FROM RECOGNITION TO PROTECTION

Insights from a Cross-Sector Roundtable on Human Rights Defenders and Tobacco Control

ORGANISERS

Britta K. Matthes

Kelsey Romeo-Stuppy

Fred Dunwoodie Stirton

MODERATOR

Laurent Huber

PARTICIPANTS

Aikaterini Koula

Daniel Castrejon

Laura Graen

Neil Sircar

Ulisses Terto Neto

Why this discussion?

Growing awareness of intimidation faced by tobacco control advocates has prompted consideration of whether and how the human rights defenders (HRDs) framework might strengthen protection. To explore this question, a roundtable brought together participants from tobacco control, human rights and adjacent advocacy fields.

Key Insights

Tobacco control advocates meet the definition of HRDs

Participants noted that the action-based definition set out in Article 1 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders provides a clear basis for understanding tobacco control advocates as HRDs. Several also emphasised that the use of the term does not depend on formal designation or permission from institutions.

> **Article 1 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders: "Everyone has the right... to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights..."**

Recognition offers important opportunities – but is not a universal solution

Participants highlighted that the HRD framework offers opportunities to increase visibility, legitimacy and engagement with human rights mechanisms. However, recognition as an HRD does not confer a specific legal status or automatically unlock dedicated legal protection. Protection ultimately depends on action by states and other actors. Participants also emphasised that the strategic value of the HRD label is context-dependent and that its use should not be prescribed.

Strengthening protections for tobacco control advocates requires action across sectors and levels

Participants highlighted the importance of connecting tobacco control with the wider human rights community through stronger partnerships, reciprocal solidarity and engagement with existing human rights mechanisms. They also noted that strengthening protections requires coordinated action at local, national, regional and international levels.

Potential Pathways Forward

Participants identified a number of potential pathways for strengthening recognition and protection. These should be viewed as areas for further exploration rather than a definitive set of recommendations.

Embed the HRD perspective

- Increase awareness and appropriate use of HRD terminology within the tobacco control community, including through training and guidance.
- Foster engagement between the WHO FCTC and human rights mechanisms.
- Explore opportunities to strengthen recognition of tobacco control advocates through WHO FCTC processes, including future sessions of the Conference of the Parties.
- Encourage organisations involved in or supporting tobacco control advocacy, including funders, to consider how HRD approaches could strengthen the protection and security of advocates.

Make better use of existing protection mechanisms

- Increase awareness among tobacco control advocates of existing support and protection mechanisms available to HRDs.
- Explore opportunities to engage with relevant national, regional and international protection mechanisms, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.
- Identify emblematic cases that could help strengthen recognition and protection.

Strengthen the evidence base

- Document intimidation experienced by tobacco control advocates.
- Develop the evidence base on how HRD frameworks may support tobacco control advocacy.
- Undertake qualitative research to better understand opportunities, challenges and implementation pathways.

Build cross-sector partnerships

- Strengthen links between tobacco control and human rights organisations, including those working with HRDs.
- Foster reciprocal solidarity across advocacy communities.
- Organise joint events and opportunities for cross-sector exchange.
- Strengthen collaboration between advocates, researchers and human rights experts.

Acknowledgements

This brief draws on discussions from an invitation-only roundtable involving experts from the tobacco control, human rights and human rights defender communities. While this brief seeks to accurately reflect the discussion, it does not represent a formal consensus statement or endorsement by individual participants or their organisations.

This work was supported by the **University of Bath University Impact Fund**.