post-conflict situations where restoring normalcy required comprehensive strategies, including options for transitional justice, as well as providing redress and remedy to victims of rights violations.

The meeting is expected to focus on women's rights defenders, racism, and the relationship between human rights and business. Delegates will also consider how national human rights institutions can continue to strengthen their role and build credibility through cooperation with UN human rights bodies, in particular the Human Rights Council.

Representatives from more than 160 national institutions as well as Government and NGO observers are attending the conference. Also represented are regional coordinating bodies of national human rights institutions from Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Americas and Europe.

Ms. Pillay underlined the importance for national human rights institutions to comply with a set of principles known as the "Paris Principles" which are key elements of an effective national rights protection system.

"Institutions in line with the Paris Principles can help ensure the compliance of national laws and practices with international norms, support governments to ensure their implementation, monitor and address core human rights concerns such as torture, arbitrary detention, human trafficking and the human rights of migrants, and contribute to the eradication of all forms of discrimination," she said.

Out of almost 100 national human rights institutions around the world, 67 are accredited with "A" Status for compliance with the Paris Principles. Ms. Pillay encouraged all institutions that have not been accredited or are currently not fully in compliance with the Paris Principles, to work towards that goal.

She also urged them to lobby their governments to ratify the Convention on Enforced Disappearances and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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