

Understanding the Basics video transcript

When the Human Rights Council decides a rights issue is so important that it needs a specialist investigation, it creates a Special Procedure. Through Special Procedures human rights defenders can draw attention to rights abuses and prompt an expert-led response.

Special Procedures come in different shapes and sizes: they can be an individual known as a Special Rapporteur or Independent Expert, or a team of experts called Working Groups. In all cases these experts are entirely independent. Not controlled by politics, they remain impartial and unbiased; a neutrality that allows them to cover issues that might otherwise be deemed too politically 'sensitive' for discussion at the international level.

Special Procedures can have a thematic scope: for example, the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances was created as a reaction to that particular violation, and examines the issue in every country around the world. Other Special Procedures focus on a single country, such as the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Cambodia.

They embark on country visits, prepare reports, and raise concerns about individual cases or laws. Every year the experts present their reports to the Human Rights Council. The reports include recommendations to the Council, to individual governments, and to other actors like businesses or NGO's.

Special Procedures can also issue statements and press releases, thereby increasing scrutiny or awareness of a problem.

Special Procedures are one of the most powerful international instruments for confronting violations of the rights of individuals and particular groups.

In the past they have taken action against the killing of environmentalists, raised awareness of the challenges facing female human rights defenders, shone a light on abuses against LGBTI people, and helped to expose the risks faced by civil society in highly restrictive environments.

So as a mechanism, Special Procedures are invaluable to human rights defenders. Their defined scope allows a precise focus on the issue. They are

fast, flexible, and public. They can mobilise quickly as situations arise and react as they develop.

Finally, they are open and accessible. The cases they raise, the countries they visit and even the content of their reports are all strongly influenced by information they receive from civil society. As a result, Special Procedures are one of the most effective tools available to human rights defenders.